

FROM HONDU HEAD TO VERA CRUZ

Peace-time Disaster in the American Navy Owes Seven Million Dollar Saving and the Preservation of Many Lives to the Efficacy of the Pocket Flashlight

By G. K. SPENCER, U. S. N. R. F.

SOME seven million dollars' worth of American naval property preserved from destruction and a goodly number of precious lives saved!

Such is the record of three years of use in the Navy of the pocket flashlight—the "hand torch," as the bluejackets call it.

Naval ships and lives have been lost in that period, but never for want of a flashlight. Every nighttime naval situation afloat, when peril of ship and life threatened, has been dominated by the Yankee seaman's "hand torch." So was it at Hondu Head when seven destroyers were tipped from the Navy lists and so was it off Vera Cruz when the old Tacoma gave up her life in the blast of a hurricane.

Perhaps the actual and total saving to the government effected by the use of flashlights in the naval service may be impossible to compute, but estimates from that day in February, 1922, when the Destroyer Woolsey was rammed and sunk off the Mexican coast will tell.

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Naval Heraldism

And always in the moments of extreme peril the best traditions of the American Navy have been upheld to a manner which makes a narrative of gripping interest.

It was a faint moonlight night when a merchantman lumbered into the northward path of the Pacific Fleet on the 2,500 mile run from Balboa to the Hawaiian Islands. The ship went dark as all guns failed and the steam lines filled with salt water.

Mustered by flashlight

Suddenly appeared on all sides officers, boatswain's mates and rowdies with flashlights. The crew followed the light, mustered, launched the boats and proceeded to fill them. As the first boats cut away from the doomed ship, the vessels of the destroyer force were arriving to receive the survivors.

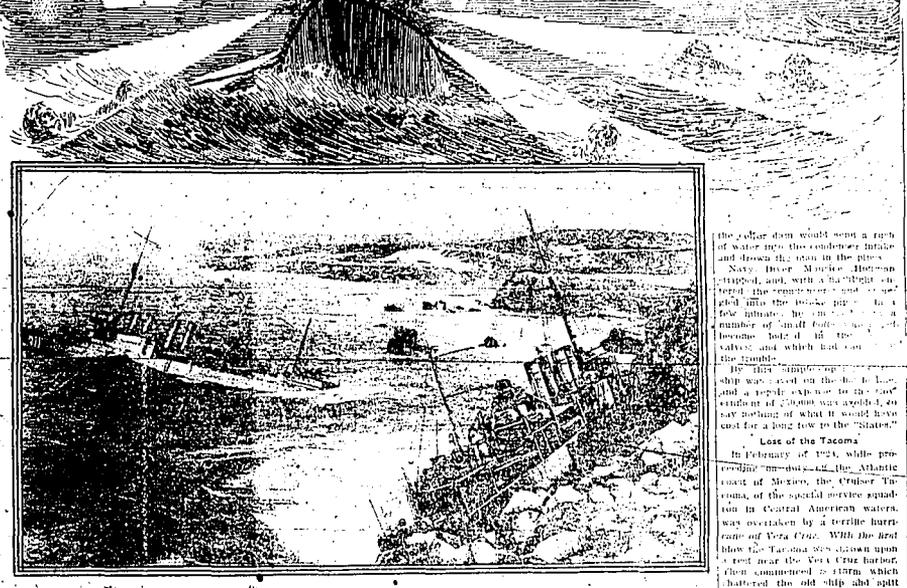
Quartermasters began signaling from the stinking ship's decks with their hand torches in the conventional naval code. The intricate rescue work was then conducted by instructions given by the Woolsey's quartermasters with their flashlights. Several men were mangled on board, dead at their posts or in their bunks, to go down with the ship when the Woolsey parted her tow line from the Destroyer Jacob Jones and dove to the bottom.

Quartermasters on both ships, even before the topmast lights could be switched on, swung their flashlights over the water and pressed the switches. Each navigating bridge saw the other's light, and by a "hand torch" the destroyers showed warning saving to the Navy of \$3,000,000, by means of the "hand torches."

Master Save Plims's Crew

One of the notable instances of the salvage of life and Government property occurred in the victory number of 1921. After a brilliant night run down the coast of California, the destroyer force was signalled from a sleeping plane the Destroyer Blodgett secured the coast line, split the "hand torch" showed the location of the sleeping plane.

Flashlights were used by the command on the plane, the three planes with their "hand torches" showed the location of the sleeping plane. The crew of the three destroyers saw the sleeping plane and its ability to right of itself. The crew of the three destroyers saw the sleeping plane and its ability to right of itself. The crew of the three destroyers saw the sleeping plane and its ability to right of itself.



U. S. S. P. LEE AND U. S. S. WOODBURY ON THE ROCKS AT HONDU HEAD

what a or vicinity the officer believed, he was in.

The Fatal Turn

Consequently, the report was made to Captain Watson that a turn must now be made in order to clear the point of Arguello in order to have a clear course into Santa Barbara Channel. Then came the fatal order—order which cost twenty-three naval men their deaths and struck seven iron ships from the lists of the Navy.



men had not even stopped for clothing, they had their flashlights. Each vessel that a flash light meant a life or more.

End of the Delirium

The Delphy, meanwhile, in the center of the formation, leading the center column (the Young was leading the port column), went on a few feet and also struck, immediately her lights were extinguished, as her generators were flooded, and the ship tilted. Within the space of fifteen seconds a number of flashlights which the crew always kept at hand were speaking the night.

To the Chaucery and Fuller, following close behind in the formation, it seemed as though the Delphy and Young were leaping back toward them, so rapidly were the vessels traveling toward the rocks. The flashlights' nervous glow on the two doomed ships formed the following ships and engines were removed, somewhat reducing the stacks of the succeeding craft, and thus materially contributing to the saving of lives on the succeeding ships. Indeed, had it not been for the flashlights on the Young and Delphy, the other ships certainly would have plunged directly into the wrecks, killing the men who were struggling to obtain safety on their falling destroyers.

With the thought that they were the only survivors, the crew were off from each side were found willing to take a line and attempt to rescue themselves. With the aid of "hand torches," those who were off and men jumped in their attempts to carry them.

My first glimpse on a striking" said Lieutenant Commander Hunter, "was that six men on the rocks near San Miguel on the island itself. Signals were sent out by yard-arm blinkers to the effect that the Delphy was around, and "hand torches" were also used to send the message. It was impossible to use the signal searchlights as they had broken in the crash."

Crews Reach Shore

The Chaucery, seeing his vessel was doomed, gave orders to "abandon ship," and the men made their way to the rocks and thus across them to discover that they were able to reach a beach—although within they were no man knew.

And then came dawn, the bleak day of a stormy day, and the realization that instead of being on a small atoll in the Pacific they were at the mainland, victims of the cruel fate of Hondu Head.

Case of the Henshaw

During the spring annulars of 1921, off the Veria Islands, the Destroyer Henshaw developed severe condenser trouble, salt water,

the yellow foam would seem a part of the sea, the condenser failed and down the ocean in the gulf.

Navy Doctor Maurice Hoffman stepped ashore, with a flashlight on his hip, and a "hand torch" in his hand, and searched into the black pit in a few minutes, but he found no man. He returned to the ship, and became bold in the darkness, and which had not been seen.

Loss of the Tacoma

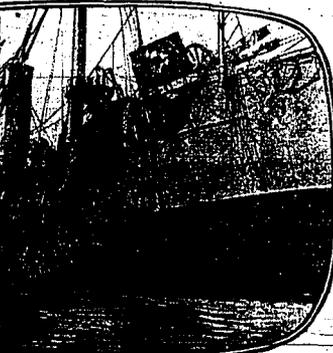
In February of 1923, while proceeding on duty off the Atlantic coast of Mexico, the Cruiser Tacoma, of the special reserve squadron in Central American waters, was overtaken by a terrible hurricane off Vera Cruz. With the first blow the Tacoma was driven upon a reef near the Vera Cruz harbor. She commenced to list, which brought the old ship and water in every timber, but beneath her hull, wooden blocks supported her keel.

Scene of Horror

Below decks, indescribable scenes of horror prevailed. Men were tossed about like so many sacks. A few of the crew, courageous enough to control their actions, by a superhuman effort of will were able to cling to the upper parts of the deck, which were on a list, and with their flashlights were able to watch for shipmates who slipped down into that part of the deck which were blown away. As men fell, the beams of the flashlight guided others to pull them forth.

Dravery of Ensign Smith

The latest incident of the flashlight's use in naval tragedy came on June 12, 1924, when Lieutenant Junior Grade Ensign Smith, U. S. N., was killed during a gannery practice.



THE UNITED STATES SPECIAL SERVICE SHIP TACOMA, WRECKED OFF MEXICAN COAST.

graphic account of the conduct of the officers, and men of Hondu Head failed to enlighten the darkness which swathe the cause behind the disaster, which had the Pacific Destroyer Squadron many miles off its course that fatal night.

Whatever the cause may have been, the Destroyer doctrine is that a squadron present the leader. The senior officer present and his staff. The leader of Squadron No. 31 that night was the Delphy. Lieutenant Commander Young, the senior officer, was on the Delphy. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron.

The officer on the bridge of the Delphy sprang to the top of the mast, and the Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron.

Each act in this drama was as if the Delphy were the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron. The Delphy was the leader of the squadron.



WRECKS AT HONDU HEAD. SHIP COMPLETELY SUBMERGED IN U. S. S. YOUNG, WHICH LOST NINETEEN MEN

ing over; was prostrating her red bottom to the slowly dying glow of the Chaucery's searchlight. As the Chaucery's crew believed at first, she was a buoy of some sort, but the doctor was finally put out of action on the south shore of the island of Oahu. Fifteen hundred miles from his nearest drydock, the doctor was finally put out of action on the south shore of the island of Oahu. Fifteen hundred miles from his nearest drydock, the doctor was finally put out of action on the south shore of the island of Oahu.

Rescue by Flashlight

Meanwhile, on the other side of the pile of rocks, the Woodbury, U. S. S. Lee and Nichols had also crashed on the rocks, several hundred feet from the beach.

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