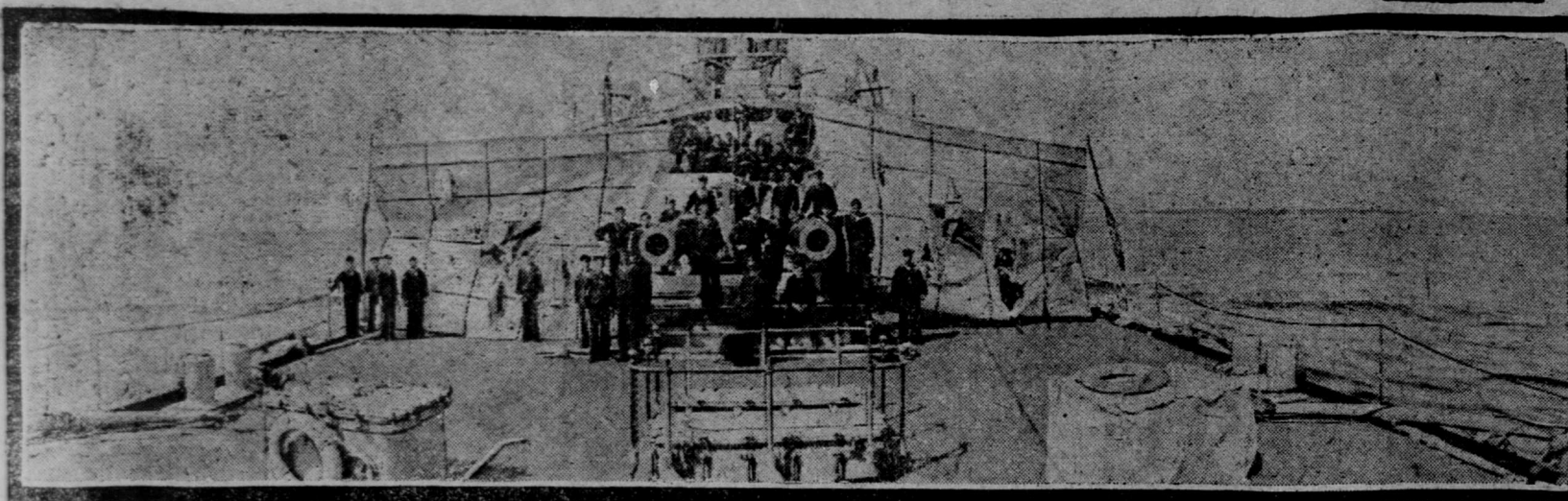


MAGDALENA BAY WHERE THE FLEET ASSEMBLES FOR TARGET PRACTICE

INTENSE RIVALRY OF CREWS IN MAKING NEW RECORDS WITH THE BIG GUNS



TARGETS ON THE ALABAMA AFTER PRACTICE WITH 13 INCH GUNS

By Commander J. D. Jerrold Kelley, U. S. N.

MAGDALENA BAY indents the peninsula of Lower California, between the twenty-fourth and twenty-sixth degrees of north latitude, in a wide and regular curve. Its waters spread well into the heart of the lowlands and stretch through slow lagoons and by sluggish quebradas for many lonely miles to the northward, southward and eastward. The bay furnishes fine anchorages, indeed the best of any in all the 3,000 and odd miles' run between Panama and San Francisco. At all seasons it offers a safe haven for vessels of every class, and many squadrons, whether seeking a place of rest and recruitment after long sea voyages or a rendezvous of approved strategic value, may be harbored within its easily defended entrances.

The back country is sparsely settled and prohibitive in appearance, because of a sterility attributable to a lack of rain and of artificial irrigation. Remote ranches, separated by long areas of desolate plains; a few camps in the neighborhood of the mines, quaint haciendas, distant stations where the orchilla—a dye moss—is gathered, and in almost inaccessible valleys a church and a monastery built by the Franciscans—these are the characteristic developments of the country. Many years bridge the period of the monks with our own days, but the natives still live more by the spirit and traditions of the missions, and with a simplicity that is not without its charm, than by the laws or under the fostering care of their own government.

Even the immediate shores of Magdalena bay have little to attract the stranger except a landing place for the hunter bound for the shooting on the great plains to the eastward, or for the prospector wandering toward the foothills of the Sierras which skirt the gulf side of the peninsula almost to the sandy cape of St. Lucas. The usual and most convenient anchorage is in and about Man-o-war cove, on the westward side, north of the entrance. Facing this is the group of buildings owned by the concession company and occupied in normal seasons by a population that numbers less than 50. For the great cities of Cortez and Pizarro, promised nearly 40 years ago in the most noted of the American colonization schemes, exist only as airy fabrics of dead and gone imaginations.

The climate of the region is mild and equable, blessed as its sea frontier is by the moderate breezes and temperate influences of the California current and the drift of the Mexican monsoon. Two areas are almost rainless, due to the interference of the coast range of the Sierras with the southeasterly winds, but to the northward, where irrigation has been introduced and rain falls, the changes in the country are fully as marvelous as those effected in the lower California situated within our own boundaries. Near the Ensenada of Todos Santos, close to the frontier, there is a fruitful region owned and settled mainly by Englishmen—even farther south the development is creeping and so some day the whole peninsula may become a productive and prosperous territory, inviting colonizers of thrift, intelligence and energy.

It is, of course, unnecessary to say that the possibilities of these southern and middle regions of Lower California early attracted the speculative—or was it the beneficent?—attention of promoters, although in the days of the civil war these were known less euphemistically. Finally, a reputable and financially sound company, whose intentions were better than their knowledge of the country, took up the exploitation and colonization. But even this, the most conservative of those earlier years, proclaimed the Magdalena bay region as a lotus land. "Not a place," it complacently and naively declared, "where a man could grow rich without work, but one where he could live more comfortably with less labor, produce more repaying crops from a given number of acres and enjoy more ease and luxury for less money than in any other part of the world." Its agents pointed out that the heat was never excessive nor the cold severe than in the Octobers of the Atlantic states, and that this equable temperature, the absence of fog—nothing was said about the rainfall—the steady breeze blowing from sea to gulf and the possible open air life throughout the year made "the country the healthiest on the continent. Local diseases," they added, "were unknown." Now, there is—in the phrase of Mr. Squeers—richness for you. And yet a large measure of the 1691 is honest prose and many of the allusions exist.

The most serious and systematic of these earlier projects was the one conceived and engineered by a syndicate known as the Lower California company. The list of its officers, directors, counsel and stock holders reads like an extract from the Golden Book of Amer-

ican prosperity and respectability. The company became the grantees of the greater portion of the zone included between the twenty-fourth and the thirty-first degrees of north latitude, and its lands extended west and east from the Pacific ocean to the sea of Cortez (better known then and now as the gulf of Lower California) and north to the boundaries of the United States, with their bays, harbors, islands and others dependencies—including in all about 47,000 square miles, or a territory as large as the state of New York. This patent was granted by the Mexican government in May, 1866, and subsequently the company became the assignee of the greater part of the Jucker contract in the state of Sonora, which added about 8,000,000 of acres to the 30,000,000 of the original grant. It owned besides this principlally large districts through assignments and agreements by the heirs of the Emperor Iturbide in Sonora, Sinaloa and the Frontera, this last including the ownership of the mouth of the Colorado river and its banks for many miles. Here were names and regions to conjure with to inflame the imagination and to enlist enthusiastic co-operation.

The first expedition was embarked in 1870 on board a schooner, and after a languid and uneventful voyage along a favorable coast the boat anchored in Magdalena bay. Prospecting and surveying began at once; indeed, with so much earnestness that the news traveled over the peninsula to La Paz, the capital of the district. Suspicion was naturally aroused and reports drifted to the surveyors that an armed force was being prepared for their capture or dire destruction. At this juncture the flagship Ossipee, flying the broad pennant of Commodore William Rogers Taylor, arrived, and after replenishing the stores of the party it steamed around Cape St. Lucas and up the gulf to La Paz on a mission of inquiry. It took on board the secretary of the company, the energetic, intelligent and ever optimistic Colonel Drake de Kay, at one time during the civil war aid to the commanding general of the army.

The report of the armed force was true enough, though much exaggerated. A little more than a sergeant's guard had been detailed to repel the invaders, but when explanations had been made, the express authority of the central Mexican government exhibited, apologies tendered and immunity promised, the Ossipee left La Paz for Mazatlan, where it was hoped communication might be established with the City of Mexico. At this season of the year gales in the gulf of Lower California are frequent and violent, and so toward the end of September the ap-



DWELLING HOUSES AT MAGDALENA BAY

proach of the heaviest cyclone known to the coast for 40 years forced the Ossipee to sea. For nearly three days the flagship buffeted this hurricane, described locally as the "cordozazo de St. Francis d'Assis"—a long name that, but meaning, by and large, the snapping of the whip of St. Francis—and then came out of it somewhat bruised, but, as learned afterward, the only surviving large vessel of four that had been exposed to its fury.

Upon the return of the Ossipee to Magdalena bay it was found that the first shipment of colonizers was expected, not from California, but from New York by way of the isthmus of Panama. The prospecting and preparation of the land were gone forward with, somewhat languidly it must be confessed, for it was soon apparent that the only prospect for any profitable labor was in the collection of the orchilla.

In the meantime the Lower nian, a four page patent inside journal, was with characteristic intertidity issued. The first number appeared on October 12, 1870, and the second on November 10. Whether any other editions saw the light is unknown, for even at this early date the enthusiasm and faith of the projectors of the enterprise began to waver. Both editions were, especially in the patent inside aspect, so similar that the novelties of this dead and forgotten journal of

civilization and research—it was eight inches square—are found mainly on the home made outside, set up and kicked off in the fore-castle of the schooner. The first edition boomed and burgeoned with three columns of advertisements—mainly, they unblushingly declared, from La Paz, from outlying ranches and from the (projected) cities of Cortez and Pizarro, while a few came from the better settled communities, such as San Francisco and New York. Nearly all of these were the inspirations and productions of the perferid and joyous imagination of the secretary and his assistant. They glowed with promise. In the second edition the foreign advertisements were withdrawn—and only two columns appeared.

Cattle and transportation, the journal announced, could be provided at the potically named ranches of the brothers Ramon and Pablo de la Toba and the contractor Victoriano Gomez, who offered to sell "cattle, mules, horses, hides, cheese and other groceries." The lawyer who displayed his card in Spanish was Manuel Clemente Rofo San Tomas. It is unknown whether any of these excellent patrons of live journalism really existed—they never appeared while the Ossipee lay in the port—except perhaps the lawyer. He may have been the uneasy and somewhat alarmed person who acted as assistant interpreter to the gifted and most agreeable Frenchman, M. de Roguement, who was the managing city and news editor of the Lower Californian. But of the other



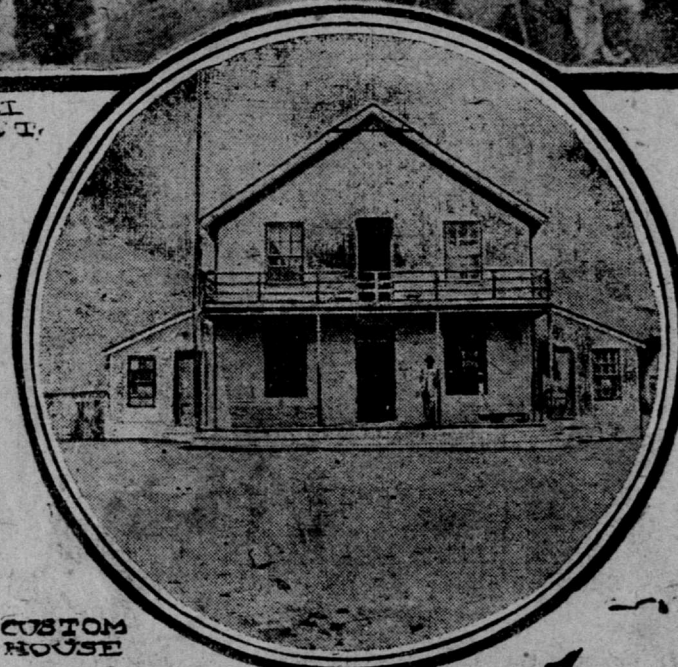
CUSTOM HOUSE

land and conditions that are far from irredeemable. Our interest in Magdalena bay is very close and its future is of high importance to us. The state department has long sought to utilize it as a rendezvous for the drills and coaling of the fleet, and Mr. Root in his voyage on board the cruiser Charleston, enabled to estimate at first hand its situation and its possibilities. Mexico has been liberal in the courtesies extended to us, emphasizing these of late by a permission to moor coal barges in its waters for the supply of our fleets. It is reported that a request had been made to establish a rifle range and to build a

shore coaling station, but that the project did not appeal to a nation viewing with natural distrust anything that might appear to its people and to other states as a first step toward the alienation of national territory. It has been hoped, so the reports go, that the privilege accorded for so many years to maintain a shore coaling station in Pichilique, on the gulf coast, might be extended to Magdalena bay. The reasons for this denial, as measured by Mexico, are undoubtedly sound in Mexican eyes. What might happen should an emergency arise and a serious strategic question be involved cannot now be considered. This country, however, has all faith in the indisputable friendship, good will and amity of our great neighbor to the south and is sure of its

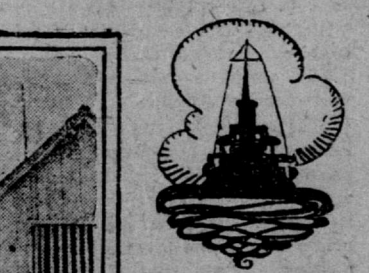


SEVEN INCH GUN DRILL ON THE CONNECTICUT



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MAP OF MAGDALENA BAY AND VICINITY

unwillingness to put us at a disadvantage because of any trick or device of rivaling sea powers. The arrival of the Atlantic fleet in Magdalena bay should, thanks to the opportunities offered by Mexico and to the excellent condition of our personnel and material even after the long and eventful voyage, enable the record target practice of the year to be engaged in under the most favorable conditions. The gunnery performances of our ships are so creditable and our yearly improvement is so marked that a large interest has been aroused in the methods, the theories and practices employed. But the essential parts of these must, for the best reasons, remain a sealed book to all save the initiated, and any attempted description of them

must be expressed in generalities and be confined to externalities open to the world. For many years our naval and military authorities displayed too much liberality in revealing our systems of offense and defense, but now, happily, these are guarded with restrictions that are altogether admirable and wise. Record target practice is, it may be said in general terms, conducted with the ship steaming at a prescribed speed over a measured range, the limits of which are indicated by buoys, near one of which a screen target mounted on a raft is moored. The officers commanding our fleets and squadrons are each year ordered to carry out a record target practice and an autumn great gun practice. Special facilities are afforded each vessel for continuous gunnery work, and the plans to be followed by the assembled

of science and art, of theory and practice, with the personal element is discovered in an enormously increased efficiency in gunnery practice. The training, skill and rivalry secured, the ship goes to the firing range with a determination to do its very best. When the vessel reaches the range, surely straightened out for its run, a red flag is mastheaded and a single blast is sounded by the steam whistle. This indicates the firing should commence, and as at the speed assigned a very short time interval is allowed for the run, it is important to begin at once and fire with rapidity consistent with "getting on" the target. The only hits that count are those which in direct flight, not by ricochet nor indirect fire, hit the target; and the value assigned each of these is dependent upon the particular zone struck. Hits, not holes, count. The size of the mark varies somewhat according to caliber and practice, but if published reports may be credited the target screens for great guns are about 21 feet in length and 17 feet in width, and distant from the range somewhere near 1,600 feet. If possible all the guns in a turret are fired on the same run, in order that a true turret value may be established.

The shots from each gun are accurately determined. A repair boat, stationed in the neighborhood of the buoy and well clear of the range, goes to the target at a special signal and counts the hits made—not the holes as indicated above—and effects the immediately necessary repairs. There is a target un-



MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF MAGDALENA BAY

ships are carefully formulated so that the prevailing conditions will be as similar as possible for all the competing ships. Previous to this test great attention has been paid to the primary and preliminary training of the crews, and a selective process has been utilized to secure for the gun stations the men apparently best fitted by temperament, promise and achievement for the specialized duties imposed. The training for this test as preparation for battle from the beginning been systematic, persistent and practical and the keynotes have been "thoroughness and persistency." No advance has been made until the lessons have been thoroughly taught, and then the pupil proceeds by progressively higher requirements to the goal where indi-

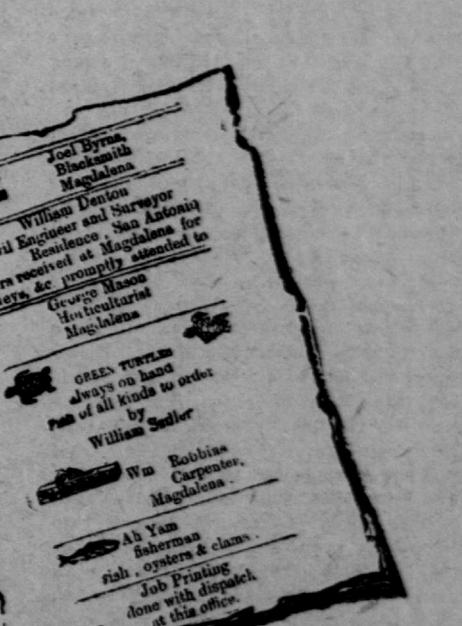
MEN OF WAR COVE MAGDALENA BAY

visual effort must be merged in team work and each unit of every gun's crew must be able with almost mathematical precision to perform his exact share of the labor imposed. The efficiency thus attained is, however, not confined to a few, as every ship has reserves of men, each one fitted to take up any one of the specialized duties. The work is, of course, unremitting and is from the first pursued not only according to a prearranged program, but as a supplement to expected but not defined opportunities when the demands of other duties will not interfere.

All this earnest and intelligent endeavor is based on the necessities imposed by preparation for war—that is, so far as the battery and its service are concerned. The inspiring theory is, first, that gun crews should be trained so they can hit, through team work, a target accurately and rapidly, and, second, that the training of the ship, its handling and its disposition will complement the accuracy and rapidity of gun fire. As a rule these practices are undertaken by the enlisted force with such an appeal to the ambitions and rivalries of the individual that in a short time each unit is fairly certain to share the enthusiasm and to emulate the keenness of his officers. Indeed, this rivalry exists not only between fleets, squadrons and single ships, but among the various crews of the same ship, though, in the latter case, this is usually subordinated to the sentiment that his ship—not his last ship, after the old fashioned and approved sea growths, but the ship on board of which he is serving—may be set down in the list as No. 1, as the champions of the champions.

The final result of this co-ordination of science and art, of theory and practice, with the personal element is discovered in an enormously increased efficiency in gunnery practice. The training, skill and rivalry secured, the ship goes to the firing range with a determination to do its very best. When the vessel reaches the range, surely straightened out for its run, a red flag is mastheaded and a single blast is sounded by the steam whistle. This indicates the firing should commence, and as at the speed assigned a very short time interval is allowed for the run, it is important to begin at once and fire with rapidity consistent with "getting on" the target. The only hits that count are those which in direct flight, not by ricochet nor indirect fire, hit the target; and the value assigned each of these is dependent upon the particular zone struck. Hits, not holes, count. The size of the mark varies somewhat according to caliber and practice, but if published reports may be credited the target screens for great guns are about 21 feet in length and 17 feet in width, and distant from the range somewhere near 1,600 feet. If possible all the guns in a turret are fired on the same run, in order that a true turret value may be established.

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consisting in the main of mythical persons and the crew of the company's schooner. The trophy is delivered on board a ship or transferred to a new winner it is received with appropriate and dignified ceremonies by the whole crew at muster, and is enthroned in honorable evidence of good work well done. Then, too, money rewards are distributed according to gun rank or rating among the successful crews, and, while these are prized, they are in the estimation of the ship's company much inferior to the honor, the kudos of the victory. Besides record target practice there are other tests, such as rolling, night firing, and at the summit of the endeavor battle practice, where most of the conditions stated above are varied because the ship is handled as if it were in battle and the officers are more intimately associated with the immediate direction of the batteries.