

San Marcos Wreck Still Remains Hazard

NORFOLK. — Despite repeated blastings by the Navy, the old San Marcos wreck is still a hazard to navigation.

This is the conclusion of the Norfolk District of the Coast and Geodetic Survey.

The wreck lies 6.7 miles southwest of Tangier Island, about 60 miles north of Norfolk.

Two survey craft, the Hilgarde and the Wainwright, under command of Lt. Comdr. John R. Plaggmier, USCGS, by dragging a cable over the area, found it cleared at 11 feet. The Coast Guard requirement for navigation in such waters is 20 feet.

The USCGS said the two vessels made six drags over the wreck and all hung at 11½ feet.

It said the result was subject to minor correction because the measurement was made on the basis of predicted tide rather than actual tide.

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THE DRAGS brought some unexpected results, the USCGS said. One of them brought up an aerial bomb. But the bomb dropped back into the water before it could be brought aboard.

It was described as perhaps one of the unexploded ones used by Gen. Billy Mitchell's outfit demonstrating possibilities of air power in 1921.

Another drag brought a large oil slick to the surface. On one drag the cable broke and about 1000 feet of it was lost.

Still another observation was that the magnetic compass cuts all sorts

of capers within 100 feet of the wreck, because of the mass of 12-inch armor plate the old wreck contains.

The San Marcos was the former USS Texas, the Navy's second battleship, which served in the Spanish-American War. She was partially sunk in target practice by the USS Nebraska in 1911 and became a Billy Mitchell target ten years later. At least three craft have been sunk by ramming the hulk.

The USCGS vessels are now dragging over another sunken Navy craft—a landing ship—north of the San Marcos.

Navy Will Demolish Ship Mitchell Sank

BALTIMORE, Md. — The Navy will start to work on ridding Chesapeake Bay of a 37-year-old navigational hazard—the sunken hulk of the battleship San Marcos, the ex-USS Texas. The obsolete battleship was sunk in 1921 by airplanes led by Billy Mitchell in a bombing exhibition designed to show that planes were effective against capital ships.

The ship sank in about 30 feet of water about six miles southwest of Tangier Island Light. At low tide part of her superstructure is barely awash.

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Navy Sinks Hazardous Hulk

NORFOLK — The San Marcos, once the proud battleship Texas and more recently a Chesapeake Bay navigational hazard, no longer will bother shippers.

Navy demolition workers have finished blasting the sunken hulk so that now the main wreckage lies at least 20 feet below mean low water.

Lt. Comdr. Francis P. Jordan,

commanding officer of the salvage lifting vessel Salvager, said about 1500 pounds of explosives knocked the remainder of the wreck down to where it would no longer menace ships. The Salvager had the job of demolishing the hulk.

Three weeks of blasting last fall had left the center section and a portion of the stern above the desired level.

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New Try Set To Clear Bay

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NORFOLK. — The battleship San Marcos (ex-USS Texas), sunk by Gen. Billy Mitchell in an air power display in 1921, will be leveled by modern explosives.

The ship's sunken hull has been a navigational hazard in the Chesapeake Bay for 37 years. Several ships and many small boats have been damaged by striking the submerged vessel. She rests in 30 feet of water but her superstructure is almost awash.

The leveling operation was postponed because the Navy salvage lifting ship Salvager, scheduled for the work, was assigned to search for an Air Force plane which crashed near the Lynnhaven area.

Tests conducted by the Salvager show that the wreck can be leveled by the use of modern explosives. The operation, scheduled to take about 10 days, was expected to provide a clearance of about 25 feet over the sunken hulk.

A group of airplanes led by Billy Mitchell sank the ship in a bombing exhibition designed to show the effectiveness of aircraft over major ships. The San Marcos was sunk six miles off Tangier Island Light.

Navy Tries to End Ghost Ship Threats

By the Associated Press

Washington

The Navy hopes the old USS Texas has snagged its last ship from its underwater grave.

The old battlewagon was intentionally sunk in shallow water of Chesapeake Bay in 1911. Since then she has snared seven other ships in her superstructure. That's perhaps a dreadnought record for having sunk more ships as a wreck than when afloat.

Navy men worked most of last winter and used more than 7,000 pounds of TNT to blow the top off the once-proud battleship. They wanted to make sure every section of the wreck is at least 20 feet below the surface.

The task was an important one, because federal courts have ruled the government was at fault in several sinkings at the site near Tangier Island—across the bay from the mouth of the Potomac River.

To make sure the ghost ship causes no more trouble, the Coast and Geodetic Survey will chart the wreckage next week. Two survey ships will pass over the site, dragging an underwater cable between them.

This will tell whether the Navy demolition experts succeeded in cutting the old hulk down to harmless size.

FROM THE FILES

NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA,
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San Marcos Target Tests Are Recalled

By FRANK J. FENTON
Times-Herald Staff Writer

Silhouetted against the leaden winter sky as she lay at anchorage in Hampton Roads, midway between Norfolk and Newport News, the mighty warrior of another era still gave the impression of armed might.

But to the men on the Navy tugs plying from Old Point Comfort with cargoes of livestock the erstwhile scourge of the Spanish fleet was completely defanged.

NO LONGER would the vessel put to sea with humans as her crew, for come the morning of March 20, 1911, the USS San Marcos, would more resemble Noah's biblical boat with its crew of chickens, pigs, cats and goats.

In the now gunless turrets felines prowled, in the engine room, now a clutter of cold boilers and empty bunkers bleating goats roamed, while between decks fowl bedded down with swine to await the dawn.

The only semblance of humanity was the lifeless mannikins that graced the bridge and fire control tower.

Within hours the collier Leonidas would take the San Marcos in tow, past Old Point Comfort where once she anchored as part of the Great White Fleet,

out into the Chesapeake Bay whose waters often parted before the knife sharp hull as the ship raced off to find the Spanish fleet sheltered in Cuban waters. But on this trip instead of continuing on towards the Virginia Capes, the Leonidas and her tow would turn north-east for a final anchorage near Tangier Island.

The San Marcos title was strange to this denuded man-of-war. Before the decommissioning and subsequent dismantling of the heavy cannon, the vessel bore the proud name USS Texas. A new Texas lay abuilding but a few yards away in the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co. and the now former representative of the Lone Star State was reduced

to carrying the name of one of that state's smaller city.

LINING THE RAIL of a nearby battlewagon sailors watched with interest the curious goings on in loading the San Marcos.

These interested tars represented the modern Navy. Their gleaming, brand new battleship was the epitome of naval might on this March 9, 1911.

When the dawn rose the veteran of another age would stand to test before the guns of the USS New Hampshire.

During the night, after the last of the animal-bearing tugs had departed, the Leonidas began the tow to the execution grounds. The powerless over-aged warrior wallowed in its wake.

The two ships had barely got-

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San Marcos Tests In Bay Recalled

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ten under way when the anchor chain of the New Hampshire rattled and the heavy hook broke the surface of the roadstead to be pulled tight against the anchor hole.

Other smaller vessels followed suit, torpedo-boats, destroyers, fire tugs and cruisers fell in behind the wake of the executioner.

FOR SEVERAL hours the strange convoy made its way up the bay and then in the darkest hour before the dawn, the New Hampshire and its escorts came to a halt about eight miles south-east of Tangier Island while the Leonidas and its hapless tow continued on until anchorage was made six miles distance.

From the fire control tower of the New Hampshire the Texas made a tempting target out-

lined against the brilliant hues of the new dawn and once the sun poked above the eastern horizon final preparations were made for the target drill.

The gaping muzzles of 12 and eight-inch rifles yawned almost impatiently as the final calibrations were made and when all was ready the New Hampshire began its northward run, six miles away.

The new battleship had scarcely gotten under way when a gun in the forward battery roared sending a heavy missile toward the tethered Texas. The huge geyser of water told the gunners they were short of the mark.

Another heavy rifle boomed and the geyser marked the overshoot. Bracketted with the first barrage the Texas waited.

THIS TIME the guns aft sounded in unison to burst astern of the target, then the forward turrets went into action to land just off the Texas bow.

Having zeroed in the New Hampshire gunners went to work in earnest and the next four salvos racked the helpless Texas with deadly accuracy. Leaving her a mass of flames from stem to stern.

The New Hampshire ceased its fire while awaiting tugs raced out to douse the blaze.

Making a wide turn while the firefighters quenched the flames the New Hampshire started the south leg, seven and a half miles away from the target.

Four more salvos roared as the tugs cleared the target zone and each rocked the Texas viciously. But her inner watertight compartments securely locked, and the thousands of tons of cellulose stacked around the waterline kept the gallant old warrior afloat.

ONCE AGAIN the New Hampshire wheeled about and began another run, loosing four more salvos. The cellulose was not enough to keep the Texas afloat.

Hastily before the target sank, the tugs returned to survey the damage wrought by the

New Hampshire. The Texas was not much more than a sieve her hull perforated time and again by the heavy shells, but to everyone's surprise the animals, with one exception, had escaped injury.

The lone casualty was a chicken that suffered a shrapnel wound in the leg.

All of the Texas "crew" was evacuated and as the tugs withdrew the old ship slowly began to settle on the port, gradually turning keel up. For a last few, defiant moments it floated bottom up, the early morning sun's rays glistening on the barnacled steel plates and then with a slight movement it edged its bow down, gently raising the stern to plunge into the muddy floor of Chesapeake Bay.

The old had given way to the new.

The San Marcos was dead—the Texas was aborning.