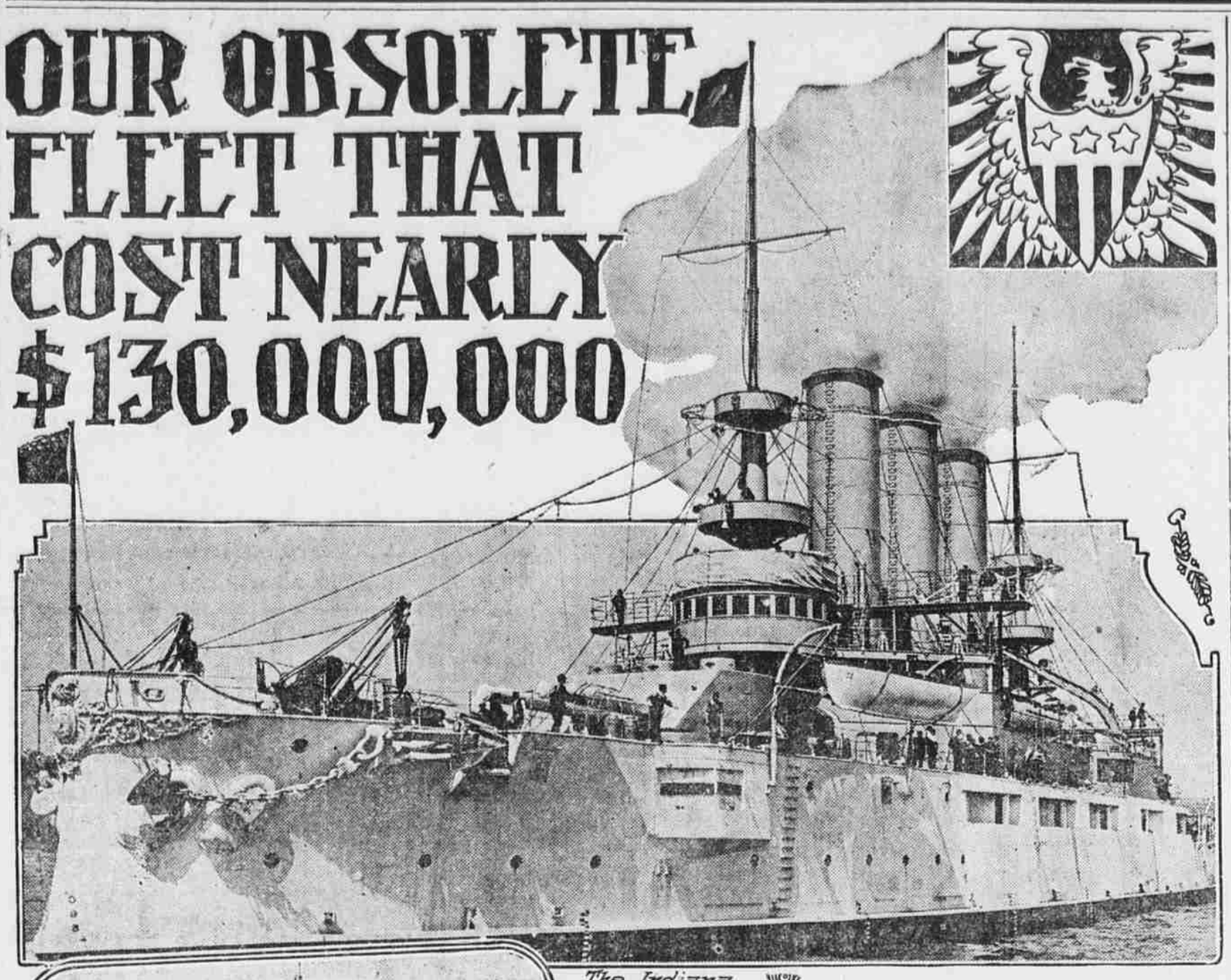
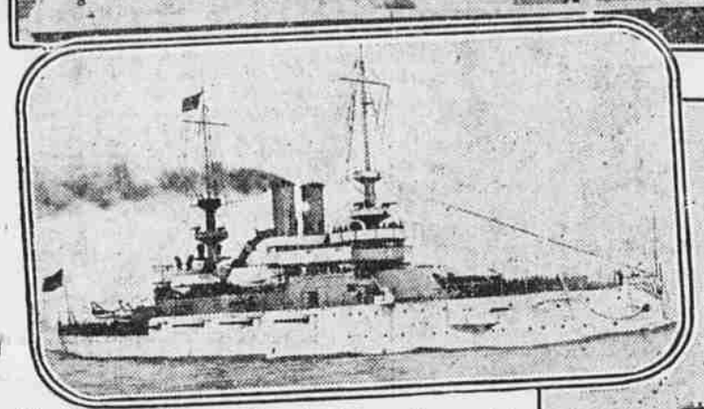
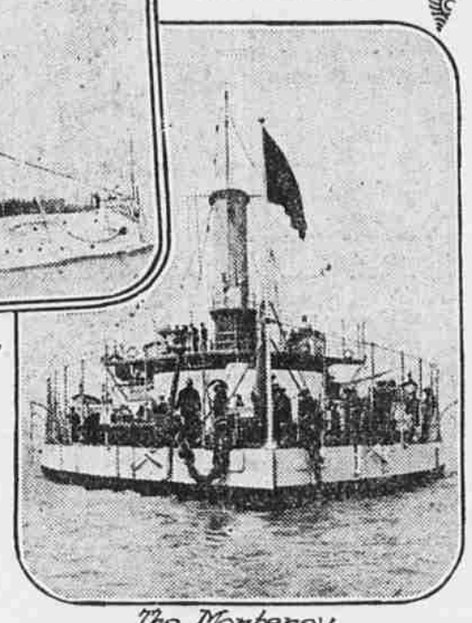
OUR OBSOLETE FLEET THAT COST NEARLY $130,000,000



The Indiana



The Iowa—Evans' Ship in Cuban Campaign



The Monterey

FIFTEEN years ago George Dewey stood on the bridge of the famous Olympia and won the battle of Manila bay, William T. Sampson from the bridge of the armored cruiser New York directed the operations before Santiago, and the pennant of Winfield Scott Schley fluttered from the masthead of the beautiful three-funneled armored cruiser Brooklyn. The world acclaimed the commanders of the squadrons of which these vessels were the flagships, while all America joined in one grand hurrah for a navy that was admittedly one of the best on the seven seas.

The American navy is still among the best, but the ships that were fought by Dewey and by Sampson and by Schley are no longer figured in the line-up that makes the great fleet under command of Rear Admiral Badger one of the most powerful fighting organizations the world has ever seen.

Every one of the famous ships of 1898 is today officially admitted to be obsolete, and all of them put together would not be as powerful as is the giant superdreadnaught Wyoming, or the Arkansas, or the Florida, or the Utah, any one of which would be a match for all the ships that fought under Dewey and Sampson combined, if such a test should be made.

Just a year ago the then secretary of the navy, George von L. Meyer, publicly called attention to the fact that the American navy had more than its full quota of battleships whose day in the first line had passed and the places of which would have to be taken by more modern ships of the Wyoming and Florida classes if the United States was to retain its position as the world's second naval power. The other day the observation of the ex-naval secretary was recalled by a naval officer in New York, who took pencil and pad and, going back fifteen and twenty and twenty-five years, figured out just what the obsolete ships now adorning the naval lists originally cost the United States government.

It was so ridiculously easy, the computation of that total value of famous ships that are ready to die a naval death of old age. The result was astounding, and when at last the navy man wiped his brow and announced the result of that little mathematical feat of his he had proved that the value of those ships, some of them still less than a dozen years old, reached the stupendous total of more than $100,000,000, or, to be exact, $129,932,814.

Of this $130,000,000 fleet that was, it is interesting, and in a way sad, to note that it includes the Saratoga, the name given Sampson's old flagship New York when her name was taken so that it could be given to the mighty superdreadnaught New York, now nearing completion in the navy yard in Brooklyn; Schley's flagship, the Brooklyn; the Olympia, from the bridge of which Dewey uttered his famous order to Captain Gridley, "You may fire when ready, Gridley;" the Iowa, that was "Bob" Evans' ship in 1898; the Indiana, and the Massachusetts, sister ships, which won fame and glory before Santiago, and the Oregon, which won the plaudits of an admiring world by her great run around the Horn, and which in her old age will probably be given the honor of being the first American war vessel to pass through the Panama canal in April of next year.

Then, of course, there was the old Texas, the ship that was commanded by the beloved Captain Philip, the vessel from the deck of which he offered his prayer of thanksgiving to God when Santiago's battle was ended and the Spanish ships had met their doom—the same ship from which Philip ordered his men not to cheer when the Vizcaya, the Cristobal Colon, the Maria Theresa, the flower of Cervera's squadron, were burning and sinking down into the grave to which the deadly shots of Sampson's gunners had consigned them. But the old Texas, which, like the New York, was renamed so that the name of the Lone Star state might adorn that of the new New York's sister, has long since met her fate.

Ripped, riddled and torn by the shells of the newer and more modern ships, to prove the marksmanship of whose men the Texas was destroyed, the hulk of that old ship—a sister of the Maine that went down in Havana harbor, and which going down hastened the conflict with Spain—still half floats in Chesapeake bay, just enough of her left to provide another marksmanship test for some mighty dreadnaught of the fleet under Admiral Badger.

As went the old Texas, so will go some of the other ships of the fleet that is obsolete. Already the Indiana is mentioned as the next martyr ship for the Atlantic fleet, and after her the Massachusetts, and then the Iowa, and perhaps within a year or two the Kearsarge and the Kentucky, the Alabama, the Illinois, and the Wisconsin, all of them beyond all question or doubt now of the obsolete type of fighting craft.

But let's call the roll of the obsolete fleet, and the flagships shall lead off just as they did at Manila and at Santiago:

1. The cruiser Olympia, flagship of Dewey at Manila.
2. The armored cruiser Saratoga, flagship of Sampson at Santiago.
3. The armored cruiser Brooklyn, flagship of Schley at Santiago.
4. The battleship Oregon, Clark's immortal around-the-Horn ship.
5. The battleship Iowa, "Fighting Bob" Evans' last command as a captain.
6. The battleship Texas, already gone, "Jack" Philip's old ship.
7. The battleship Massachusetts, another famous Santiago memory.
8. The battleship Indiana, sister ship of the Oregon and Massachusetts, and, like them, one of Santiago's famous contenders.
9. The battleship Kearsarge, first of superimposed turret ships.
10. The battleship Kentucky, sister ship of the Kearsarge.
11. The battleship Illinois, one of the around-the-world voyage ships.
12. The battleship Alabama, also of the fleet that went around the world under Evans and Thomas and Sperry.
13. The battleship Wisconsin, with the Alabama and Illinois the only battleships of the navy whose twin funnels are arranged in parallel fashion, one to the port and the other to the starboard.
14. The battleship Maine, built in memory of the martyr ship of 1898, and yet a ship that is already obsolete and has been missing from the Atlantic fleet for several years.
15. The battleship Missouri, another around-the-world voyager.
16. The battleship Ohio, still in the Atlantic fleet, but slated to leave in the near future never to return.
17. The commerce destroyer Columbia, so long missing in the news of the navy that a generation has grown up that knows her not, and she was of the flying squadron of 1898.
18. The commerce destroyer Minneapolis, a speed record breaking cruiser of the late nineties, a sister of the Columbia and, like her, of the flying squadron of 1898.
19. The monitor Amphitrite.
20. The monitor Miantonomah.
21. The monitor Monadnock.
22. The monitor Cheyenne, formerly the Wyoming.
23. The monitor Ozark, formerly the Arkansas.
24. The monitor Tonopah, formerly the Nevada.
25. The monitor Tallahassee, formerly the Florida.
26. The minotor Puritan.
27. The monitor Terror.
28. The monitor Monterey.
29. The protected cruiser St. Louis.
30. The protected cruiser Charleston.
31. The protected cruiser Milwaukee.
32. The protected cruiser Newark.
33. The protected cruiser Chicago.
34. The protected cruiser Cincinnati.
35. The protected cruiser Raleigh, Coghlan's ship at Manila.
36. Twenty-eight torpedo boats.

Twenty years ago this fleet of sixty-three ships would have been a match for any naval organization then afloat, with the exception of the fleet of Great Britain. Today all the vessels in it could not last half an hour in a battle with the five dreadnaughts that constitute the great first division of the United States Atlantic fleet.

And this mighty fleet of "naval has-beens" cost the United States government more than $129,000,000 and the oldest among them, not including the old monitors, is not yet twenty-five years old. The battleships in it to build and equip cost the government $64,435,225, and the cruisers, monitors and torpedo craft raise the total to the $129,000,000.

What will become of these ships? Some are now in reserve and there they will stay until their end is decided upon. Will that end be the target range or the auction block and the junk pile, or will they be permitted to rust away in navy yards nominally as units in reserve fleets but in reality as useless reminders of a navy that in its day was great but which, owing to marvelous progress in naval construction, has reached quickly but surely that state of obsoleteness from which there can be no "come-back."

The Oregon and the Olympia will probably be retained for generations to come as glorious reminders to Americans of future years of the navy that won immortality in the brief conflict that wiped Spain off the map of the western world and which added to American territory an island empire in the far east and won for this country for the first time a full, free recognition by all the nations of the world of the right to be numbered among those powers whose mission and influence is "world wide."

In the line-up of the "has been" fleet it will be noted that there is included the entire fourth division of the great fleet that circumnavigated the globe in 1907 and 1908. This division was made up of the Alabama, the flagship of Sperry when he began the voyage as a division commander; the Kentucky, the Kearsarge and the Illinois. In that fleet three of the vessels of the third division are now also listed among the obsolete fighters, the ships in question being the Ohio, the Missouri and the Maine, all sister ships and in their day hold up to the world as embodying all that was best in the construction and equipment of modern men-of-war of the battleship class.

The Atlantic fleet when it sailed out of Hampton Roads in December, 1907, was made up of sixteen first-class battleships, and a look at the make-up of the organization shows that in a period of less than six years seven, or lacking one of exactly half of those famous ships, have been relegated into the reserve, the first stepping-stone that leads to junk pile and oblivion.

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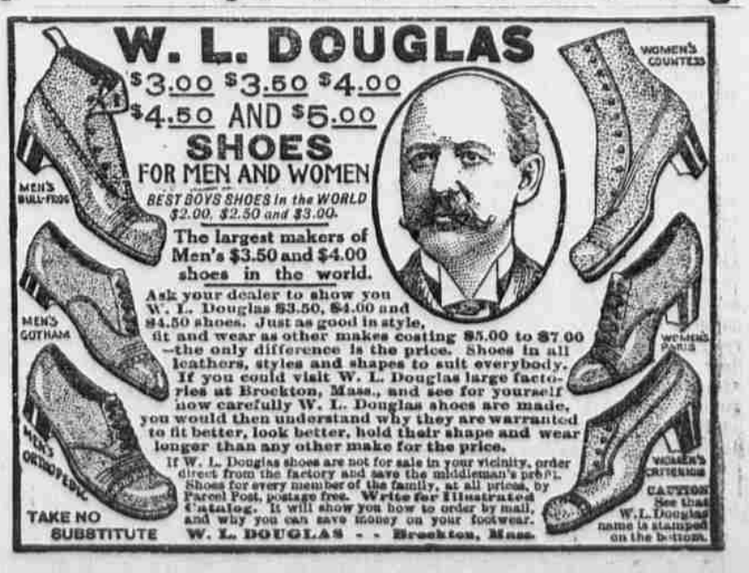

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