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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1896

THE PACIFIC COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER, HONOLULU, MAY 6, 1906

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THE TRAGEDY ON THE MISSOURI.

Newspapers that hailed with enthusiasm the establishment of new records in rapid-firing with big guns in our navy are now urging restrictions in that line, in view of the distressing accident on the Battleship Missouri. This think that the Missouri, with her twelve-inch guns, is the ship that has proven the 6-t and a relief who drugs in neighbors for bigger FREE if you don't mind. I wait now who have learned from the battle of the ship's boat, that the Missouri is a ship that is dangerous to handle, and is now serving the fleet as a target ship in the training of our seamen. It was during target practice off Pensacola, on April 13, that an explosion in a turning gear tore the lives of five officers and twenty-seven men. The fire spread before, threatening the magazine; but through the presence of mind of officers this was stilled, thus saving the most important part of the ship from destruction. In the accounts of the accident printed in the newspapers are in individuals are mentioned having distinguished themselves by their coolness and bravery. Captain William S. Cowles, the commanding officer, also plunged into the porthole chamber and assisted in the work of rescue. It is said that Chief Gunner's Mate Moore saved a ship from destruction by closing the magazine doors at so little risk to himself. He was assisted by Albie Semen Z. R. King, the hero of successes serious that caused his death.

Many experts express the belief that the explosion was the result of a "blow-back" in other words, gases and particles of matter in combustion that still remained in the bore after the previous shot were blown out by the wind and ignited the powder which had been inserted in the breech, from which burning material dropped to the landing-room below and set off other charges which were in readiness to be sent up to the turret. It appears that the ordnance officers aboard the Missouri had taken extra precautions against such an accident, and for three days no firing with large charges was done on account of the wind. It is also believed that the gun crew was trying to establish a record in quick-firing. Secretary Moody, according to the Washington dispatches, thinks that the accident may have been due, in part, to disregard of the naval regulations regarding target practice. The report says that a thousand or more pounds of powder were lying in the handling-room of the turret in front of the open magazine at the time of the explosion. A board of inquiry is investigating the accident, and as most of those who could give information as to what was done were killed, the belief prevails in some quarters that the truth may never be known.

The papers are calling for more precautions in the loading and firing of the big guns, but they are also concerned about the report of the board of inquiry that has been made public. It is feared that this will bring the gun crews on the Missouri and Minnesota, killing about fifteen men, and soon afterward a special order was issued to prevent a repetition of these accidents. "In view of the horrible tragedy," says the New York Evening Post, "the Navy Department should do something to prevent practice tests from being turned into mud rivalry in breasting the record. We have more able officers and efficient officers than perished in the recent Spanish-American War." This accident, observes the Pershing Dispatch, "is a startling evidence of the cost of life and as treatment which may be entailed by an undisciplined and reckless pursuit of the policy of naval expansion." The Army and Navy Journal remarks:

"The accident on the Missouri is only one of a series which has attended the development of modern war-ships, modern ordnance, and high explosives. The accidents are among the possibilities of naval greatness, and they are common to all navies. We have had one war, but no more than our share of them, and should doubtless have others as our navy increases, but we shall not halt in the development of our naval policy because a possibility of absolutely eliminating the possibility of accidents. Every ship, every port, is a safe port. Every port, is a shipyard. Every life lost on the Missouri places a sacred obligation of greater alertness upon every member of the crew. They think that the spirit of rivalry prevalent among the officers of the fleet is detrimental to a standard of efficiency, discipline, and courage unparalleled in the navies of the world."

The New York Press believes that such accidents are bound to occur, and thinks that our gunners are the risk that will eventually bring our navy up to perfection. To quote: "Because of a railroad wreck, with a sacrifice of scores of lives, reasonable minds do not argue that traveling by rail should be abandoned. Men in the service of the navy who lose their lives by premature discharges of guns and unexpended explosions of ordnance at target practice are taking the risk which is inseparable from the business of war—both its making and its preparation. They are taking the risk which is necessary in peace times to the perfection of the fighting machine as a war it is necessary to the successful application of the machine to the more dangerous war." It is said that the Missouri had been pounded with seas to expect the gasses from the turrets, but the draft may have been too strong for them.