

THE MIRACLE OF MOBILE BAY

BY REARADMIRAL CASPER S. GOODRICH, U. S. NAVY.

This story is not fiction. It is an amazing account of an episode in connection with the naval battle in Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864, when the monitor *Tecumseh* was sunk in action. The names in the story, as told by Rear Admiral Goodrich, are real, and with the historic facts set forth are in the records of the great Civil war.

THE story was told to me by my friend and shipmate, Gardner Cottrell, who died many years ago in early manhood, a splendid, handsome officer, full of energy and animated by the loftiest professional ideals. Such men are hard to replace, but the memory of their gallantry and their patriotism remains to stimulate those who follow them.

At the time of his death Cottrell was an acting master in the navy, serving on board the new monitor *Tecumseh*, the most formidable vessel in the squadron which Farragut took into Mobile Bay that bright summer morning in 1864 to deal another of his crushing blows for the preservation of the Union.

Several years after the war had ended, Cottrell and I, with some of our messmates, had gathered on the hurricane deck of the good ship *Frolic* in Gibraltar harbor to smoke our after-dinner cigars and to enjoy the cool evening breeze that came softly through the historic straits, a few miles distant from our anchorage. The lights of the old walled town were beginning to appear. In the west the rays of the setting sun threw a soft veil of color over the Spanish hills back of Algeciras, over the tranquil waters of the great bay and over the Ape's Bells and the Moroccan mountains looming grandly above the African shore line. They came back to us reflected from the sails of scores of peaceful merchant vessels passing into and out of the Mediterranean in its only gateway for Spain, and yet an unperceived stimulus, and they brought out in glided relief the towering and impressive silhouette of the famous rock, Great Britain's only foothold on the continent of Europe. The time and the scene alike favored reminiscence. One word led to another, the chambers of memory were opened, and without realizing what he was doing Cottrell slipped into his narrative. As well as I can recall it after the lapse of four decades, this is what he said:

"I wonder if any of you can forget the sensations on the eve of battle. The day has been exactly like that preceding the Mobile fight; something in the air has brought it all back to me, and I have been living over again the experiences of that thrilling event. The extraordinary nature of one of its happenings I have never understood, for it borders on the miraculous. It was, of course, a coincidence pure and simple, and yet it remains fresh in my thoughts to this moment, marvelous and inscrutable as ever. What was it? Well, I'll tell you if you care to listen.

READY TO GO ON.
"As you all remember, Farragut had moved his vessels from the Mississippi river to the eastward in the summer of 1862 and had stationed them off Mobile bay. For weeks they swung to their anchors, maintaining a strict blockade of the port, now rolling slowly and steadily from side to side in the low ground swell of the gulf, now steaming ahead to keep from dragging when a northerly breeze blew from shore or a short lived southeaster threatened to set them adrift to pile up on the hostile beach. It was a dreary existence, enlivened only by the occasional advent of a mail boat from New York or Hampton Roads or the welcome visit of a supply steamer bringing fresh provisions to vary the monotony of salt beef, 'soup and bully' and hard-tack.

"There was little intercourse between the various ships, for it was war time and every one had to be ready for the

call which might come at any moment, and each ship's company learned, nevertheless, that the same unreal existed on all the vessels there, both large and small. Everywhere the question was whispered, 'what is the old man going to do and why doesn't he do it?' There is nothing so galling to the souls of fighting men as inaction, and we chafed under it, forgetting in our youthful impatience that Farragut's habit was not to advance until quite ready, under-estimated by criticism or by counsels of haste. We knew now the incomparable grasp of his mind, how he selected the exact moment to strike when wind and tide, fog or clear weather, sunlight or moonlight should be all on his side.

"The grand old man left nothing of chance which he could foresee and forestall. Then, too, he knew my ship, the *Tecumseh*, was to join his flag, and he preferred to postpone the action he had determined upon until reinforced by the



most powerful craft afloat in those days, the newest of our monitors. Yet even after our arrival he disappointed us in not pushing ahead at once when ever he intended to go, and so we in our turn, forced for a brief while to share the irksomeness of expectation, became even more pronounced grumblers than those whom we had found on the spot chafing under what they deemed needless delay. We had come with our magnificent ironclad—why wait any longer? Such was the burden of our talk as we walked the *Tecumseh's* deck, pausing now and then to scrutinize the entrance to Mobile Bay, strongly guarded by Forts Morgan and Gaines and by other works thrown up by the rebels to keep us out, for the conviction was borne in on us that Farragut would repeat his maneuver at New Orleans—get behind the batteries and from the security of the harbor within bring the enemy to terms.

"It was not long before this conviction was strengthened, as we heard rumors of an impending advance, too positive and definite, we thought, to be wholly without foundation. Orders gave fresh snap to our drills and exercises in preparation for the approaching conflict. At last the glad tidings were officially given out on August 4

"ALTHOUGH A GOOD SWIMMER I WAS NOT ABLE TO GET FAR ENOUGH AWAY, AND SOON FELT MYSELF PULLED UNDER THE SURFACE."

that on the following day the fleet would enter the harbor. Our joy knew no bounds. We would rush past the forts and make short work of the Confederate Admiral Buchanan and the vessels which he meant to set in opposition to our progress, we would 'sink, burn and destroy' as the old time war instructions used to run, unless they hauled down their flag in unconditional surrender. Such was the burden of our song as my messmates and I sat at the wardroom table that night and discussed for the hundredth time exactly what we would do to justify the confidence the admiral reposed in our good *Tecumseh*.

"Assurance rather than expectation was the prevailing sentiment; a reverse or even a disaster we dismissed as wholly out of the question. Lieutenant Kelly, our executive officer, suggested that no fight was ever until either lost or won and that there was always a possibility of the event proving widely different from the anticipation. 'It is not well for us,' he said, 'to blind our eyes to the fact that our enemy is brave and determined and that he will not flinch or give up until forced to do so. So we must do our very best, shoot quick and true, exactly as the prescribed order of battle and the rest of us did not challenge this plain statement of duty, even though regarding it as wholly superfluous in our case, and the talk veered around to the prescribed order of battle and how much comfort our neighbors astern of us in the line would derive from being near so grand a ship, for the *Tecumseh* was selected to lead the monitors close under the guns of Fort Morgan itself.

PREPARING FOR FIGHT.
"Has it ever occurred to any of you," asked Dr. Blank, "there may be torpedoes planted in the channel, and that the *Tecumseh* is no better, if she

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is not indeed rather worse, than a wooden vessel in the event of running upon one of them?"
"Oh, speak English!" we shouted.
"Now, our excellent surgeon was a pronounced pessimist, always looking on the dark side of things and imagining all sorts of mishaps, which fortunately had never yet materialized, so we scoffed at him and his baleful suggestion and told him that, thanks to our heavy armor, his job during the fight would be a sinecure, since no man would be so much as scratched.

"I hope so," he replied, 'but there's always a chance that something may go wrong. Ce n'est que l'impreu qui arrive toujours, you remember.'
"Don't get mad, doctor," we answered, 'but for goodness sake, cheer up! This is no time for gloom; it's what we've been looking forward to and praying for ever since we were ordered to this grand ship.'
"I'm not gloomy in the least, but I can't forget my early teaching that he who seeks to do battle with his enemy should first count the cost."
"I confess the menace of torpedoes had scarcely entered by mind as seriously, and even when mentioned on such an occasion, I gave it little weight. Anything happens to the *Tecumseh*! Nonsense! She was impregnable and practically invulnerable. At this moment the captain's orderly came into the wardroom and whispered something in the ear of the executive officer, who immediately called the mess to attention and announced that the store ship which was to remain outside during the engagement would receive special care for any papers or valuables their owners desired to send to her for safe keeping. Shortly afterward coffee was served, and then the other officers left the table to form little groups, each deeply occupied in speculation as to the exact hour of starting, the weight of the rebels' fire, the likelihood of our capturing his little fleet unharmed, the pleasure we should have in pitting the *Tecumseh* against his armored flagship, the *Pennesse*; the amount of prize money we would divide among us, the unreliability of our cannon primers, the proper length of fuse to put in our shells, etc., etc. You know what they said as well as if you had been there. It's the same talk always whenever similar conditions arise.

"It so happened that I was left alone at the table sipping my coffee while my thoughts reverted to the conversation during dinner. Of course, nothing could really hurt the *Tecumseh*, she was too stout and strong. Still, there would be no harm in sending on board the store ship a few papers, valued and some trinkets I should not care to lose. Why not? I could never regret doing so, no matter what the event. It might be, and it doubtless was, foolish—and yet—and again I asked myself, Why not?"
"Rising from my seat I went into my stateroom, selected the things I had in mind and put them in a tin document case which bore my name on the outside. They scarcely covered its bottom, so insignificant were my belongings, and they left in it a large empty space. Bringing it out into the wardroom I told my messmates that I for one had decided to leave some things in a place of safety until we either came out again or the store ship joined us inside.

"Well, you are a fine fellow to serve on board the *Tecumseh*," was their greeting. "Have you no pride in your ship? You ought to be ashamed of yourself," etc., etc.
"You're all wrong," I replied. "I am proud of my ship and I'm not ashamed of myself. I have here some papers I should not care to lose, that's all. I'm as sure as any of you that nothing will occur tomorrow to make

me regret having sent them out of the ship, but all the same, I'm going to send this box to the store ship, and if any of you would like to put into it letters or valuables of your own there's lots of room left and you're welcome to do so.

THE THREE MEN.

"My remarks were received with jeers from all but two officers. These remarked, after a few minutes, 'It's absurd, of course, and entirely unnecessary, but I think I'll accept Cottrell's offer.' With this they put some letters and other articles in my document case, on the inside of the lid of which I pasted a paper bearing our names: 'Acting Master Charles E. Langley, U. S. N.; Acting Master Gardner Cottrell, U. S. N.; Acting Ensign John P. Zettick, U. S. N.' and we sent the box to the store ship by the guard boat that same evening.

"You all know what happened; how we steamed bravely into the harbor, Alden leading the wooden ships in the Brooklyn, a smaller craft being lashed alongside of a larger, so that if one were disabled in the channel the other could take both out from under the heavy guns of Fort Morgan; how the *Tecumseh* took her position at the van of the monitors, the *Manhattan*, the *Winnebago* and the *Chickasaw*; how, when the Brooklyn stopped and reported, 'Torpedoes in the channel,' Farragut from his post aloft in the Hartford shouted down to Percival Drayton, her captain, 'Damn the torpedoes; go ahead!' How the Hartford replaced her at the head of the column; how it was the *Tecumseh* that fired the first gun at 13 minutes to 7 a.m.; how both sides fought like madmen, the gunners stripped to the waist and bathed in the sweat of that fierce struggle under a blazing August sun, and how our great admiral justified the expectations of his countrymen by winning another glorious victory.

"It's a great story, but I won't repeat it as most of you were there, too, although you know also that the battle was not won without serious loss; that, blown up by a torpedo 30 odd minutes after opening the engagement, our noble *Tecumseh* sank, an iron coffin engulfing nearly a hundred officers and men; that history records no more gallant act or more perfect courtesy than was displayed by our brave captain, Tunis A. M. Craven, who, as the ship was going down, held back at the foot of the ladder leading to safety, saying, 'After you, pilot.' Gus giving his life for another, since of the two only one could hope to escape the torrent of water now engulfing the doomed vessel.

"I was fortunate enough to be on the *British* deck, just under the turret, at my station in the powder division, when the shock came and the sea began to pour in. I shouted to the few men near me to climb up through the turret, and joining them all of us hurried to keep ahead of the water. We crawled through the 15-inch gun port and, among the last, I reached the deck as the ship gave a lurch and settled heavily. Flung to the side I jumped overboard and struck out as hard as I could, fearing to be sucked down with

the *Tecumseh*, which I realized was hopelessly lost. Although a good swimmer I was not able to get far enough away, and soon I felt myself pulled under the surface, as I had feared I would be. It seemed an eternity before I came to the top again. I was nearly exhausted, but I struggled to regain my breath and had barely succeeded when a heavy wave came along from I don't know where and swamped me entirely. I suppose I was born to be hanged, for once more I saw the light of day, filled my lungs with fresh air and managed to keep afloat by treading water. It seemed a long while, yet probably it was very short, before I was picked up by one of our own boats. Langley was in her and later I heard that Zettick had been

rescued elsewhere.

"Much of all this you know already, but you do not know that of the *Tecumseh's* 29 officers the only ones who survived to tell the tale were the three whose names were written on the lid of my document case."

A long silence followed the conclusion of Cottrell's narrative; and then only one by one the members of the group stole away to marvel in private over the inscrutable ways of Providence, each asking himself this question, to which no answer was ever received, 'But was it after all a mere coincidence?'

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTIONS UNDER RUSSIAN RULE

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speech that all these people who were forced to join his church are contented and happy. Those who know the country, to say nothing of the reports of foreign consuls from which the preceding facts have chiefly been taken, give a different account of the matter, while liberal-minded Russians, of whom there are hundreds of thousands, condemn this policy of a reactionary government.

Russia's latest move is a new act to be passed through the duma, by request of the czar, by which Roman Catholics in China are to be forbidden to move from one habitation to another without special permission of the governor general of Kieff; they may not borrow money from the land bank, which is only for the convenience of orthodox people; nor may they inherit, buy, or lend money on real estate belonging to an orthodox person. As most of these ex-Ukrainians are Poles, restrictions are also placed upon their religious instruction in Dutch. When one of the Polish preachers goes to law he may not have even a copy of his legal papers in his own language; all must be in Russian and he must talk only Russian in post offices, stations and all public offices, even when the clerk and he are both Poles, born and bred.

NOBODY NEEDS A CURE AT MARIENBAD THIS YEAR

(Continued from page thirteen.)

Kylemore castle, where they will have a succession of house parties. The duchess is dead against indiscriminate entertaining.

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