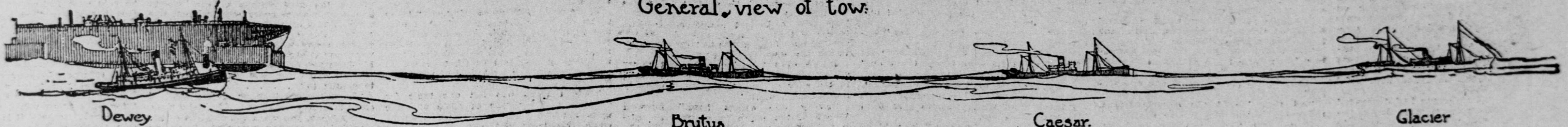
Across the Atlantic in a Dry Dock



The Dewey in a blow

White with incrusted salt and streaked red with rust, slowly following the lead of the three weary ships that towed it, the big dry dock Dewey passed into the Mediterranean after one of the most marvelous pasages ever made across the western ocean.

It is a far cry back to that December day when the Solomon Islanders watched with regret the departure of the flotilla with the dock that had lain so long in the shelter of its shores, and much credit is due those in charge for bringing the ungainly monster safely through four thousand miles of stormy seas and what is considered the worst section of a twelve thousand mile voyage.

All who saw the huge structure as it stood for months immovable as a fortress completing its preparation for sea, its great sides towering above the masts of surrounding craft, admitted that the Navy Department was undertaking a large task in taking it out to the Philippines, and later events proved that they were right.

Those were great days at Solomon Island, for with vesels of war coming and going, colliers, lighters, tugs and supply vessels hovering about, the quiet waters of the beautiful Patuxent took on the bustling airs of a busy port. But Solomon's days of glory are over and no longer admirals and high officials from Washington visit its shores, for the day after Christmas the rat-ta-tat of the riveters and puffing of the derricks on the dock gave way to the steady clank of the huge chain as it slowly wound round the windlass and link by link brought up the eight great mushroom anchors out of the mud where so long they held the Dewey a prisoner. For two days the labor of getting them on board lasted till at last they were all stowed along the broad floor of the dock and with the aid of three colliers and two tugs the big structure swung majestically around, slowly gathered way and its long voyage to the Far East was begun.

Down the Patuxent River and out into the Chesapeake the long tow picked its way through fleets of little oyster vessels, which, disturbed at their dredging, like frightened gulls took hurried flight at our approach, to settle down only after the strange procession had passed.

Now, having the dock to ourselves, we had an opportunity to look about and see what manner of craft was this in which we were going down to sea.

Roomy she was beyond question and one can well realize where the 150 tons of red lead that it took to paint her went when one considers that five times around the top sides is more than a mile and her high walls tower nearly sixty feet above the water.

In one of the sides, away up near the "roof," are the living quarters, while the other contains the operating apparatus, pumps, boilers, dynamos, etc. A bridge at either end spans the intervening space.

The quarters, considering the limitations, are roomy, well lighted and ventilated, with a cold draught system for keeping the temperature down in a hot climate, but none for keeping it up in a cold one save a makeshift arrangement of soft coal burning stoves, with the pipe thrust out through the nearest port, filling teh room with nauseating smoke and gas.

At the after end of a long passage running the full length of the dock is the cabin, at the other end the fo'castle. Between the two and opening on this alleyway are the staterooms, mess and bath.

The dock carries a company of thirty-two, divided into the captain's and the fo'castle mess, each with its own cook and attendants.

Captain J. D. Wood, sailing master, has a chief and second mate. Mr. Phillip Mullen, chief boatswain, U. S. N., is in charge of the towing gear. Mr. Hans Hanssen, designer of the dock, is advisory dock expert, and Mr. J. H. Detwiler, who will remain with the dock in Manila as permanent dock master, is also making the trip in her.

Besides engineers, firemen and fourteen seamen, the Dewey also carries a rigger, carpenter and wireless operator.

Our first night out came on black and threatening, and later developed into a succession of mild squalls of wind, rain and an enveloping fog, through all of which the long, awkward tow carefully groped its way.

How it ever did it was a wonder to all concerned, as in a channel that allowed no great deviation from a given course, we were surrounded at times by a dozen ships under way; and the fact that the morning broke clear and fresh upon the intact tow speaks well for the skill of Captain Hutchinson, who led in the Caesar, and Mr. Thompson, who piloted the Glacier.

Down the Chesapeake we had a general cleaning or "field day," when hose, broom and swab reigned supreme, clearing away the debris left by hundreds of workmen after months of labor, to say nothing of the mass of blue mud brought up by anchors and cable.

Out of all this the Dewey emerged more shipshape, and, reaching the Virginia Capes toward midnight, passed out to sea.

The bad weather of the night before made it plain that some sort of shelter was necessary on the top side, where standing watch under such conditions was a positive hardship, as the wind, meeting the resistance of the great side walls, swept over the edge with a fury that beat rain and spoondrift into one's face with a sting like bird shot, while the wet, slippery iron deck gave rather a precarious footing for such a height.

So with the help of the carpenter the quarterdeck was adorned with a chart-house, which made up in utility what it lacked in grace, for besides giving a comfortable lee, it furnished a most convenient place for keeping signals, logbook and nautical instruments, for, be it known, the Dewey is navigated like any other seagoing ship so far as it is possible in a craft with neither means of propulsion nor steering gear of its own, and her position reported every day at noon to the flagship with the rest of the fleet. This is a precaution against parting company in a gale, when, if such an event occurred, the dock by means of her wireles apapratus could make known its position to the Glacier and be picked up without delay.

The first morning at sea, with the land out of sight and a slight heave and roll, before a fresh northwesterly we were making a good offing from the dangerous coast, and in the Dewey's case we were to solve at last the uncertainty expressed by Solomon the wise, when he said of the three things beyond the ken of man one was "the way of a ship in the midst of the sea."

To our intense satisfaction we found that the ungainly craft went through none of the strange antics predicted by the wise ones ashore, but followed the ships docilely enough, and, though not keeping in strict column formation, owing to the pressure of the wind on her side swinging her off at an angle, made as good progress in this manner as though squarely butting the seas with her blunt end.

The third day out the higher temperature of the Gulf Stream gave us a welcome relief from the obnoxious stoves, and the moderate weather gave the Glacier, hitherto holding aloof, an opportunity of taking a hand in the towing. Under slackened speed she came up astern, ranged alongside and, smartly passing her line to us, drew ahead to take a position on our starboard bow.

Owing to a sudden puff of wind the dock swerved enough from her course to cause an eddy, and as soon as the Glacier felt the suction, under her slackened speed and with only a single screw, she lost steerage way, and, in spite of all that could be done to prevent it, swung her full length across our path.

Nothing but the prompt action of her commander in stopping the tow, and thus allowing his ship to cross over the sunken tow line, saved her from what might have been serious injury.

A second attempt later in the day proved how unfitted for the work the Glacier was, for no sooner was she fast than some flimsy gear on her taffrail went overboard, and the heavy line, slipping over the side, made it impossible to steer in the rising sea, and again she had to let go.

By this time the gamy little Potomac was getting short of coal, and was ordered to cast off and go to Bermuda to replenish her stock.

No sooner had she left the fleet than a heavy gale came up from the southweest, making it necessary to steam into it for two days.

Fearing that our altered course might cause the Potomac to miss the fleet on her return, the Glacier left to pick her up. Two nights later a searchlight on the horizon showed that the flagship was looking for us, and an answering beam from our own light brought her up with the tug in two hours.

Afterward, for coal economy, the Potomac was towed behind the dock, excepting when acting as tender to the fleet, and the Glacier took her place at the head of the fleet.

Then followed our golden days, when in spite of a heavy roll from northward, for nearly two weeks we made average daily runs of over 100 miles, and in the warm, sunny weather life on the Dewey went merrily on.

With an immense amount of towing gear to look after, dynamos, condensers and evaporators to be kept running, all hands were busy during the day, but the long evenings off watch were whiled away by interminable games of solitaire, a stiff game of poker, or maybe a long yarn of the Indian Ocean or frozen Arctic by men who had sailed them all their lives.

Of course among so many men there must be pets, and two kittens were enrolled as privileged members of the dock's crew at Solomon's. One became a great favorite and pampered pet, but the other liked not the society of man, and lived among the keel blocks on the lower deck, refusing proffered food, and—so they will tell you in the fo'castle—gained a livelihood by prowling around the forward deck in the night and picking up any luckless flying fish that strayed aboard over the great comber we pushed before us.

To watch this snowy mass, reaching far ahead and banking up against the square end, come tumbling in with a crash, interesting always, was fascinating in the tropical moonlight.

One night, as the writer watched the great dripping towing bridle come black and glistening out of it, a sudden shock, followed by the instant disappearance of the chain altogether, while the "bull rope" that suspended it from the overhanging bridge, vibrated like a fiddle string with the strain put upon it, told plainly the line had parted somewhere and we were adrift. Instantly the crew awoke, and while the lookout reported to the deck officer the deep bass of the whistles passed the word along the line to the Glacier, far ahead, whose lights flashed back orders in turn. Out of the fo'castle tumbled the men to the shrill cry of "All hands!" and as they took their stations the black smoke pouring from our funnels showed that the firemen were busy below.

The dock, which but a few minutes before trembled at the impact of the heavy seas, now vibrated with steam winch and capstans, as all night long the crew toiled at getting in and stowing the monster chain bridles and water soaked fifteen-inch hawsers. Not till almost noon the next day was it all stowed safely on deck in a egart soggy heap, and it was 2 o'clock before we were under way again.

A few days later, four weeks out, we picked up a wireless from the Maryland with a message to the Glacier saying that the repairs for the collier's towing machine had been forwarded to Naples. This message was carried by a chain of ships two thousand and sixty-eight miles, making a new record for ships at sea. On this trip the Glacier wired more than one thousand six hundred miles alone.

After this our luck seemed to leave us and the wind, always ahead, blew stronger than ever, with intermittent gales at times making progress impossible. On one day, with all ships steaming to the eastward, we atually lost twenty-four miles. For two weeks we made only a trifle more than two hundred miles, while at the end of five days we were in exactly the same spot.

Three times we went adrift and distance painfully gained was swept away by the dock, which wallowed off in the trough of the sea before the wind at a gait that made our puny efforts look sick and our course a crazy zigzag.

On going adrift the draught was always increased, as was also the case in exceptionally heavy weather. This made our craft comfortable enough, even in the trough of a big sea, and while the rest of the fleet were wildly tossing about, breaking furniture and china, the Dewey never so much as spilled a glass of water.

The plight of the Potomac was especially pitiful and the men, when we had a chance to see them, showed the effects of the miserable existence aboard her. For weeks at a time they lived under battened hatches as the huge seas tossed their little ship about like an eggshell. Small wonder that some of her crew deserted at the first opportunity.

Ever looking for milder weather, we kept edging southward, but in vain, and at least it was potent to every one that we had picked up the northeast trades far north of their usual limits.

The continued pounding and rolling which the dock went through caused some of the securing bolts holding the pontoons to work loose, and we slowed down a few days to tighten them. To get at the outside bolts it was necessary for some one to go over the side. This was done by Mr. Hanssen, as no one else seemed to desire the job. Several times a sea wrenched him from the bolt on which he was working, to dash him violently against the side, perhaps thirty feet away. Fortunately he escaped without serious injury.

After a passage of two months, the coal and water supply in the flotilla was getting low, so a stop at the Canaries was considered advisable, and the Potomac was despatched ahead to prepare the way for the Dewey in Las Palmas.

Away she went like a bird out of captivity, leaving a long steak of foam trailing after her, and a day or two later, in the sheltering lee of majestic Teneriffe, the tow separated and shortened hawsers for our trip through the islands.

What these isolated islanders in their mountain villages thought of the strange fleet standing about in so queer a manner for a whole day off their shores would be interesting to know. Had it been a day later instead they might have taken alarm at the Yankee fleet when flags were broken out and a national salute was fired in honor of Washington's birthday.

Next day, on February 23, fifty-seven days out from home, towed by the Caesar alone, we slipped into the beautiful harbor of Las Palmas, while the natives lined the wharves and housetops on the hills.

A few days later the cruiser Tacoma appeared off the harbor with repairs for the towing machines and fired a salute to the flag of old Spain and the fort on the mountainside replied with one to Old Glory.

During our stay here the dock was visited by as many as could gain the privilege. Most interesting among these were a company of middies from H. M. S. Isis, who swarmed over the dock, intensely interested in the strange raft and our voyage in her.

Had we remained a week or so longer the dock with its significant name might have been visited by the King of Spain himself, as he paid a state visit to the islands shortly after our departure.

Thoroughly refitted, we once more put to sea on the 17th of March and headed up for Gibraltar against a two knot current, but fortunately encountered no heavy weather, and when the great rock rose out of the sea ahead we felt that at last one stage of our journey was over, and we entered the Mediterranean with fresh confidence in our ability to weather the storms of other seas yet to conquer.

Outside of the demise of three Chinese sailors from beri-beri in the Caesar there was no serious illness in the fleet on the passage over.

Poor Chinks, deprived of a Chinaman's chief ambition of a ceremonial funeral, they were buried at sea with what honors we could give, and at a burial all ships took part.

Under slow headway and with flags at half mast, the white shrouded figure was slipped over the side into the sea, and, as the bugler on the Glacier sounded "taps," the shipmates tossed after him offerings of rice to provide for his voyage to the Chinese heaven.

He was even defrauded of that poor consolation, however, as a few gulls that had been circling about swooped down and with loud screams devoured the unexpected feast.

AUTOMATA THAT SHOWS GENIUS OF INVENTORS

In the eighteenth century a Swiss watchmaker named Pierre Jacquet Droz brought to the Spanish court a beautiful and ingeniously constructed clock which so pleased the King, Ferdinand VI, that he not only purchased the timepiece, but reimbursed Droz for the expense of his long journey. The enterprise, says the New York Times, came near having a very different ending, however. The clock was adorned with the figure of a shepherd, who, when the hour struck, raised his pipe to his lips and played a tune, of which he had six in his repertoire. At the same time the shepherd's dog rubbed his pelt affectionately against his master's leg. At the shepherd's feet stood a basket of apples. Every time an apple was taken from the basket the dog barked so naturally that on one occasion a real dog which happened to be present barked in reply.

These magical performances made everybody but the King flee in terror. The inventor, in fear of the holy inquisition, begged permission to exhibit and explain his masterpiece to the grand inquisitor, who, though the explanation was probably lost on him, deigned to issue a public announcement in the name of the church to quell the growing belief that the clock was a work of the devil. And so Droz was allowed to return in peace to his native mountains, while his clock remains to this day in the Museo Arqueologico of Madrid. Thereafter Droz, who was being educated for the church, abandoned his theological studies and devoted himself entirely to mechanics, which had hitherto been merely a diversion. Among other things he constructed a writing automaton, representing a child, which writes words and sentences, dips the pen in the ink and carries it from the end of a line to the beginning of the next line in a very realistic manner. The complicated mechanicism by which these motions are effected is entirely concealed in the wooden body of the figure. The alphabet of the automaton, being French, contains neither W nor w, and nearly half the capital letters are also omitted for the sake of simplicity. Hence circumlocutions are occasionally necessary.

At the recent historical exhibition of clocks and watches at Nuremberg the apparently very young, but really very old, penman always substituted, for "Nuremberg," "the city of Albert Durer." This figure was constructed about 1750. Like the other automata it has had a curious and eventful history. The other figures, the harmonium player and the draughtsman, are the work of Pierre's son, Henri Louis Jacquet Droz, who did not waste any time in theological studies, but devoted himself from the first to horology and science. Consequently his works, of which, unfortunately, only the harmonium player and the draughtsman are still in existence, are of far simpler and more practical construction than his father's. At Nuremberg the little draughtsman, which is similar in principle to the penman, gave two specimens of his skill with the pencil—a head of Louis XV, done in bold characteristic strikes, and a childishly naive drawing of "Mon Toutou"—"My Bow-wow." Once this childlike figure drew this portrait, ostensibly from life, in the presence of Louis XV and his gay court. Now all are gone save the ever young artist, whose hand, unchangeable as that of fate, still traces the features of the dead King as it drew them more than 100 years ago.

The younger Droz, encouraged by his father's success at the Spanish court, sailed with the three automata for Madrid, but was shipwrecked on the French coast. The figures were badly injured, but Droz succeeded, after much labor, in repairing them, and resumed his journey. In Madrid the English manager who had suggested the enterprise advertised the automata as veritable marvels. Perhaps he overdid the matter. At all events the holy inquisition confiscated the figures and clapped Droz into prison. After enduring great suffering he was set at liberty, but the automata were not restored to him, and he returned in poverty to his home at La Chaux de Fonds in Switzerland, where in 1788, one year after the death of his father, he died at the age of 37. After passing through many hands the three automata were eventually presented by a number of art lovers to the Museum of La Chaux de Fonds, the home of their inventor, where, after more than a century of wandering and vicissitudes, they seem destined to rest in peace to delight and amaze future generations.