

1917 - by EDWIN BALMER

Herewith is presented the ninth installment of a fiction serial dealing with what might happen should European powers, after they had settled their own differences, wage war upon the United States. The author, one of the best fiction writers in the country, has based his story upon a thorough understanding of military, naval, and internal conditions in the United States and upon a sound knowledge of military and economic history. The story will cause you to realize the critical situation in which this country and you, your neighbors, and your family are placed by the let-well-enough-alone attitude of the pacifists.

SYNOPSIS.

In Elgin, Ill., live the Ashby family, consisting of Nathan Ashby, owner of the Ashby Brass company, and his wife, a daughter, Nellie, married to Bob Wendell, a navy lieutenant; and Jim Ashby, a son, engaged to Agnes Ware. Nathan Ashby is the archtype of pacifist, deaf to the warnings of impending danger to America. Almost out of a clear sky news is received that the U. S. scout cruiser, Salem, proceeding against orders, in the North Atlantic has encountered the fleet of the former European enemies and has been sunk, a deliberate act of war. Bob is recalled to Newport News. Spies are discovered in the Ashby works, and evidence of a league of spies that swarm the country and are even enlisted in the army is held by Jim Ashby, who for a time is held prisoner in one of the spies' rendezvous in a fashionable residence in Chicago. Jim after his adventure returns to Elgin. War is on and Jim has signified his intention to enlist. Bob arrives in Newport News to find that the battle preliminaries are already being fought. A message is handed him telling him he is to report at once aboard the Arizona.

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THE three from the train followed the boy down to the boat and preceded him on board. The ensign—his name was Wayne—steered the launch swiftly across the water toward Norfolk. All about the anti-aircraft guns were going incessantly. Wendell's pulses quickened with the nearness of the firing, but for a few moments he silently studied the silhouettes of the ships lying further down the river and in the roads.

The big, four funneled, two masted destroyer which had started the firing was the Cummings; the Cassin of the same class was just beyond; a little further off the larger and newer destroyers, Ayrlwin and Balch, both had brought their anti-aircraft guns into action; a couple of great cruisers—they had the two turrets, four funnels, and the cage foremast of the Montana class—spat a shell now and then, but, for the most part, they were silent. Sailors sprawled over their sides with paint pots and brushes daubing big splotches of gray over the lead colored paint; the superstructure and funnels of the cruisers the turrets and the barrels of the long guns, were already dappled so that the outline of the ships, even when close by, was vague and broken.

Beyond the cruisers, and sentinelled by a dozen small torpedo craft, lay three monster warships, each with a single gigantic funnel, two tall cage masts, and four huge turrets, two forward and two aft. They were mottled like the cruisers, gray and darker gray; at a distance of eight miles or ten—at which such ships should fight—the mottling must make doubtful their silhouettes, but at three or four miles Wendell knew them—three of the most powerful superdreadnaughts of the American first line of battle.

The blood burned in Wendell's face as he saw them, and he raised his prismatic glasses to his eyes. "Which is which?" he asked of Wayne.

"The Nevada is nearest," Wayne replied. "The Oklahoma lies next."

Wendell nodded; he had made out, through his glasses, the distinguishing lines of the two nearer monsters; their lower turrets, bow and stern, mounted three guns each; three of the huge fourteen inch rifles; the other turrets showed but two guns apiece—ten fourteen inch rifles on each vessel.

"The next is the Pennsylvania?" Wendell referred. All of its four turrets showed three guns each—twelve fourteen inch guns together.

"Yes, sir. She came in just this morning."

"Then the Arizona's at the navy yard?"

"Yes, sir; we're taking on ammunition."

"I see." Wendell looked an instant across the water to the estuary of the Elizabeth, where the city of Norfolk lay on the left; Portsmouth, with the navy yard, was on the right. He turned his glasses then back to the roads and the bay beyond. "What's out further?"

"Some of the mine layers; we've put out most of the mines at night, of course, but the regent's aircraft were here right after daylight and spotted most of them, so we're adding a few more now—mixing the dummies and the real ones."

Wendell nodded. Aloft in an aeroplane at Pensacola he had seen how distinctly the mines—hidden by water from lookouts on ships' decks—stood out to the pilot and observer far overhead. Every mine at the entrance of the bay might be spotted on such a sunny day, but the observers in the air could not tell the real mines from the dummies.

"So, our friend up there," Wendell searched the sky for the blue streak of the enemy aeroplane, "isn't our first visitor?"

"No, sir, I should say not!"

"Where have they been coming from?"

"Some say that they must be coming from a secret shore base—in a swamp somewhere or a backwater along the coast. They're all hydroaeroplanes, but they're more probably com-

ing from some 'mother' ship which is with their battle cruisers."

"Where are the battle cruisers?"

A flush stained Wayne's face as he answered, "Haven't you heard, sir? They've been raiding the coast all day. Two cruisers up above Boston, they say, shelled Salem and Newburyport; there's some more have been raising hell along Rhode, Island and Long Island and New Jersey. They're all battle cruisers of their Carthage class or armored cruisers of the Pera type—six or seven knots faster than anything we've got except our destroyers. Our ships at Boston and in New York have tried to drive them away, of course, but we've got to send out our first line ships to do that; their battle cruisers give us the laugh and keep just out of range of us, and—shoot hell out of the coast. Atlantic City was or fire this noon with two or three hundred dead, and the squadron down this way—which that plane comes from, probably—shelled Ocean City, in Maryland, this morning, and another ship killed twenty women and children at Virginia Beach."

Wendell gazed at the great dreadnaughts lying in the roads; he felt the flush which had flamed to the ensign's cheeks as he confessed the helplessness of the fleet against the regent's battle cruisers now burning in his own veins. The two tall cage masts of the Arizona, toward which he was bound, showed above the other shipping before Portsmouth, and the objective of the aeroplane, at which the anti-aircraft guns of the destroyers had been firing for twenty minutes, now had become clear. Twice, while the launch had been crossing the James, the enemy's plane had dashed over the city, but had turned in a long ellipse to swoop back again. On the third return now, the pilot appeared better pleased with his position; as he passed over Portsmouth something dropped, which glided in the sunlight, and where it fell flame and black smoke and flying debris billowed up. At the roar of the explosion the anti-aircraft guns redoubled their racket, but the aeroplane only "banked" and swung about, short, and dropped another bomb, which blew up a second black cloud of destruction.

"He's devilin' the Arizona, you see," Wendell handed his glass over to Ross, who was beside him, "or he's trying to get the navy yard arsenal."

The red warning flag—the signal for other craft to keep away while the battleship took aboard its powder, shells, and gun cotton—dut-

"The fellow that tried to chase one of the planes this morning got shot down for it."

"Killed?" Ross asked.

"He fell in the bay from 3,000 yards."

But the blue streak—the wings of the enemy's plane were again quite invisible—ignored both the American biplane and the shells breaking in the sky; it circled and flew for the navy yard once more.

Wayne brought the launch to the side of the Arizona as the blue aeroplane headed into the wind from the sea and maneuvered for position overhead. It was plain that the pilot was to drop bombs again, but Wendell, with Ross and Fulton just behind, climbed to the deck of the battleship, and now, as they were in sight of other officers and men, they did not even look up at the menace overhead.

The Arizona, as Wendell had observed as he approached, was cleared for action; everything movable which had been on the deck had disappeared—davits, boats, railing, stanchions, flagstuffs, and ventilators; a crew of painters at work forward were finishing the prescribed mottling of the ship. The officer of the deck was standing on the side toward the dock with another officer superintending the taking on of ammunition. The officer of the deck, glancing up at the aeroplane, shouted an order for the men to cease bringing powder. Wendell approached him, tensely; from directly overhead—as nearly overhead as the pilot of the plane could calculate—an aerial torpedo was descending upon his ship. Wendell knew this without looking up; Ross, who was beside him, knew it, as did Fulton, who followed. The officer of the deck, turning, saw the three junior lieutenants and cried to them to take cover; at the same instant a cry of alarm came from a seaman who was standing further forward, shouts from others on the docks gave warning, cut short in the middle by a shock and roar which battered and deafened. Bob Wendell, swaying and grabbing for support, caught the shoulder of some one; the gas from the explosion choked and stifled him; pain in his eyes blinded him for a moment; then he coughed the gas from his lungs and was able to look about.

A seaman lay on his face at Bob's feet; there was a horrid hole in his back; it needed no second glance to see that the man was dead. Further forward, three bodies were piled up at the barbette of No. 2 turret.

The officer of the deck—it was he against whom Bob had been thrown—saw the dead men, too, but he did not concern himself with them. He gave no greater concern at that moment to the officer who had been superintending the taking on of ammunition, who now lay unconscious. While Bob still clung to him the officer of the deck gazed overhead and saw that the aeroplane had gone on. He gave a curt order for resuming the work of taking on ammunition; then he spoke to Wendell. "All right, now."

Bob regained some steadiness, apologized, and reported himself.

"Go below," the officer of the deck direct-

munition and the work of painting the ship had ceased only for the few seconds before and following the explosion; the slaying of four men and the wounding of others had interrupted no one of the unharmed who had work to do.

Wendell, on his way to quarters where he could wash, passed through the wardroom. Everything which belonged there had been stowed away—electric fans, china, plate glass and looking glasses; bottle ports were closed. A junior lieutenant—"Garry" Starnes—who had been a classmate and a close friend at Annapolis, appeared and led Bob into his room. From that room, too, all breakables had been removed. Bob was used to the bareness of the rooms as a preliminary to the firing of the big guns in battle practice, but the bareness affected him differently now.

In addition to absolutely essential articles, there was nothing in "Garry's" room but two photographs in leather frames fastened above the desk. Bob gazed at one of the photographs; it was of a smiling, direct eyed, likable looking girl of 16 or 17. The picture was rather faded; it was seven or eight years old. Bob remembered it well. Garry had had it back in midshipman days; the girl was the one who came down to Annapolis, all flushed and excited, for Garry's graduation, and who had danced with him all but three of the numbers at the "hop." The other photograph was a picture of her, too—a photograph recently taken—showing how beautiful that laughing little girl had become, how happy Garry had made her, and photographed with her was a little boy of 4 (Starnes had married the year after he graduated; Bob was his best man), very like his mother and a good deal like Garry, too, and wearing proudly as a band for his straw sailor hat a ribbon, "U. S. A. Arizona."

Bob bent and gazed closely at the picture of the little boy, and, suddenly and quite unconsciously, his eyes blurred.

"That's a great kid," he said to Garry after a minute.

"He's all right," Garry winked and looked away. He was pleased that Bob had noticed the picture, but he did not want to talk about it. "You mighty near got it above, Bob."

Garry had not been close enough to suffer from the explosion, but he was badly shaken; he had had to make more of an adjustment, perhaps, than Wendell; for Bob, forty hours before, had seen a man destroyed and he had gone off and left the body beside the road because it was war. It was yet novel to Garry, though he had played the pretense in practice many

times, to go about his business after men on the ship had just been killed.

A mess man of the detail who brought on board the officers' baggage appeared at the door with Bob's bags. Garry received them and opened them on his bunk.

"You're rather a sight," Garry informed Bob. "You'd better make a complete change; if you haven't everything you want I guess my things'll fit you. And, by the way, you might as well bathe now. Every one's been ordered to."

Wendell looked about quickly. The order for every one to bathe and put on clean clothes was the preliminary of battle, a precaution taken so that expected wounds would be as clean as might be. "You mean we're going out soon?"

"Looks like it."

Bob went to the shower bath; when he returned Garry was gone, but the next moment rejoined Wendell in the room.

"How's Varney?" asked Bob.

"Pretty much hurt about the head, but he's conscious and the doc thinks he'll pull through, but he'll not fight his turret in this scrap. They're taking him ashore to the hospital. And two of the men that are got for good were gunners—one was Ferris of the Kansas, remember him? The best pointer on the ship."

Wendell realized that the sound of the anti-aircraft guns had ceased. It surprised him, when he thought of it, that he did not take trouble to find out what had happened to the machine and that Starnes did not concern himself about it, either. The fate of one aeroplane, which no longer was menacing, was too trivial among the events now upon them.

"What are you here?" Starnes questioned. "Watch and divisional officer, Bob?"

"That's what the orders said which I got on the train. I haven't seen the old man yet. You're still on fire control, Garry?"

"Yep."

"Foretop?"

"Right. I'm in charge there. And you've a turret?"

"No. 2, Wayne thought. He said on the way over he understood he's to be my junior." Garry shook his head. "Not any longer—not if they're carrying Varney ashore! I don't mean you won't have the turret; I mean you'll have it all to yourself, and Wayne'll have a turret, too—or Ross will have the turret and Wayne take a division of fives by himself."

Wendell glanced about quickly. It was not like Garry to find fault; he was notorious for eagerness to take on two men's work in an emergency, cheerfully, and as though he preferred it. His battle station, as he had just been told, was chief fire control officer in the tops; his business, when the alarm bells should boom

through the ship and the bugles should blow "General quarters," was to lead his "spotters" to the top of the foremast, and, through his telescope, watch for the splash of the Arizona's shells.

At ten or twelve miles distance the initial range could only be approximated, so Starnes, as fire control officer, would "spot" the splash of the great shells as they struck the sea about the enemy; his duty would be to estimate the distance of the splash beyond or short or to the right or to the left of the target; to telephone his estimate instantly to the chief fire control station far below the armor and the water, from which there would go to the guns the instructions for the correction of the sights so the next shots would be closer and the next might hit.

Garry was naturally adapted to this work and had been trained to extraordinary skill in it; there was no better man of any rank for this work in the fleet, so the fact of his being chief fire control officer in the foretop betrayed no weakness of personnel.

The fact of Wendell's appointment as second divisional officer without a junior would be different. His battle station, as he had said to Starnes, would be to command No. 2 turret—the great turrets, housing three fourteen inch guns, just forward of the bridge and the conning tower. A lieutenant of full rank, with a lieutenant of junior grade (like Wendell) or with an ensign as second in command, belonged at such a battle station. Wendell had realized, therefore, that his order to report for duty as watch and divisional officer was proof of lack of officers, but he was used to that fact. Often enough, in battle practice, he had been senior divisional officer in command of a turret. But if Varney's loss meant that he was to have no junior in the turret who had been trained at the big guns, the weakness in battle might be serious indeed.

"What's the department doing?" he challenged Starnes.

"Doing!" Garry burst forth with pent up rage. "Dragging every damned hulk out of reserve or out of the navy yard cemeteries and taking away good men from ships to man 'em to make a show—a rotten political parade of names of 'ships in commission' to bank the country with! They haven't recommissioned any of Farragut's sailing vessels yet, and so far they've left the Constitution alone, but half the Spanish war junks are going to sea again. Damn it, Bob, think of it! They took Duval—except for the old man and Mr. Stacey, the best officer of this ship—to resurrect the Iowa. Alward's ordered to apply the pulmotor to the Kentucky."

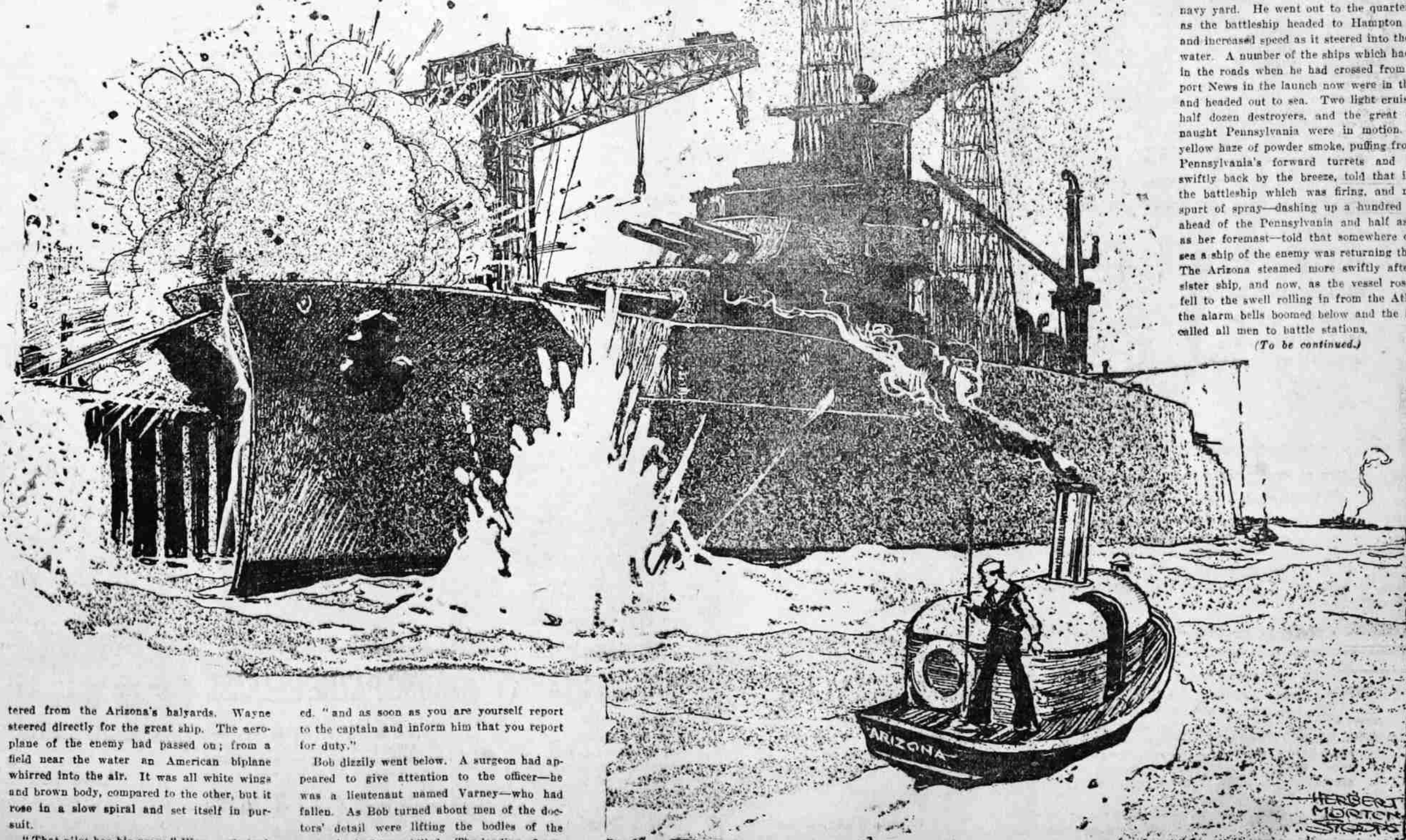
"They're sending officers—men, Bob—men that we need and the Oklahoma and the Pennsylvania and the Nevada need, to take out destroyers that haven't done twenty-five knots this century, and they're stripping us of ensigns and boatswains to command nine knot traps to lay mines—which every tramp captain ought to have been trained to do ten years ago—they're manning more rotten merchanters to drag for the mines which the regent's men are thoughtfully planting everywhere they get a chance and just setting adrift in other places, and—"

Garry cut short and jumped up and stood listening. Mmmmmmm! a deep, resounding reverberation rumbled over the water. Mmmmmmm! It vibrated again. Mmmmmmm! It was far away, very far away, but there was no question of what it was—one of the forts or a ship somewhere out in the bay firing its heavy guns.

Wendell, finishing dressing, hurried to the captain's room, where, formally reporting himself for duty, he was ordered to Mr. Stacey, the executive officer, for assignment to his division.

Cries and commotion came from about the ship, and as Bob turned from the executive officer to inspect No. 2 turret, which he was to command in action, the Arizona left the navy yard. He went out to the quarter deck as the battleship headed to Hampton roads and increased speed as it steered into the wide water. A number of the ships which had been in the roads when he had crossed from Newport News in the launch now were in the bay and headed out to sea. Two light cruisers, a half dozen destroyers, and the great dreadnaught Pennsylvania were in motion. The yellow haze of powder smoke, puffing from the Pennsylvania's forward turrets and blown swiftly back by the breeze, told that it was the battleship which was firing, and now a spurt of spray—dashing up a hundred yards ahead of the Pennsylvania and half as high as her foremast—told that somewhere out at sea a ship of the enemy was returning the fire. The Arizona steamed more swiftly after her sister ship, and now, as the vessel rose and fell to the swell rolling in from the Atlantic, the alarm bells boomed below and the bugles called all men to battle stations.

(To be continued.)



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