Yankee Tars in a Naval Battle in War of 1812 Not Recorded in History

Prisoners on Board British Frigate Leander Outsang Their Captors, but Were Finally Conquered by the Cannonball Cure

The American prisoners on the Leander would not stop singing their patriotic songs. To drown out their noise the British officers placed forty-two pound solid shot on the deck directly over them. The shot passed from one side to the other at each roll of the frigate and caused a noise more horrible than the booming of thousands of Chinese gongs. One by one the singers dropped off until all were silenced.

By EDGAR STANTON MACLAY.

IN the diary of a Yankee privateersman who served in one of the most famous letters of marque during the War of 1812 is an account of a naval battle which has escaped historical record. It shows that American man-o'-warsmen of that day were called upon to engage in more than one style of fighting.

This battle occurred aboard the British fifty gun frigate Leander, flagship of Sir George Collier's squadron, while in chase of the American frigate Constitution across the Atlantic in the winter of 1814-15. According to a statement printed in the London *Times* in 1814 the Leander had been built and fitted out on the exact lines of the famous American forty-four gun frigates of that period and had been stationed off Boston harbor in the avowed hope that she might bring Old Ironsides to a conclusion at arms.

Late in December, 1814, the Constitution gave the British blockading ships the slip and again was in blue water. Learning of this a few days later Sir George started across the Atlantic on a blind cruise for the flying Yankee; and how closely he kept in the Constitution's wake is shown by the fact that he came upon her only a few hours after she gained Port Praya, off the African coast.

About a week after Sir George left his station off Boston on this transatlantic chase he captured an American privateer which had sailed from Boston at the time the Constitution left that port. Sir George took the privateer's people aboard his flagship as prisoners. We know that at least one of the privateer's officers had served in Old Ironsides as a Lieutenant when she fought her memorable actions with the Guerriere and Java, and that at least three of the Leander's men had served in the Java when that frigate was captured by the Constitution, one of them having had his shin badly shattered.

Additional piquancy to the incident about to be related is had in the fact that the first thing the American prisoners noticed when gaining the Leander's deck was a large placard nailed to her mainmast on which were inscribed the following words:

REWARD OF 100 POUNDS.

To the man who shall first descry the American frigate Constitution, providing she can be brought to; and a smaller reward should they not be able to come up with her.

Learning from some of the British seamen that the Leander was hot on the trail of the Constitution, these American prisoners instantly felt a desire to take part in the probable fight—even if it were only in a secondary capacity, that of singing patriotic songs. Their peculiar position was suggestive of the story of Napoleon's drummer boy, who, when ordered to beat the retreat replied that he did not know how, so he began beating a charge, with the result that victory instead of defeat resulted to the French arms. These helpless prisoners could not take part in the battle that actually occurred between the Constitution and the Leander (a battle at long balls) but they could sing their war songs and shout their defiance.

For sixteen hours in every twenty-four the prisoners aboard the Leander were confined in the narrow quarters of the cable tier, being allowed on deck only from 8 A. M. to 4 P. M. To while away the long hours of darkness in their "pen" the prisoners resorted to story telling and singing.

"The singing," records one of these prisoners, "was made up of such songs as seamen generally have by heart and were rattled off from memory. In general they detailed sea adventures, with a sprinkling of some love affair to make them more entertaining, and enough of the superstitious to insure their belief.

"By the quickness of our fifer's ear for music he soon was able to lead off with any song that was sung to him once or twice, and, in addition to his other qualifications—he was decidedly the best singer on board—possessed a manly, clear and highly musical voice." It may be added that he came from the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts, had been a candidate for the Legislature and was a leader of the singers in his own home church choir.

It soon became known to the prisoners, however, that some of their songs were rather offensive to the officers of the Leander, particularly those that referred to recent American naval victories. One of these songs had for its subject the Constitution's victory over the Guerriere, the first four lines of which ran as follows:

It oftimes has been told that British seamen bold
Could flog the tars of France so neat and handy, Oh.
But they never met their match till the Yankees did them catch,
Oh, the Yankee boy for fighting is the dandy, Oh.

Other naval songs grated harshly on the ears of the Leander's officers and one night the marines on guard at the open hatchway leading from the cable tier told the prisoners that the objectionable songs must cease. "This," records our chronicler, "only brought out other songs with a louder chorus than before and with extra hurrahs for Yankee thunders."

It must be said that the British officers took the situation with remarkable good nature. They stationed six of the best singers in the Leander, reenforced by a dozen "leather lunged" men to join in the choruses. Standing near the hatchway, they began singing English patriotic songs. The Americans eagerly accepted the challenge. They waited until the first British song was concluded, when the Yankees burst out with an American tune in determined rivalry, each of the prisoners "striving to outdo his shipmate, especially in the chorus, knowing that the character of our country was at stake and that it depended much upon our zeal and good management whether it should be upheld in the face of our enemies."

Our chronicler continues: "We strove accordingly to do our best as America's representatives. I trust I shall be able to prove for the benefit of coming generations that our efforts were not entirely unrequited, or at least enough was done for historians hereafter to give it a place; nay, we claim as fearlessly earned, bravely gained and dearly bought a conspicuous niche in the temple of fame among the titled dignitaries, naval heroes and military bulldogs of renown who have gone before us in times past or may come after us in ages to come."

This singular battle was kept up some time, the British crew forming a ring about the contestants, while the more dignified officers listened and watched from vantage points as if a prizefight were under way. Unfortunately for the singers there had been few victories of their ships over American craft, so their list of songs on this subject was short.

On the other hand, the prisoners were rich in such nautical verses; and the result was that the enemy ran through their "list of victories before our party was fairly warm with the contest." To meet this deficiency the English singers fell back on songs relating to their victories over the French, the Spanish and the Dutch—such as "Nelson at Trafalgar," "Battle of the Nile" and "The First of June."

After this battle had raged more than an hour the English singers were compelled to retreat, their musical colors lowered, their voices wrecked and their throats "presenting a scene of carnage so horrible, I assure you, as to deprive me very much of the pleasure of victory"—to paraphrase a famous American naval official report of that day. The defeat of the English singers was announced by the prisoners to all in the frigate with three times three cheers, "accompanied with clapping of hands and such other noises as each and all could invent in our zeal to outdo one another and uphold the honor of the country we hailed from."

It appears that the quarters of the Leander's wardroom officers were directly over the cable tier, so the noise made by the prisoners interfered with the sleep of the officers when off duty. Soon word reached the prisoners that they must keep quiet. But instead of obeying they made more disturbance

Presently the officer of the deck came down and said that if order were not maintained he would resort to unpleasant means. Our narrator says: "If the most savage tribe of Indians in North America had at once broken loose with a terrific warwhoop it could not have been louder or more grating to the ear than the screamings of the sixty prisoners that followed the termination of the watch officer's speech."

In vain he tried to reason with the prisoners, who now were half mad with excitement, and concluded by saying: "Order must and shall be maintained in the ship; if by no other means I will order the marines to fire into the hold and, when too late, you will learn your folly." This threat only served to increase the disorder and such defiances as:

"Crack away, my Johnnie. You can make killing no murder, but you can't easily mend the shot holes in your best bower cables."

"If he mends his manners he'll have task enough without troubling himself with the cables."

"Yes, patchwork is bad enough in the whole and not easily mended by a swabber."

"Is it to be a pop-and-let-alone running fire, or a regular crasher and-be-done-with-it?"

"Hurrah for Old Ironsides!"

"Three cheers for the gallant Perry!"

Finding that he could not reason with the prisoners, the officer retreated amid nine cheers from the frenzied men in the cable tier. All that night the disturbance was kept up, although the prisoners realized that punishment in some form would come to them.

On the following night the Americans had been singing and shouting as before for about two hours, when they heard a deep rumbling noise over their heads. This was the rolling of forty-two pound solid shot on the deck directly over them, which the British had let loose within a confined space so the shot would continue to roll with the motion of the ship. One of the prisoners records:

"The shot passed from one side to the other at each roll of the frigate. They caused a low, harsh, thunderlike rumbling, as deafening and more horrible than the booming of ten thousand Chinese gongs, intermingling with many bell clappers set in motion by one who was sworn to drown all else by his noisy clatter. They were brought suddenly to a standstill when coming to the scantling and with a jar and noise little less than a discharge of small artillery.

"In this there was no variation, except as they came in contact with each other, when the sharp snap of the balls meeting was enough to split the brain of us who were underneath the deck with the advantage of the planks immediately above our heads to convey and magnify the rumbling noise as a sounding board a hundredfold."

At first some of the prisoners tried to brave it out. Some tried to sing, but the shot sang louder. Some joked, jeered and jangled, but the rolling shot drowned the puny opposition. Our chronicler says:

"Some swore, raved and damned, but the shot went booming on. Some yelled, hallooed and whooped, but on came the shot as doggedly as before. Some blustered, threatened and stormed, but still the stolcal shot rolled on. Some sighed, groaned and roarded but rumble-de-dump went the shot.

"One by one the singers, the jokers, the swearers, the whoopers, the stormers and the roarers dropped off until all were silenced. Not a sound was to be heard save these dull, heavy messengers of anguish which kept rolling their tormenting rounds over our heads."

Any person who has descended into an empty cistern and has heard the ear splitting reverberations caused by normally sharp sounds will appreciate the torture these prisoners were subjected to in the confined space of the cable tier with those solid shot rolling directly over their heads.

Ever after that when these prisoners kept up their singing later than 10 o'clock at night they were promptly subjected to the "shot cure."

Government to Build Dock Which Will Prevent Accidents in Testing Submarines

Strange Craft Is Invention of Ex-Officer of Italian Navy and Is Latest Engineering Provision Against Certain Kind of Submarine Dangers.

Submarines to Be Tested Need Not Port, but May Be Submitted to Proof Pressure at Wharf of the Builders

CONGRESS provided money at its last regular session for the building of a strange craft. Officially it is called a wrecking and a testing pontoon, but in fact it is the latest engineering provision against certain kinds of submarine accidents. It is the invention of an ex-officer of the Italian navy, Major Cesare Laurenti.

Every time a disaster in the submarine flotilla of some European Power has occurred we have congratulated ourselves that no kindred mishaps have befallen our own boats of this sort and the general public has come to the conclusion that we were secure against similar casualties. The truth is that a number of our submarines have escaped by the slimmest margin from disaster.

When a submarine is made ready for submerged operations she is loaded down with water ballast until the remaining buoyancy represents a total of not more than 300 pounds. Should the vessel leak and let in that amount of water she would begin to sink, and a submarine once started bottomward reaches the bed of the sea with disturbing celerity. It is necessary to reduce a submarine's buoyancy in this fashion in order to facilitate diving and manipulation below the surface. It is equally needful that the likelihood of leakage shall be reduced to a minimum.

The designers of submarines do their best to make these boats strong enough for ordinary service and the American Government requires that they shall be watertight and sturdy enough to withstand the pressure if by accident they should be carried to a depth of 200 feet. The Navy Department takes no chances and it requires that each of these underwater craft before acceptance shall be lowered 200 feet down into the sea, but without any one inside of her.

Accordingly, the contractor hires a big floating wrecking derrick and with the submarine goes to some point where the water is of that depth and if possible the bottom sandy. Preferably he chooses a protected or land locked bay, but sometimes he has to go to the open sea. The boat is ballasted with water in her submerging tanks until a few hundred pounds more would sink her. She is held in the grip of slings of steel chain and sufficient weight is placed upon her outside to sink her to the required depth.

Pressure gauges record any yielding of the hull and the amount of the deformation due to the maximum stress of the enveloping sea at the full depth. These are examined when the boat is brought again to the surface and the inspectors look for any leakage. Leaks may occur, however, two hundred feet down through the momentary opening of a seam or joint which would close again when the boat arose, and these can not always be located, or a slightly greater submergence might lead to disaster though the test might show that the hull was sound. These considerations impelled the Navy Department to seek a bigger margin of safety and more scientific adjustment of the structural material.

The real story back of a record-breaking exploit will help to a realization of this need. A new submarine was making preliminary tests in preparation of an official deep-water submergence a year ago. A sheltered body of water was chosen for this try-out, and upon the navigator's chart had been marked the place where the boat was to be carried 200 feet down to the bottom. There were unexpected delays, and the hour for the trial had long passed before the craft was ready for her dive. In the interval her engines had been running and they had drawn upon the supply of fuel. Moreover, the submarine drifted away from the chosen position.

This boat carried her fuel tanks outside of her main or pressure-resisting hull. When full, these tanks were safe against the crushing force of the sea, but in this instance some of them were partly exhausted. This made the reservoirs buoyant, and just so much more water had to be taken into the ballast tanks to make the vessel sink. Before the submarine got 200 feet down—and her officers and crew were inside—those unfilled fuel tanks collapsed and the buoyant air escaped, and the result was exactly equivalent to suddenly increasing the craft's dead weight either by leakage or added ballast. Without warning she hastened bottomward, but she did not halt where she was expected. She had drifted over a hole 256 feet deep instead of only 200 feet deep, and no one realized the predicament until she came to a standstill with the depth gauge hand quivering its startling message!

The tanks were blown free of water, but the boat did not rise because that discharge was not sufficient to overcome the unexpected increased negative buoyancy. The men's cheeks blanched and for a while there was excitement and confusion. The boat seemed glued to the waterbed. Finally, emergency facilities were brought into play and the boat rose. If this mishap occurred over a deeper hole nothing would have stopped the submarine from sinking to the fullest limit and that might have meant certain death for all aboard.

Another case illustrates how quickly a submerging boat can sink. This submarine was equipped with two compressed air ballast exhaust systems, one to be used when the craft was near the surface and the other when deeper down. The object was to reduce the drain upon the reserve air to a minimum. The submarine was upon her trial trip, and one of her manœuvres was to take aboard ballast until her buoyancy was almost neutral, i. e., so that half a pound more of water would cause her to sink.

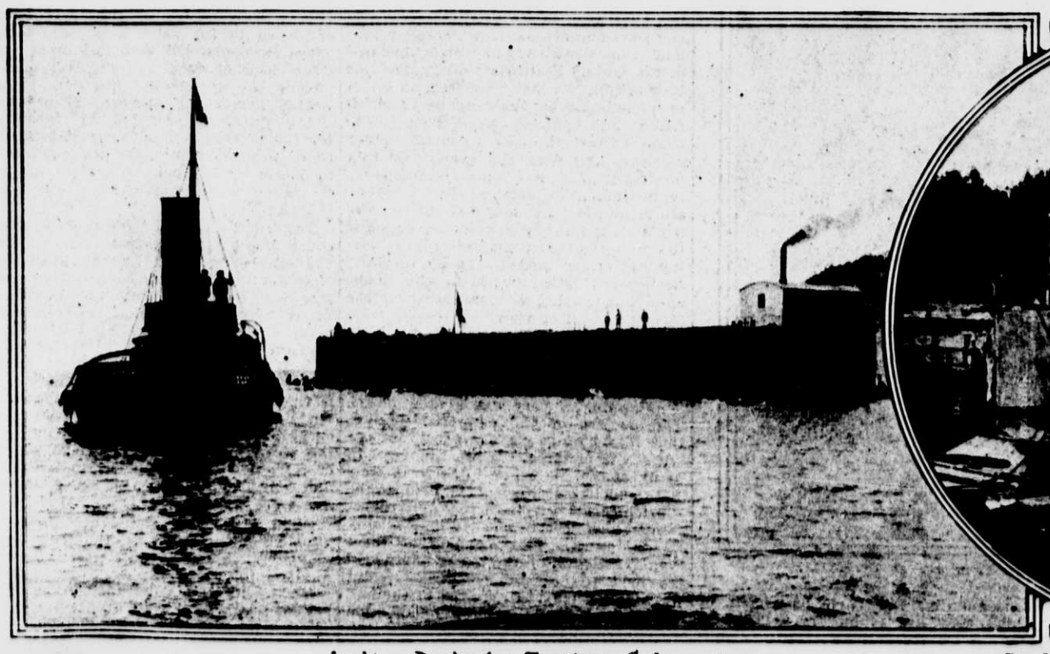
The sailor at the blowout valves was tired, the air in the boat was hot and close and made him drowsy. In juggling with the ballast to reach the desired neutral stage too much water was admitted and immediately the boat began to sink, but no one realized it until she was more than ten feet down. When the order to blow was given the sleepy valve man turned on the air from the low pressure system, and that impulse was not sufficient to overcome the external pressure tending to force water into the boat at the tank outlet.

Before he awakened to the situation the submarine was forty feet down and hit the bottom with a bump. The high pressure reserve was called upon and the submarine started surfaceward, but there were anxious moments before routine was reestablished and the proper course taken to meet the condition. Had the vessel been out in the open sea she would have fallen to the bottom to certain destruction.

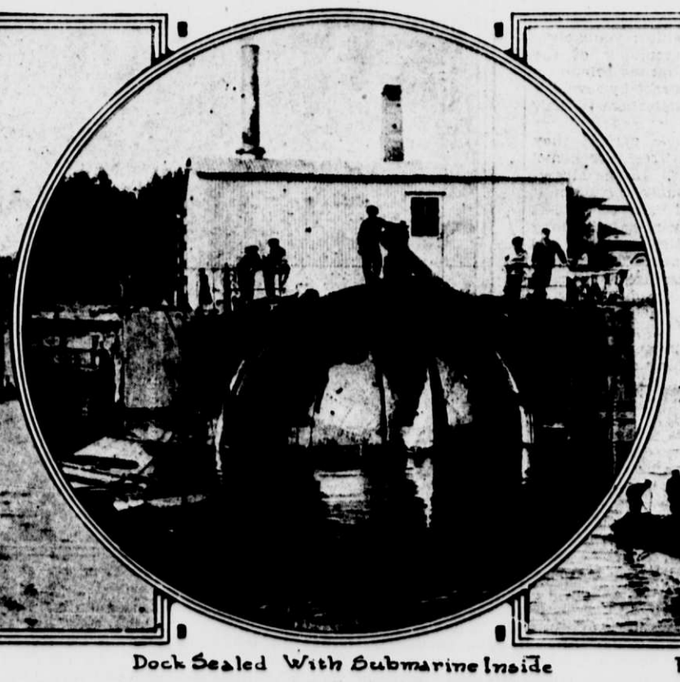
It is to do away with some of these dangers and to test a submarine without peril to observers inside of her, under circumstances which virtually duplicate sinking to trial depths in the open sea, that Major Laurenti designed his dock. The submarine to be submitted to examination need not leave port, but may be subjected to proof pressure externally applied with water right at the wharf of her builders.

The stopper or caisson which seals the dock is withdrawn and the submarine floated into a long steel tube. She is connected by telephone with the officer in charge of the pumps. The stopper is swung into position and the space surrounding the submarine is entirely flooded. Hydraulic pumps increase the enveloping pressure until this external stress tending to crush the submarine equals that of the sea at a depth of 200 feet. The observers inside the boat are watching the effects, and should leaks develop they can locate them. If the yielding appears dangerous they have only to telephone to the officer at the pumps and at once the pressure is relieved. If after reaching the pressure equivalent of the prescribed submergence, everything be apparently sound in the hull structure then the crushing force can be slowly augmented until perhaps a leak does open up. This either shows the maximum safe limit of submergence or it indicates where added strength may be needed.

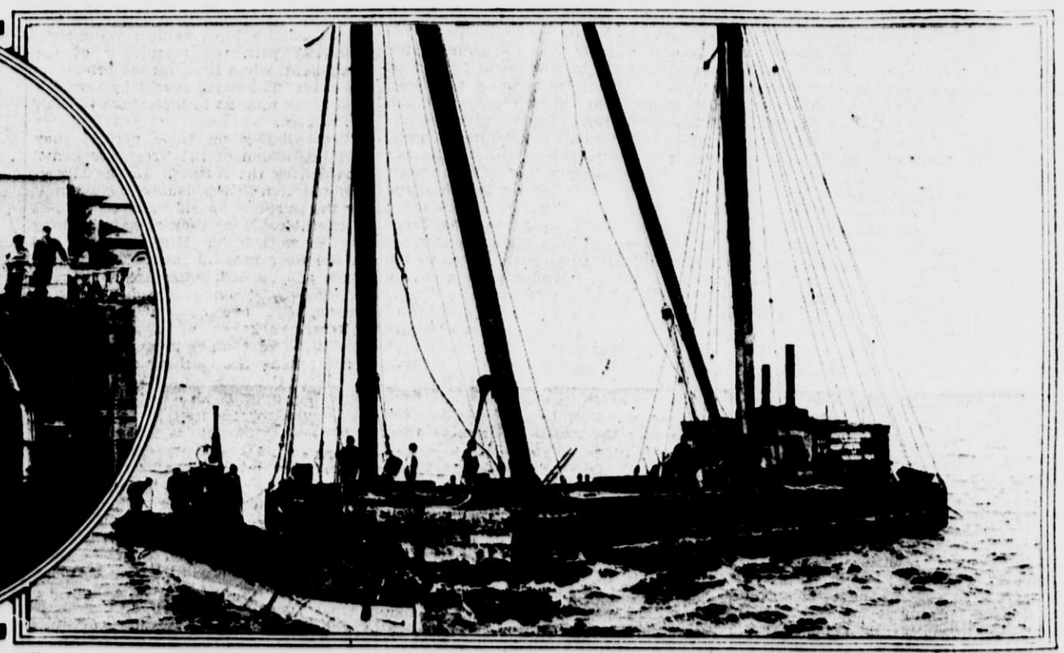
The submarine expert may ask, "Will the pumps work against the 'head' of the enveloping water? Will the compressed air be able to push the ballast out of the tanks if the submarine be down to equivalent depths in the actual sea? Will the valves leading outboard stand up against the intrusive pressure?" All of these queries can be answered conclusively and in a practical manner in the Laurenti dock. Nothing is left to guesswork, but these apparatus are called to duty just as they would be if the craft were carried to the ocean's bottom by chance.



Italian Dock for Testing Submarines



Dock Sealed With Submarine Inside



Preparing the Submarine for Lowering after the Old Plan.