

CYCLOPS MYSTERY

Disappearance From Seas

Few Years Ago of

Ill-Fated U. S. Naval

may be
SOLVED

Collier May Be Explained by Recent Mishap

to Sister Ship Orion, Which Limped

Into Port After Nearly

Buckling Up in Atlantic Waters

By Carl T. Crum

ONE of the most amazing mysteries that has ever baffled the Navy Department is probably solved at last. Navy officials believe they have the answer to the strange fate of the collier Cyclops, which vanished so completely and weirdly en route from South America to this country during the World War, taking some 300 human lives and a huge cargo of manganese ore down with it.

The last heard from the Cyclops was when she left the Barbadoes, British West Indies, where she stopped for bunker coal. Then she mysteriously disappeared, without a word or a vestige of wreckage to indicate where or how she had come to grief. For seven years the Navy Department has never abandoned its search for an explanation to the vessel's disappearance—some bottled message or scrap of labeled driftwood, washed up on shore, that might tell the story. It has carefully investigated every possible rumor, some of them manifestly ridiculous and none of them adequate, concerning the ship's fate. And then, last month, an accident to the naval collier Orion, sister ship to the Cyclops, and identical in construction, suddenly threw a great ray of illumination on the matter.

Caught in a severe storm outside the Virginia Capes, the Orion, laden with a large cargo of coal, buckled and barely made port in safety. It is now believed that this is precisely what happened to the Cyclops; that she encountered one of the tropical storms so frequent in the neighborhood of the West Indies; that the weight of the great piles of manganese ore—much heavier than coal—in her hold shifted, and that she buckled and went down suddenly before lifeboats could be lowered, safety appliances reached or even the wireless put into operation.

THAT the Cyclops, equipped as she was with superior wireless apparatus, should fail to send out one signal of distress has always been considered one of the strangest features of her disappearance. But this feature is easily explained if, as the ship bent and twisted and her decks gave way, the wireless was injured.

At any rate, the assumption that the Cyclops collapsed and sank as the Orion collapsed and nearly sank is the only one of all the many theories so far advanced that appeals to the Navy Department as distinctly plausible. A careful inspection of the damaged Orion has been ordered by Secretary Wilbur to determine if flaws in its construction were responsible for the buckling of the ship. And should such flaws be found, it is predicted that the secret of the Cyclops disaster will come to light with them.

Although other vessels have sailed silently and mysteriously off to the port of missing ships in recent years, none has created quite the furor that the vanishing Cyclops did.

As seamen tell it, the Cyclops started out in life with a jinx upon it. When it was first launched on May 7, 1910, at the yard of William Cramp & Sons Ship and Engine Building Company, of Philadelphia, the vessel did not start down the ways when expected, and there was an anxious wait of about ten minutes while the boat's bow was raised by jacks. Then it took the water without difficulty. "A bad omen!" said the seamen who watched the proceeding. "She balked at the start!"

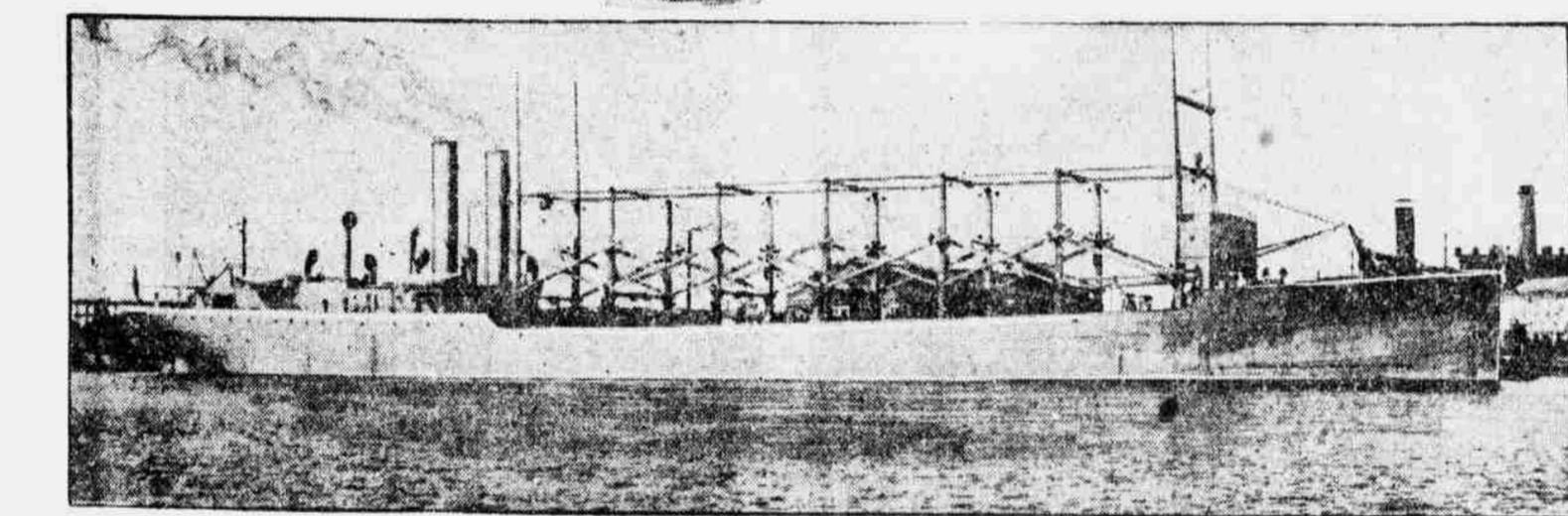
Nevertheless, the Cyclops started on her career in the navy the following November with much rejoicing. As the largest collier of her type in the world and the only one to be equipped with special facilities for coaling first-line fighting vessels at sea, the navy took great pride in her and sent her on several special missions.

AFTER the United States entered the war, one of our great needs was for manganese, to make hard steel. The supply obtainable in this country was insufficient, and the resources of other nations had to be drawn upon. Brazil had a large quantity it was willing to sell, so the Cyclops was sent to South America to get it. Arriving at Rio de Janeiro on January 25, she began loading manganese ore until she had taken on 10,800 tons of it. The job completed, on February 16 she left Rio for Baltimore, carrying with her several pas-

sengers from Brazil, including the American Consul and his party from Rio.

Headed for the Barbadoes as her first port of call, the Cyclops started slowly on her way. She was never a speedy boat, and this time she was handicapped by a heavier cargo than usual and by the disablement of one of her engines. Later, there were seamen in Rio who claimed that they had watched her off with the greatest misgivings, that they had seen her decks sag, and feared she would never make port with the heavy cargo she was carrying. But at the time, no hint of warning was raised. When the vessel reached Barbadoes she was still in good condition, except for the one engine. After filling her bunkers with coal, she departed from the island on March 4, and that was the last that was ever heard from her.

WHEN she failed to appear at the port of Baltimore when she was due on March 13, the Navy Department was not alarmed. Reviewing her past record of brilliant service, naval officers felt sure



Equipped with powerful wireless and in the lane of traffic, the Cyclops disappeared leaving absolutely no trace, and now an accident to the Orion, a sister ship, seems to indicate the nature of the accident in which the ill-fated vessel was lost

she would bring her valuable cargo safely in within the week. But as the week went by and no word came from the Cyclops, there was reason to fear the worst. For the ship carried a splendid wireless equipment, and the captain would certainly have notified the department of any undue delay. Requests for information from anxious relatives of the men on board came flooding in, but the navy withheld a definite statement, refusing to believe that the vessel was actually lost. At last, however, on April 14—"in justice to the relatives of those on board," the Secretary said—the following statement was issued:

"The U. S. S. Cyclops, navy collier of 19,000 tons displacement, loaded with a cargo of manganese, and with a personnel on board of fifteen officers and 221 men of the crew, and fifty-seven passengers, is overdue at an Atlantic port since March 13. She last reported at one of the West Indian Islands on March 4, and since her departure from that port no trace of her nor any information concerning her has been obtained. Radio calls to the Cyclops from all possible points have been made and vessels sent to search for her along her probable route and areas in which she might be, with no success.

"No well-founded reason can be given to explain the Cyclops being overdue, as no radio communication with or trace of her has been had since leaving the West Indian port. The weather in the area in which the vessel must have passed has not been bad and could hardly have given the Cyclops trouble. While a raider or submarine could be responsible for her loss, there have been no reports that would indicate the presence of either in the locality in which the Cyclops was.

"The search for the Cyclops continues, but the Navy Department feels extremely anxious as to her safety."

IMMEDIATELY, in spite of the navy's lack of reports, the rumor spread that the Cyclops had been sunk by a U-boat—a circumstance that would clearly indicate a German submarine base on this side of the Atlantic. Some were even of the opinion that she had not been sunk, but that the Germans

had captured her—in some overwhelming manner that would prevent her using her wireless—and had towed her across the Atlantic to a German port, where the officers, crew and passengers were all being kept prisoners.

In support of this novel theory, it was pointed out that Commander George W. Worley, who was in command of the Cyclops and had been ever since the day

she was launched, was of German birth, although he claimed to have been born in San Francisco. An interview with his sister in San Francisco disclosed the fact that Worley's name was really George Frederick Wichman when he arrived in this country as a little boy. But in California he was adopted by a man named Worley, and when he grew up he applied to the courts for permis-

sion to change his name to Worley at the same time that he filed papers for American citizenship.

In 1918, when everybody with a German name was suspected of having secret dealings with the enemy, these circumstances were regarded as most suspicious. It was also brought out that Worley kept a photograph of the Kaiser prominently on the wall of his cabin, and that he had been tried by court-martial a few months before the Cyclops sailed for being intoxicated in his bunk when the vessel was passing through the North Atlantic submarine-infested area. True, he had been acquitted of the charge and again placed in command of the big collier, but there must have been some cause for suspicion, people argued. Then there was the strange fact that he had sold his property in Norfolk, where his wife and daughter lived, just before the trip to Brazil, settling up his affairs, with the intention, he said, of retiring to the Pacific Coast.

Bottles containing cryptic messages were continually being plucked out of the Atlantic from points as far off as Maine and Texas, all of which purported to have come from the missing ship. The authors of these messages were nearly all firm believers in the submarine theory, and evidently wanted to impress their views upon the Navy Department.

SOME of these efforts of the public to amuse itself with the tragedy were especially cruel, since they aroused false hopes in the relatives of the lost crew, some of whom continued to have faith that the ship would finally be heard from. One morning, for example, a Philadelphia clergyman was astonished to find in his mail a letter from a supposed wireless operator stating that he had picked up word from the Cyclops.

The ship, the letter said, was being brought into port by a quartermaster, an enlisted man, after the crew had mutinied and placed the captain in irons. Suspecting that the captain had intended turning over the vessel and crew to the Germans, the quartermaster had thus boldly acted and saved the collier for the cause of democracy. The letter

One theory to explain the mysterious sinking of the Cyclops is advanced by a Navy man, who says he believes she literally broke in two and sank almost immediately, carrying down any lifeboats that may have got away

was published, and many relatives of the lost crew probably believe it until the navy was forced to inform them otherwise.

Another of these cruel false clues came in the form of a telegram to the mother of a young South Carolina fireman, who was a member of the Cyclops' crew. The message, dated New York, said that her son was safe in this country again and that the missing vessel was being held in a German port. Naturally, the navy investigated the telegram, although it was palpably a hoax.

But time has proved the absurdity of connecting the Germans with the fate of the Cyclops. We know now that there were no enemy submarines so far over on this side of the Atlantic and, besides, the Germans have failed to claim credit for the lost vessel. As they have been extremely candid in telling us what happened to a large number of other ships which they destroyed in ways that would never have been understood had they not chosen to explain them, the navy has long since exonerated them from any blame for the Cyclops.

In fact, it is very doubtful if the navy ever had any faith in the U-boat theory. It is much more probable that even as early as a few weeks after the disaster they strongly suspected that the Cyclops had come into conflict merely with natural laws and had gone down like a shot.

A BRIEF investigation conducted by Lieutenant James M. Hays, who was navigating officer of the navy collier Cyclops until a few days before she sailed, when, by a stroke of good fortune, he was transferred to her sister ship, the Orion, convinced him that the Cyclops was what he called "an engineering disaster." The ship was loaded, he pointed out, with nearly 15,000 tons of manganese ore. There were only two stationary cranes to load the ore on, and they were 300 feet apart. So 7500 tons of the ore were loaded forward in the collier and the other 7500 tons aft. "There is no mystery in my mind as to the fate of the Cyclops and her crew," Lieutenant Hays declared. "I believe that perhaps on a calm and sunny day, when the sailors off watch were dozing, or perhaps at midnight, when all were asleep except the men on watch, the great ship, without warning, parted amidships, splitting her aerials (she sent no wireless call) and sank from sight."

"I have often stood on the foremast of the Orion," explained the lieutenant, "looking aft, and watched her deck give in a calm sea. The cause of this is that the twin-screw colliers are so long that when both engines happen to thrust together the longitudinal strain is so great there is a give to the framing of the ship. Oftentimes during that vibration I have looked up at the bridge and watched the foremast bend like a carriage whip."

"It was this very thing that astonished the seamen in Rio. Even from a distance, they could see the Cyclops' deck give under the strain."

Very little attention, apparently, was paid to Lieutenant Hays' report at the time it was made. There was still too much interest in the submarine theory, the dreadful possibility that German U-boats might be cruising somewhere about the West Indies. But now it will probably be taken out of the department files and reread carefully. For, in the light of what recently happened to the Orion, the young officer appears to have been something of a prophet.

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Mysteries of the Sea

MORE than one thousand American Navy men have gone down to the sea in ships that have disappeared without leaving a trace. From the brig Reprisal, lost in September, 1777, down to the tug Conestoga, which dropped out of sight in the Pacific in 1921, there is a long list of ships on file in the Navy Department marked—missing! The Cyclops was unique only in that she was the first ship with a wireless equipment to make a silent exit.

Here is the Navy's list of vessels lost, together with the date of their disappearance:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Reprisal, 1777 | Hornet, 1829 |
| General Gates, 1777 | Sylph II, 1839 |
| Saratoga, 1781 | Sea Gull, 1839 |
| Insurgent, 1800 | Grampus, 1843 |
| Pickering, 1800 | Jefferson, 1850 |
| Hamilton, 1813 | Albany I, 1854 |
| Wasp III, 1814 | Levant II, 1860 |
| Epervier, 1815 | Tug Nina, 1910 |
| Lynx, 1821 | Cyclops, 1918 |
| Wildcat, 1829 | Conestoga, 1921 |

It is curious to note that between the period of the Civil War and of the World War, the Navy lost no boats whose disappearance could not be explained. No reason is advanced, however, for this mystery-free period. The sea is never reasonable.