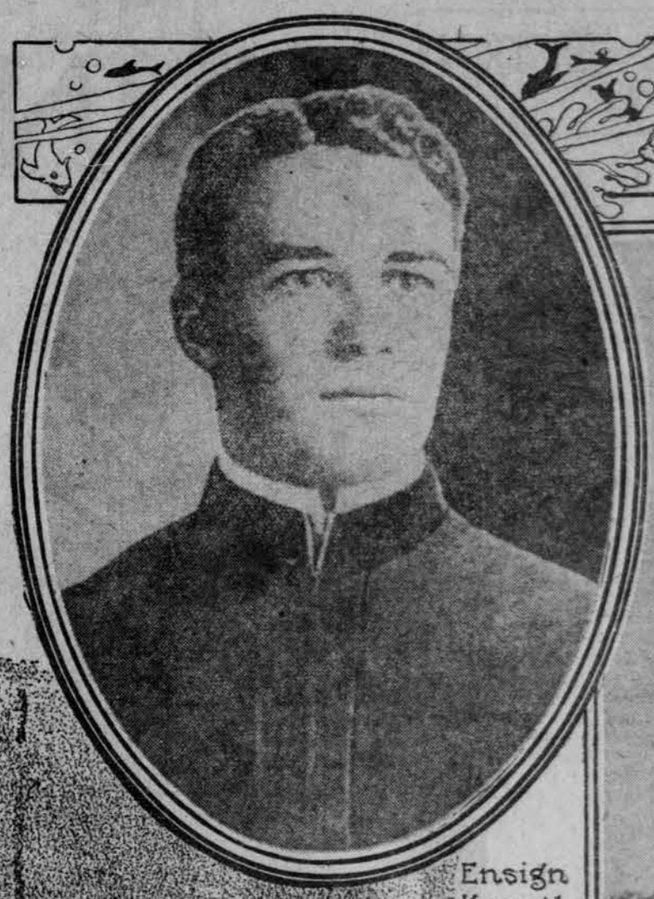
TORPEDOED HIS WAY TO FAME

ENSIGN WHITING, in Charge of the Submarine Boat Porpoise, Shot from the Bottom of Manila Bay—Valorous Deed Described to Crews Aboard All U. S. War Ships.



Ensign Kenneth Whiting U.S.N.

Ensign Whiting as a Foot ball Player with the Naval Academy Team in 1904

ENSIGN KENNETH WHITING did it.

The idea was not wholly new. Its feasibility had been discussed around many a ward room table. But nobody had ever put the idea to a practical test, or even attempted it. Therein lies Ensign Whiting's conspicuous accomplishment. He did it.

Imagine yourself a minnow in a shark's mouth. A momentary opening of the cruel teeth and you slide out and rush up, up, up through green water to safety. That describes the recent exploit of Ensign Whiting in Manila bay.

He is no minnow; far from it, as his brilliant football record at Annapolis will attest. The shark in this case was the United States submarine torpedo boat Porpoise, from which he escaped, by having himself shot through the torpedo tube and swimming upward through five fathoms of water gained light and air and freedom on the surface of the waters where Dewey had sent the Spanish ships in an opposite direction. His zealous and daring experiment adds another picturesque detail to the thrilling lives of the officers and men who work with the strangest of all craft under the American flag. Moreover, it demonstrated the practicability of a new method of escape from a submerged submarine in the case of accident.

The story establishes a modern simile for the biblical tradition of Jonah and the whale, and was deemed of sufficient importance to be communicated to every fleet and read aloud to the crews of several of the big battleships and cruisers. It is not intended to encourage the idea that submarines are necessarily dangerous. The necessity for new methods of escape has not been brought home by disaster in the American navy. Most of the recent fatal accidents in the British service have been cases of submerged submarines run down by steamers in crowded harbors and roadsteds. Work with the submarines in the Philippines is of recent origin.

About the time that the unprotected condition of the distant possessions prompted the dispatch of the battleship fleet to the Pacific the navy department had the submarines Shark and Porpoise loaded on the deck of the collier Caesar and sent 12,500 miles via Suez to the navy yard at Cavite. At the same time Lieutenant Guy Castle, who knew more perhaps about these particular craft than any other officer in the service, was sent across the continent and the Pacific to meet them.

NO DRESS UNIFORM JOB

When they were once more in the water looking like a couple of strange sea monsters Ensign Whiting was detailed to command the Porpoise and work with Lieutenant Castle. The two craft were accorded a prominent place in the defense of Manila. Their "moral effect," always accorded high rating by strategists, was heightened in comparison with the meager fortifications and light naval force stationed in the islands.

Submarine duty is no dress uniform job in a temperate climate, much less in the tropics. The sun blistered the paint from the steel skins of the Shark and Porpoise and increased the discomfort of breathing the air laden with the fumes of the gas engine that drives the boat until submergence compels resort to electric propulsion from the storage batteries.

The two young officers, aided by Ensign Theodore C. Ellyson, a classmate of Whiting, were strictly O. T. J. (on the job), as their fellows put it. Everybody saw them tinkering with the machinery alongside the dock at Cavite and making an occasional run out among the armored cruisers. Rear Admiral Harber, commanding the division, and their other seniors gave them a free hand, and the capabilities of the submarines were steadily expanded.

But "Ken" Whiting, as his classmates knew him, had a desire to do not only all that was expected of him, but more. He had put his vessel through the "tricks" and maneuvers which the submarines on the Atlantic coast had tried, and he conceived the idea of doing something which had never been tried.

When the submarine was submerged in fathoms of green water the problem presented itself to him of finding some means of escape in case the vessel were disabled and unable to get to the surface.

Hemmed in by the tons of pressure of the deep sea the only thing that could escape from the vessel was the torpedo, which, forced out from the torpedo tube by air pressure, could be sent on its self-propelling destructive mission.

Ensign Whiting knew all about the mechanism and workings of the 18 inch torpedo tube which formed the only outlet from the submerged submarine. Would it not be possible for members of the crew to escape by means of this tube in case of emergency? He would try it.

AMAZED AT HIS PLAN

As the only means of getting out through the tube was to be shot out, and as this necessitated the cooperation of some one to operate the torpedo gun, Whiting took a gunner into his confidence and unfolded his plan. The gunner was to operate the mechanism while he (Whiting) crawled into the tube and became a human torpedo.

But Whiting's plan did not impress the gunner with the same force that it impressed Whiting himself. Consequently instead of aiding the gunner availed himself of his opportunity to rush to Lieutenant Castle and inform him that Whiting had some "crazy," hazardous scheme on foot. Lieutenant Castle had best have a heart to heart talk with Whiting or he would be minus a very valuable officer.

Lieutenant Castle foresaw immediately the danger of the as yet untried experiment. The pressure of the water at considerable depths is great, the inrush into the tube would, he reasoned, hold Whiting glued to the interior, while eardrums were shattered, features distorted and other injurfes sustained, to say nothing of the terrific suction which would probably send an inrush of water into his lungs, causing death by strangulation.

Lieutenant Castle realized in a moment what Whiting was up to. He made efforts forthwith to get in touch with him. But in the meantime things had been happening. Finding that the gunner had "ducked," as the officers put it, Ensign Whiting pressed into service a gunner's mate, instructing him what to do and when to operate the torpedo gun.

SANK FOR THE TEST

Out in the bay near Cavite the other seagoing craft saw the Porpoise stop in its leisurely run and remain still for several minutes. Then the body of the sea monster seemed to sink down into the water. Gradually it sank out of sight, leaving only the thin staff flying the American flag, which went lower and lower until all had sunk from view.

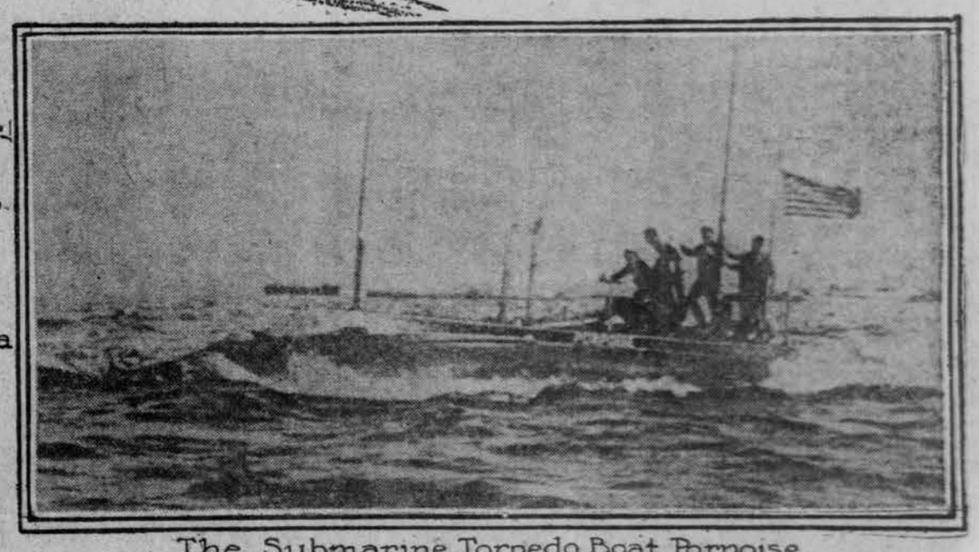
Inside the little vessel the forward torpedo gun had been swung open from the inside. The gunner's mate was operating the mechanism preparatory to opening the outward cap which separated the interior of the ship from the water. Kenneth Whiting, in his dungarees, was squeezing his broad football shoulders through the opening and dragging himself with difficulty in position.

The Porpoise was down several fathoms.

"When I say ready let her go," was the command from the human torpedo, while Whiting fastened an iron grip on the crossbar of the outside cap. His idea was to keep hold and when this outside cap swung open it would pull him out of the tube and into the sea.

It was to be a battle between his grip on the cap and the inrush of the heavy sea. Once clear of the gun Whiting reasoned he would shoot up toward the surface with sufficient speed to get his breath in the open, above the surface of the water.

There was a moment of suspense while the inner tube door closed in response to the work of the operator. Then the outer cap swung open with great force. The water rushed in with terrific pressure, but



The Submarine Torpedo Boat Porpoise
Photo. Copyright, 1904, by James Burton

Whiting Held His Grip, Swung Clear of the Gun and Shot Upward from the Depths of the Sea

Whiting held his grip, swung out clear of the gun and shot upward from the depths of the sea, stroking vigorously.

Seventy-five seconds after he had been locked in the torpedo tube he had rolled over on his back on the smooth surface of the bay and inhaled long drafts of welcome air. When Lieutenant Castle and other officers reached the scene they found him splashing around and enjoying a good swim.

As a result of this experiment the following report was made by Lieutenant Castle and transmitted by the navy department to officers of the service for their guidance and information:

THE OFFICIAL REPORT

"I have the honor to submit the following report of an experiment to determine the practicability of escaping from a submarine boat of the Shark class while submerged, recently performed by Ensign Kenneth Whiting, commanding the Porpoise.

"Ensign Whiting entered the torpedo tube of the Porpoise through the after door of the tube, the cap of the forward door being closed. He then grasped the strong back of the crossbar of the cap and ordered the after door closed. As soon as the after door was closed the gunner's mate stationed at the cap engine opened the cap. The cap in opening forward and up hauled Ensign Whiting clear of the tube, so as to enable him to use his arms to come to the surface and to prevent his being shoved back into the tube by inrushing water. The whole operation consumed about 75 seconds.

"The only other experiment of this nature that I am cognizant of was tried at Newport some years ago when an attempt was made to blow a dog clear of the tube and was not successful. The method used by Ensign Whiting is practical up to depths in which divers could work and does not involve the use of the impulse charge."

Ensign Whiting has shown great zeal and ingenuity in developing practical schemes for the improvement of the submarines on this station."

HIS DAREDEVIL SPIRIT

When Ensign Whiting's friends here learned of the experiment they recalled his daredevil spirit. He was appointed to the naval academy from New York, being of the class of 1905.

Well proportioned and muscular, he soon established a reputation as an athlete, especially at football, where his black curly hair, waving over handsome, regular features, could be seen often in the midst of scrimmages on the gridiron. He made the team without difficulty and soon became a star, playing halfback in some of the most notable games. Whiting was also identified with the crew and was known as an expert swimmer.

He was very popular and liked by his classmates, perhaps his best friend being Theodore G. Ellyson, who shared honors with him on the football field. Whiting and Ellyson were inseparable at the academy, and strangely enough they have been together almost continually since they left Annapolis. Ellyson is now in command of the submarine Shark, working with Whiting at Cavite in their plans to better submarine development, Lieutenant Castle having been ordered home.

Both Ellyson and Whiting were on the armored cruiser squadron under Rear Admiral Brownson to Asiatic waters in 1906. Last November, when Rear Admiral Harber, commanding the third division of the Pacific fleet, wanted two men to help Lieutenant Castle in his work with the Shark and the Porpoise, some one suggested Whiting and Ellyson.

From the viewpoint of the navy department the importance of Ensign Whiting's experiment lies primarily in the fact that it suggests a means of providing for the escape from a submerged submarine by some manner similar to the one undertaken by Whiting. Whether or not it would be expedient to have the men shot out through the torpedo guns in case of emergency is a question.

ALWAYS AT IT

Although the importance of permitting escape from a submerged submarine in case of necessity is recognized, this does not argue that the submarines are unsafe. Under ordinary conditions these little vessels have had remarkably few accidents when the kind of work they do is considered and that they are practically always at it. But in time of war there are many chances for a hostile ship to disable the submarines and sink them.

Then there is always the possibility of something "inexplicable" happening, which may mean throwing out of gear the mechanism of the vessels. Added to this there is the chance of the vessels being run down when submerged, as has happened in the crowded roadsteads where the British submarines drill.

The most recent accident to submarines in the British navy occurred last July, when the British submarine C11 was run down and sunk by the cargo steamer Eddystone four and a half miles northwest of the Hainsborough lightship. Thirteen of the crew went to the bottom with the boat. Two lieutenants and a single sailor escaped death.

On this occasion the British cruiser Bonaventure was proceeding leisurely southward with a flotilla of eight submarines. The submarines were submerged and practically invisible to the Eddystone, which steamed right in their midst before it was aware of their presence. The Eddystone collided with the submerged C11, staving the C11 and sending it to the bottom in 15 fathoms of water.

There have been similar accidents in other navies, the American and Japanese navies alone remaining free from submarine disasters.

SUBMARINE DISASTERS

The British submarine A1 was lost during the maneuvers off the entrance of Portsmouth harbor on March 13, 1904. The A1 was submerged awaiting a chance to score on a battleship, when a Donald Currie liner struck it. It sank at once with the crew of two officers and nine men. The largest of the British submarines up to that time, the boat was a slow diver, and it is believed that this slowness was a large contributing factor to its loss.

Ten weeks later, on June 30, the Russian navy lost one officer and 20 men in the sinking of the submarine Delfin. This boat, which was lying in the Neva, was intended to carry a crew of 11 men. In the absence of the commander 32 officers and men, many of them novices so far as submarines were concerned, crowded into the submarine, forcing the manhole almost to the river's surface. The wash from a passing towboat threatened to flood the Delfin before the manhole could be closed. One frightened novice made disaster certain by attempting to climb to the dock. As the vessel filled 11 men were blown to safety by the air pressure.

On February 16, 1905, the British submarine A5 was sunk off Queenstown. Here six lives were lost. Several months later the submarine A8 of the British navy was blown up by an explosion of gasoline, these vessels carrying as high as 1,000 gallons, and her crew of 14 were lost.

WHEN THE FARFADET SANK

On July 6 the French submarine Farfadet sank off Tunis, taking down 13 of the crew. Fifty hours later it was raised to the surface, all the men dead from suffocation. The breaking of a sea cock was supposed to have caused the disaster.

In October, 1905, the Lutin sank with a crew of 15 off Tunis. Immediately warships of several powers went to its aid, cables were placed on and about and the submarine was being slowly raised to the surface when all but one line parted. It was possible to get food and water to the 15 men imprisoned, as the submarine hung suspended by a single line; but when the work of raising was completed all were dead. A small pebble was jammed in a valve, preventing the closing of it. Water was thus admitted to the submerging tanks and this, together with structural weakness of the tanks themselves, caused the accident.

One year later the Lutin was again sunk, this time by collision with a steamship. The crew was saved.

On April 26 last the Italian navy lost the Foca, the finest of its flotilla, and eight men by the exploding of the gasoline tanks. The explosion literally tore the boat apart and hurled members of the crew a distance of 800 meters.

There have been many suggestions looking to the escape of a crew from a submerged submarine when run down by a vessel for instance, or if disabled while submerged in time of war. Ensign Whiting has come nearest to solving this problem.