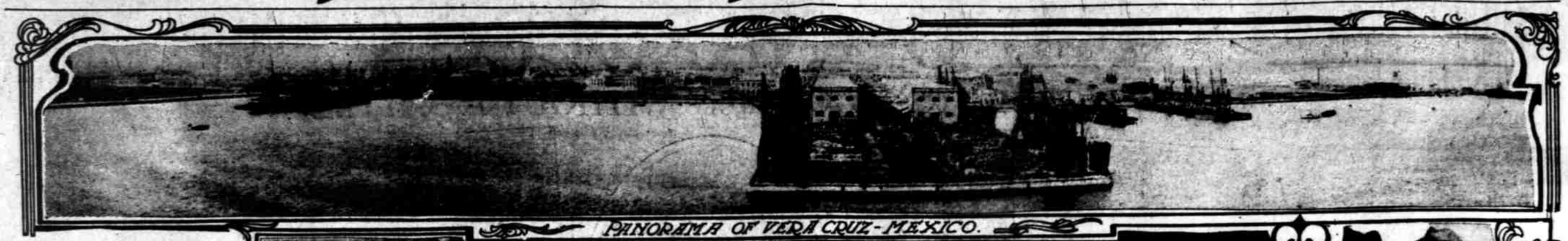
Life on Greyhound on Way to Front Told by J. P. Annin



PANORAMA OF VERA CRUZ-MEXICO.

ORDER TO FRONT SHATTERED HOPE OF MANY WIVES

Officers and Jackies on the Michigan Were Slated for Home Visits.

WERE IN MEXICO TWICE

Joy of Near Action and Pain of Adieu Mark Third Departure.

SUPERIORS "BOOST" RECRUITS

Show Desire to Advance Them—"Fifteen-straight" Cigars Cost Only 7 Cents Aboard.

By JOSEPH P. ANNIN,

Staff Correspondent of The Washington Herald.

On Board U. S. S. Michigan, Wednesday, April 15.—Twenty hours and sixteen minutes after orders to coal and clear for Tampico, twenty hours of sleepless, nerve-racking, straining activity, the staccato notes of the bridge ring out, "officers quarters," then "assembly;" a score or more of wives and sweethearts are pushed into the driving rain across the gangplank, and the U. S. S. Michigan, our first Dreadnought and a "crack" ship in her fifth year of commission, is ready for sea again.

While a tearful, waving group gathers on the deck of the battleship Idaho undergoing repairs across the dock, for a last sight of the ship which bears husbands, brothers, sweethearts southward, orders to "let go that line" came from officers in glistening black oilskins, and to the shrill whistles of navy tugs, 16,000 tons of gray destruction slide along the Philadelphia dock, ripping out five great eighteen-inch "bumpers" like so many toothpicks.

From Capt. Niblack to the rawest of 173 recruits from the naval training station at Chicago, every manjack aboard is on the quive vive. Rumor after rumor, all of sensational import, many bearing the stamp of authority, and all eagerly assimilated and passed along, tell of the fine hand of a first-class power in the present movement. Japan is in every one's mind. "Japan is backing Huerta," says report. We know it as a rumor naturally to be looked for at this time. We know it does not very well stand the acid test of logic. Nevertheless, we store it away for future reference, and steam on. But for the possibility that some real action may result from this movement the ships would be carrying a sorely tried and thoroughly disgusted complement of officers and men.

Home Only Forty Days.

Since July 1, 1913, the Michigan has been in the United States less than forty days. In that time she has twice been to Mexico. But recently she returned from a six months' stay at Vera Cruz, where the men were confined exclusively to the ship. She had laid up at the Philadelphia Navy Yard only ten days, having returned from "target practice." Except for the hope of action, Mexico is one of the last places in the world the men want to see, Tampico quite the last.

I didn't know this when I boarded ship and ducked below the cluttered decks to the junior officers' messroom a few hours before sailing. Four couples were there, finishing their luncheon as I sat down. "Well," I said, happily, following introductions all around by Ensign E. F. Enright, "I suppose you gentlemen are glad to get away."

It seemed the natural thing to say. It was my first faux pas on board. Three young naval wives and one who expects to be answered in unison, "They had better, not be glad!" Four future admirals promptly supplemented, "We are not."

Three young wives had come from far-off parts of the United States in anticipation of a long deferred visit with three young husbands. The latter had been on shore less than ten days when they were again ordered to Mexico.

"Married ten months and I have seen my husband less than forty days," summed up one young naval wife resentfully.

Many Disappointments.

I apologized, commiserated, said mean things about every one I could possibly blame, and climbed to the comparatively cheerful atmosphere of the rain-swept deck. Later I heard the same hard luck stories from wardroom and general mess. First Class Gunner's Mate Leonard was to have been married tomorrow. Commander Althouse, our executive officer, had packed to leave ship to commence his long-deferred shore duty. Junior Lieut. James Garfield Stevens was watching the progress of a dangerously sick wife in Norfolk when recalled. And there were others.

But don't let these men be put down as complaining. They weren't. These are the cold facts, and if they do not regard this cruise as a pleasure junket, these are the reasons: Not one would have avoided the trip if he could, for the simple reason that deep down in their hearts they hope and believe some real fighting will come of it.

Our steaming plans call for the most economical speed—twelve to thirteen knots an hour. This means we will not hurry particularly unless orders are changed.

Get to Work Again.

Hardly had we cast off when the men, most of whom had been working continuously for twenty hours, set to work removing the first layer of coal dust and mud, the latter of which had settled into every part of the ship. Just before dark the captain decided to anchor for the night because of thick weather. Watches were set, lamps lighted, and the Michigan rolled gently with the ground swell.

At our first dinner in the wardroom, where all officers except the captain and the junior ensigns, the latest recruits from Annapolis, mess, the talk turned on our cruise. Conclusions were almost as varied as they were numerous. Belief was general, however, that something beyond Huerta's refusal to salute the American flag is behind this quick rush of our sea fighters to the Gulf.

Naval officers, however, feeling they may talk among themselves, do not discuss questions involving their superior officers for publication. The views of these officers, interesting though they were, cannot be recorded here.

Landing Force Ready.

On Board U. S. S. Michigan, April 17.—When the Michigan reaches Tampico—in fact long before—her crew will be trained and ready to perform any drastic service required.

She will stand ready to throw on to the breach at La Barra, the landing at the mouth of the Panuco River, which runs past Tampico and empties into the sea six miles down, some 300 perfectly armed, equipped and trained blue jackets and marines, officered by Annapolis graduates, supported by field guns, supply squad, hospital corps and even a field wireless apparatus.

The officers will have worked out exactly the part that any integral unit of a landing force would have to play, and they will have their men trained to play that part. In addition, having been with few exceptions, at Tampico and Vera Cruz before, the officers know just about what form the attack will take and they are prepared to play their part in the action.

Tampico lies six miles inland on a muddy, sluggish river which beclouds the blue waters of the Atlantic at La Barra. The river cuts out a sandy promontory. A small railroad runs up from La Barra to Tampico. Between La Barra and Tampico, on both sides of the Panuco River, are huge oil wells, some of which have been burning for some time, others of which might be used by the enemy to retard the progress of a landing party.

Oil Tanks a Menace.

Large vessels like the Michigan cannot get within three miles of the shore. Gunboats and dispatch boats may run up the river around Tampico if they desire. One possibility, in case the taking of Tampico should be ordered and the Mexicans should decide to put up some form of resistance, is that these oil wells may be lighted, the contents of the mammoth tanks ignited and run down the river and over the promontory, thereby destroying millions of dollars' worth of foreign property and at the same time offering serious resistance to our forces.

When we left Philadelphia yesterday we had on board, in addition to nearly a full complement of men, 175 blood-raw recruits from the naval training station at Chicago. Not only are they new to a ship, but the allotted time for their training had been cut almost in half in order to get them to the fleet for this cruise. They are being taken to fill up vacancies on this and other vessels. They are a fine-looking, hard-working bunch. Officers say it is the best-looking aggregation of recruits they have seen.

In fact, I have never before seen in a collection of 900 men doing work similar to that performed by the "jackie" and his officer, so clean cut, healthy, intelligent, and promising an ensemble as these men present. And not least to be praised is this new bunch of 175 upstanding youngsters from the Middle West.

A "Loose" Ship.

The Michigan is known as a "loose" ship in the navy. Her men say she is the "loosest." Far from being a term of reproach, this is a distinct tribute to the esprit de corps on board. It means that in the excellent understanding between officers and men, the mutual interest in each other and in their ship, and the high standard of efficiency the Michigan ranks highest.

In company with two other newspaper men, I am a member of the wardroom mess, comprising all commissioned officers on the ship, except the captain and the eight junior ensigns. I have listened numerous times while at table to discussions between officers as to the merits of certain men, discussions which show an intimate study by the officers of the men in their divisions and a deep-set desire to advance them as quickly as possible. I have heard officers championing their men before their brother officers until the discussion became uncomfortably acrid. The effect of this interest is best demonstrated by the shore leave record of the Michigan in the past year. During nearly seven months, while the Michigan was anchored off Vera Cruz, not an enlisted man was permitted shore liberty. This means that more than 700 men were cooped up on a ship less than 500 feet long for seven months, with a break of one week at Galveston. Given shore leave at Galveston, all except three men reported for duty on time. When the ship came North again, ten days were spent at the New York Navy Yard. The men were given five days' liberty each. All except one returned to the ship. Notified of the orders back to Mexico, with the prospect of another six months' confinement, all except five men reported before sailing time.

This is regarded by navy men as a record. Of all the men I have talked with here, not one but has, in one way or another, expressed his loyalty to his ship and officers.

To me one of the many calls for admiration came from the condition of the ship. We pulled out of Philadelphia a mussy, grimy, gritty floating fort. Coal dust and just plain mud ground beneath our feet on the decks and below. Brass work was black, iron work discolored. We had all the marks of a ship which had coaled and stored in record time. Before dark set in today every square inch of this vast ship had been gone over. The decks had been holystoned and scrubbed until they resembled the kitchen floor of an ideal housekeeper. Inside the decks had been scrubbed and then coated with red shellac. Every piece of brass work had been polished; all iron work washed, even the hand-spars had been scrubbed with sand until they shone. The transformation was marvelous and the job is complete.

And in this I am given my first demonstration of the fine spirit which prevails in the remarkable zest with which these men, after working under a heart-breaking strain for twenty-four hours, jumped into harness for the unpleasant task of cleaning ship on a few hours' sleep. For after knocking off at 6 o'clock last night they were turned out again at 4 this morning to get under way.

Ship Rolls Heavily.

We dropped the pilot at 9:30 this morning and struck out boldly at our most economical speed, a shade under thirteen knots.

The Michigan is not an easy sailing ship. Because of the tonnage exaction made in authorizing her construction her superstructure is piled high in the center making her top-heavy and a heavy roller. This does not decrease her steaming or engineering efficiency, but in a ground swell or a beam sea is liable to make poor sailors decidedly uncomfortable. A number of the men, especially among the Chicago recruits, are suffering from sea sickness and carrying around that peculiarly unhappy expression common to seasick passengers. There are two other newspaper men and a photographer on board. We have kept much in the air and so far have felt nothing but a threatening disquietude amidships.

The Low Cost of Living.

Friday, April 18.—Some of Uncle Sam's political economists might probably take lessons from the navy in reducing the high cost of living. If some of them could do their shopping aboard ship they probably would be as much surprised as I was when I started in to patch up my hastily gathered wardrobe and toilet kit.

There are two stores aboard—the canteen and the "small stores." The canteen is a sort of a notion store, stocked largely with small comforts and necessities for men and officers—cigars, smoking and chewing tobaccos, candy—at what seems a ridiculously low cost.

The canteen is one of the greatest sources of contentment to the men, particularly when confined on ship for long periods. It carries a stock valued at approximately $6,000. This capital is furnished by the government without interest. The ship paymaster does all the buying and, as much of the material is purchased for all ships in mammoth lots, the unit of cost is materially reduced. Uncle Sam pays all the overhead charges and takes all the risk. All he asks in return is the original capital. Profits, limited to 12 per cent go into the ship's entertainment fund.

Before we left Philadelphia we took aboard for the canteen 4,000 pounds of candy—chocolate in cake, chocolate almonds, bon-bons, etc., all made according to specifications by one of the best candy manufacturers in the United States, and all sold at from 10 to 25 per cent under regular retail prices.

Cigars Cheap.

Paymaster H. D. Lamar took us on a special tour of inspection. I asked him what the canteen had in the way of cigars. Well, we have a cheap cigar which we sell for 6 cents," he said, naming my favorite brand, and which I cannot afford to indulge in except on especial occasions. It is a "15-cent-straight" cigar. One of the best known "25-cent-straight" brands can be purchased for 10 cents, while a "three-for-50" cigar costs 7 cents.

These low prices on cigars are possible because the cigars are purchased at Havana and escape customs duty. Because of this there is a strict requirement that they must not only be bought on board ship, but must be consumed on the ship. This requirement was a sad blow to me. There were 50,000 cigars for the men alone.

Other materials in the canteen included 7,000 packages of cakes and cookies, 5,000 bars of soap, 100 gross of cigarette tobacco (cigarettes and chewing gum are strictly prohibited as unmanly), 100 gross of pipe tobacco in tins, 800 pounds of engrossed ship stationery ridiculously cheap, playing cards, safety razors—virtually everything a man could wish along the lines indicated. The sales, Paymaster Lamar told me, average $3,200 a month in the canteen alone.

The small-stores room contains all articles of clothing required by the men. I replenished my wardrobe there. I paid 41 cents a suit for underwear I couldn't duplicate in the States for twice that amount. Socks I was able to purchase for 8 cents a pair. For $2.85 I could have bought a pair of shoes worth in the States about $4.50 or $5.

Drills Started.

All are on the qui vive aboard now. Drills have started. The men are divided up into four companies of bluejackets in addition to one company of marines. Each bluejacket company will contain fifty-four men and three officers. The marine company will comprise fifty-seven men and one officer. Three bluejackets companies will land for skirmish work. One company under Junior Lieut. Thomas will have four machine guns, and one three-inch field gun. The marine company, Capt. Creecy commanding, will have one machine gun.

The men display the greatest enthusiasm in their preparations, even in such humdrum work as packing knapsacks, counting items and other similar work. The hospital steward has prepared already the list of supplies to be sent with the hospital company.

The men will go over the side in light marching order. They will carry only rifles, bayonets, canteens and ammunition. Knapsacks will be left behind, to be sent under special guard to whatever point the men spend their first night. Knapsacks will contain only two days' provisions, as the bluejackets and marines will at all times be within easy striking distance of the ships.

Dove on Board.

Saturday, April 19.—After a day of suspense, owing to the uncertainty surrounding the Mexican situation in Washington, officers and men this morning received news of Huerta's demand for a simultaneous salute and President Wilson's prompt rejection of the proposal. Thursday an unlisted passenger was discovered aboard ship in the form of a stray gray dove, closely resembling a turtle dove. The men promptly dubbed it the personal representative of Secretary Bryan, and as promptly declared it a bird of ill omen for the belligerently disposed.

When news of the apparent settlement of the difficulty was plucked out of the air by the radio operator, Bryan's dove was blamed. This morning, with the clouds of war again low in the heavens, the dove was not to be found.

We have left the greenish waters of the north, and in the warm Gulf Stream are surrounded for miles, as far as the eye can reach, by a restlessly tossing surface of dark blue, the color of Egyptian turquoise. The men have doffed their heavy blue uniforms, the bluejackets for "whites," while the marines are wearing khaki. Officers still stick to their "blues," but not with comfort.

Tonight we had a band concert and moving picture show on the quarter deck from 7:30 until 9 o'clock. The wardroom officers gathered on the promenade deck, one level higher than the quarter deck, and the junior officers, warrant and chief petty officers occupied chairs under the big 12-inch guns. The men filled all available space on the quarter deck, 12-inch turrets, boat decks, and draped themselves in the iron network of the stern mast. The fun was almost hilarious, and the comments of the men as the pictorial stories unfolded were as amusing as they were original.

"Education" Unpopular.

One of the principal topics of discussion abroad is the new order of Secretary Daniels requiring one hour and a quarter instruction for enlisted men daily. The order is intensely unpopular among the men. The officers are not enthusiastic about it. The ridiculous situations it creates give the men their only relief and the officers their laughs—after school. I attended several sessions or parts of sessions, for I was welcome only so long as I could keep my face straight.

Picture a class of tars, some beardless youths, some gray and scared with time, drooping, gathered around mess tables and listening to an analysis of the psychology of patriotism by a boyish-looking ensign. I was watching such a scene today between decks. It was uncomfortably warm. I noticed a gray mustached Irishman nodding drowsily at the board. The officer noticed him at the same time.

"Doyle," he said, turning on him suddenly, "Why should a soldier or sailor die for his country?"

Pat, taken unawares, came back gamely:

"Shure, an' why should he?"

The inquiry was not pursued.

Class in arithmetic:

"Johnson, if a rabbit being chased takes eighty twelve-inch jumps a minute and a dog pursuing takes forty thirty-inch jumps, how long will it take for the dog to catch the rabbit? Figure that out and I'll get the answer from you a little later."

The officer a little later:

"Have you that answer, Johnson?"

Johnson, awaking from a comfortable doze:

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"The dog got tired."

Here is a sample of composition. The subject is "Buffalo:"

"Buffalo is the only town I like, and it ain't no good."

Enlisted men's schools, as far as surface conditions indicate, are helping neither the men nor the esprit de corps of the navy. Men are required to study subjects in which they have not the least interest, which will not of themselves aid the men to promotion, and which discourage the courses of instruction in useful lines that always have been open to the enlisted men and in which the officers took a real interest.

Orders Are Changed.

Vera Cruz is now less than two hours off. In half an hour our 300 men, clad in home-dyed ducks, will be lined up on deck for a last inspection and held at rest until the ship drops anchor. Hell—immune fiends, working in a temperature varying from 120 to 160 degrees, have shot the Michigan ahead of her schedule nearly eight hours in the last twenty-four. The spectacular work may yet be ahead, but the officers and men in the engine room, feeding coal to twelve great boilers, and keeping a sustained speed of nearly eighteen knots for twenty-four hours, have done a work which their officers will not forget. Chief Engineer Blakeley may well be proud of his staff, as the ship is proud of her chief engineer, one of the youngest officers ever given a detail of such responsibility.

No one got more than a brief nap last night. All worked late and arose early. Under the tension, mind and body refused to rest.

Things moved rapidly yesterday. Monday night at a dinner to newspaper men in his cabin Capt. Niblack informed us that all of Badger's fleet had been ordered to Vera Cruz. We were then pointing for Tampico. Yesterday morning orders came from Badger to refuse all press radiograms. A little later the Navy Department approved a proposal of Surg. J. A. Murphy, of our ship, that one suit of "whites" for each bluejacket and officer be dyed brown with a chemical preparation which Dr. Murphy had worked out to make the landing forces less conspicuous. A few minutes later out of the air Ensign Enright, the radio officer, and Chief Operator Cronin picked the information that Admiral Fletcher had been ordered to take the custom-house and vicinity at Vera Cruz.

Speed Increased.

Immediately Capt. Niblack passed the word for fifteen knots, two better than we had been steaming. Four more boilers were fired, and the engine room force, under Chief Blakely and Ensign Jeans, shoved her up to sixteen knots in their enthusiasm. After a few hours of nerve-straining, last-minute preparation, came the news of the taking of Vera Cruz, four dead, twenty wounded. Orders came to make all speed, and under a 2½-inch

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ENSIGN HAGGARD AND COMPANY OF MICHIGAN JACKIES DRILLING

MICHIGAN MARINES WHO HAVE BEEN UNDER FIRE.

TYPICAL MEXICAN PEONS VERA CRUZ

COMMANDER ALTHOUSE AND WARRANT OFFICERS, MICHIGAN.

HUERTISTAS

GRUESOME SCENE IN VERA CRUZ

JACKIES DRILLING WITH RIFLES AND COLT AUTOMATICS EN ROUTE

BADGER'S SHIP STEAMING INTO VERA CRUZ

FORT ALEZA DEL ULUA VERA CRUZ.