

The
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THE EDITOR

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

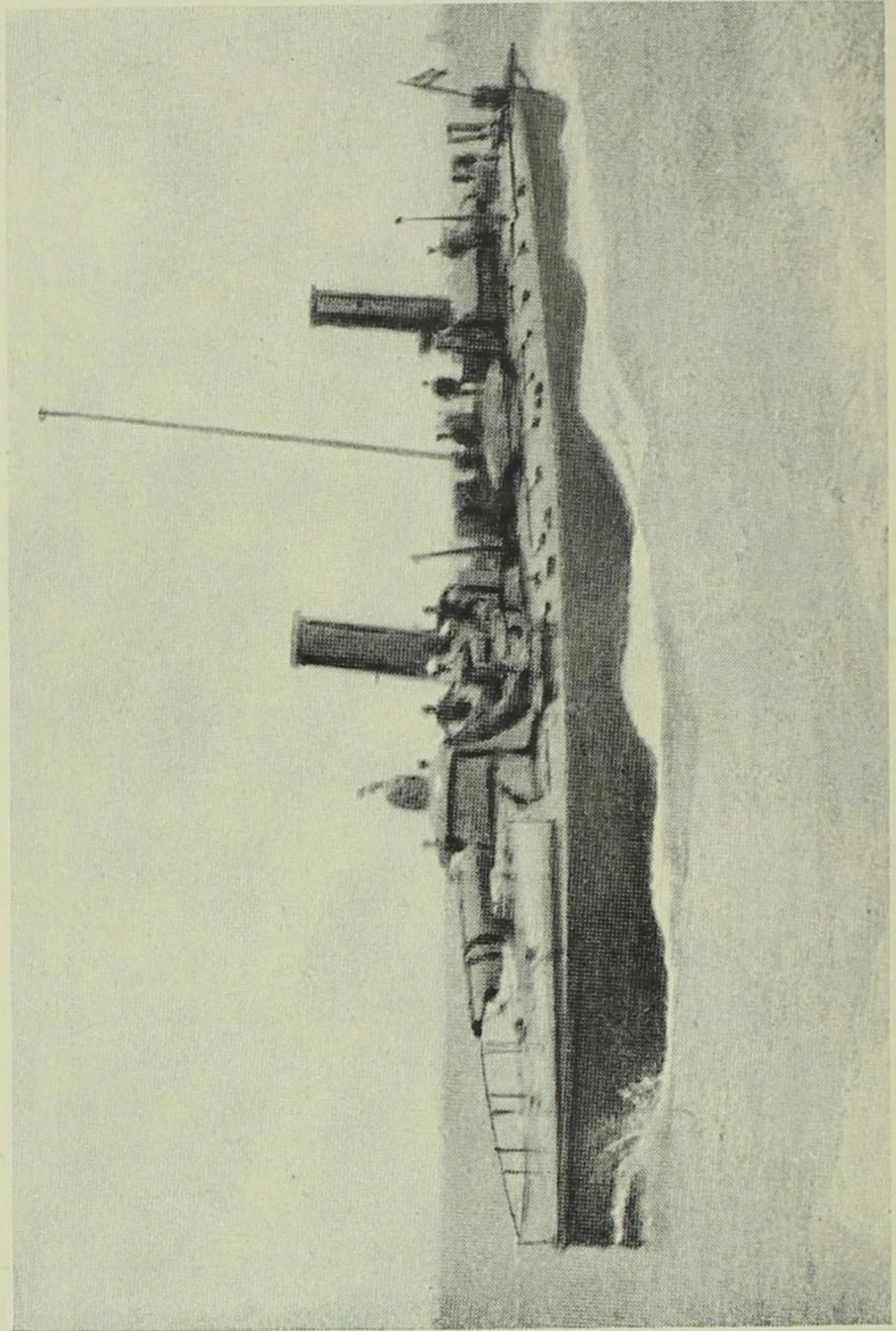
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE ERICSSON

THE PALIMPSEST

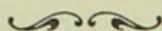
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Conception and Design

Probably no American naval vessel was ever more intimately identified with Iowa than the torpedo-boat *Ericsson*, of the Spanish-American war period. Iowa built, upon the shore of the Mississippi River at Dubuque, Iowa launched, and christened by a native daughter of this State, the boat steamed away on a career of high adventure, never to return. Its sturdy construction and efficient performance won favorable comment, not only in America but also from naval authorities abroad.

The *Ericsson* sailed under the aegis of the illustrious name of Captain John Ericsson who designed and supervised the construction of the *Monitor*, thereby winning for the North one of the most decisive naval duels of modern times. Furthermore, to this Swedish-American genius must be given the credit of inventing the screw-

propeller, revolutionary achievement in the maritime world; the hot-air engine, being the immediate forebear of the present ubiquitous gas-engine; the solar engine; and the torpedo tube gun, making possible the torpedo-boat and modern submarine warfare. Certainly the *Ericsson* went to sea under favorable auspices.

The chief function of the torpedo-boat, as signified by its name, is to carry and discharge those dangerous and destructive engines of modern warfare known as torpedoes. This requires small, sturdy, light-armored vessels, capable of slipping swiftly toward slower, heavily armored battleships, and, under cover of darkness, releasing their missiles and then beating a hasty retreat. Being practically unarmed and therefore utterly incapable of defending themselves in case of discovery, they operate upon the theory that it is better to strike and run away, and "live to fight another day". They are most efficient in the comparatively quiet waters of harbors and therefore most useful in coastwise defense against enemy fleets. They are not designed to withstand the stress of heavy seas, their cruising range is restricted by their limited fuel capacity, they need the protection of cruisers, and they are not well adapted for messenger service or the maintenance of blockade.

The design of such vessels passed through successive stages of evolution, being perfected step by step until from a technical standpoint there was little left to be desired. England, France, Russia, and Italy had long experimented with and employed naval vessels of this type, but the earliest American attempt in this direction was the construction of United States Torpedo-boat No. 1, the *Cushing*, in the Herreshoff shipyards at Bristol, Rhode Island, in 1888–1890. It cost \$82,750.

This boat, however, was said by competent authorities to have been greatly inferior in construction and in other important details to the *Ericsson*, United States Torpedo-boat No. 2, built in the yards of the Iowa Iron Works Company, at Dubuque, during the years 1891–1894. While the plans for the *Ericsson* included the most approved features as developed in other navies, she was strictly an American type of boat — the result of careful study by the Navy Department and designed by men who were specialists in that branch of naval construction. In spite of the fact that England and France had previously built about three hundred of these boats, they “had nothing superior,” and it is doubtful if any they had produced were the equal of this unique craft.

The plans for the *Ericsson* called for a vessel 150 feet in length and 15½ feet beam in the

widest section. Her rated displacement was 120 tons and, like all boats of her class, she set low in the water, although when completely equipped and with full cargo she required only about five feet of water to navigate safely. Aft she resembled the "whale-back, with graceful lines drawn into the cigar shaped termination"; but fore, she held "her depth well, giving her smooth and unbroken lines from stem to stern, and so shapely drawn" as to meet the least possible resistance to the air while speeding swiftly through the water.

In order to give the vessel maximum strength and rigidity, the transverse system of construction was employed, uniting the outer keel plate firmly with the inner flat keelson, which greatly reduced the vibrations caused by the engines and prevented the tripping of the floors. Her frames were of steel and the plating of galvanized steel was from three-sixteenths to one-fourth of an inch in thickness. The interior of the vessel was divided into fifteen water-tight compartments, which provided rooms for boilers, engines, fuel, and supplies, as well as rooms and bunks for the crew of twenty-six or twenty-seven men, who were quartered in the space in the bow, 21 by 15 feet in dimensions. The captain's stateroom, and the engineer's, each 6 by 7 by 8 feet, were likewise divided by a water-tight bulkhead and opened aft

into a wardroom or officers' dining room 16 by 19 and 7 feet high. This room also provided sleeping quarters for twelve men, occupying sailors hammocks. In the stern were the lavatory, kitchen, and pantry. The interior was covered with cork paint, to absorb moisture and condensation, and the staterooms were wainscoted with three-ply veneer one-fourth inch in thickness.

The vessel contained many modern innovations, including a forced ventilating system, patent enunciators, and "an incandescent lighting system" consisting of a generator, twenty fixed bulbs, and four hand lamps. She was also provided with a steam steering gear which added greatly to her efficiency. The engine rooms were located amidship between the two boilers, which were in separate compartments, so arranged that in case one was disabled by shell-fire, the other might continue to function and enable the vessel to escape from the zone of action. The dimensions of both boiler and engine rooms were 10 by 21 feet, and the latter contained bunkers for thirty-five tons of hard coal and a reservoir for 360 gallons of distilled water. The four machinists were quartered in staterooms 5 by 8 feet on either side of the powder magazines.

It was said that no finer engines were ever built in America. There were two sets of "four cylin-

der, quadruple expansion engines of the vertical, inverted direct acting type, operating twin screws". At full speed, these propellers were theoretically estimated to turn at 412 revolutions per minute. The cylinder diameters were $11\frac{1}{2}$, 16, $21\frac{1}{2}$, and 30 inches, and the stroke of all the pistons was sixteen inches. In addition to the engines employed for propelling the vessel, powerful pumps, capable of pumping out the weight of the vessel in water every fifteen minutes, were installed in the engine-room, to insure reasonable security from serious accident.

On deck were rigging, hatch doors, skylights giving natural illumination to the quarters below, two rather slender smoke stacks, and two watertight canvas life-boats. Fore and aft were electric search lights having a "compass of one mile". Just ahead of the forward smokestack was a conical tower from which the commander operated and maneuvered the vessel. The proposed armament was to be three torpedo tubes for firing Whitehead torpedoes; one a fixed tube in the bow eighteen inches in diameter, and two on a revolving table, aft, each fourteen inches in diameter. In addition there were four long one-pounder rapid-fire guns for repelling boarders. The fixed tube was fired by compressed air at 60 pounds pressure from the commander's office by pressing an elec-

tric button. These Whitehead torpedoes varied in length from 12 to 19 feet, and had a range up to half a mile, being propelled beneath the water by means of compressed air. Each torpedo carried a sufficient charge of high explosive to destroy a battleship if it should strike below the armor line.

In action, the vessel was so maneuvered in approaching the enemy that the sights of the bow tube were directly in line with the target. When, in the judgment of the commanding officer, the boat had come near enough to register a hit or for her own safety, he fired the bow tube, which had the greatest range, and swung the vessel round sharply to make off quickly. It was then that the two tubes mounted aft came into action, these being aimed independently of the position of the vessel by means of the turning table. They are fired with black powder. After the *Ericsson* had turned, which operation could be performed in half her own length, and got under speed, it is said that no ironclad afloat was swift enough to overtake her and "none could land a shot on her except by accident". There was no storeroom for extra torpedoes and, therefore, when the three in the tubes were fired, the boat had to sail immediately for her base or supply-ship to replenish the supply.

Proposals for the construction of Torpedo-boat

No. 2 were invited in 1890, but the first bids were all rejected because the specifications submitted were unsatisfactory. Plans were therefore drafted in the Navy Department and advertisements for new bids were posted, calling for the completion of the entire vessel, with the exception of equipment and armament, within twelve months. When it was discovered that the Iowa Iron Works had filed the lowest bid, it is said that consternation, not unmingled with incredulity, was manifest upon the faces of certain government officials. That a shipyard so located should be able to undertake and execute such a project seemed almost unbelievable. Careful investigation, however, disclosed the fact that this was no incompetent, inexperienced company, but one which for twenty years had been building steel-hulled vessels for service not only upon the Mississippi and other inland streams, but upon the Great Lakes as well.

Some of the fleetest and most valuable craft on the river had steamed away from the Dubuque yards, convincing evidence of the capability of Iowa ship-builders. These facts were carefully explained by the Secretary of the Navy, B. F. Tracy, in reporting on the contract to Congress. He further remarked upon the value of a shipyard "at a point remote from all possible attack",

and urged the encouragement of similar establishments in the large cities along the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers, that the "benefits arising from the shipbuilding industry" might be more widely distributed. While the later suggestion was doubtless made as a political expedient, and in spite of considerable opposition on the part of eastern lobbyists, the contract was awarded to the Dubuque firm, who completed the vessel in a manner thoroughly creditable to themselves and satisfactory to the government.

BEN HUR WILSON

Construction and Launching

The announcement that a comparatively obscure boat yard, located on the upper Mississippi, remote from the sea, had secured the contract for building an important naval vessel came as a distinct surprise, not only to eastern ship-builders but to many citizens of Iowa. That the Dubuque company meant business, there could be no doubt. Bonds were promptly filed for the "timely and successful completion of the boat", and the contract was signed on October 8, 1891, for a stipulated sum of \$113,500. Under the terms of the contract "she must be able to make not less than twenty-four knots an hour on her trial trip" under the supervision of the Navy Department. It was no secret that the contract price was probably less than the actual cost of construction would be, but since the government had offered a bonus of \$15,000 for each knot the boat was able to make in excess of the minimum requirement, it was hoped, by exceedingly careful construction, to make up this deficit by means of the bonus. Indeed, the contractor confidently expected "that she will make at least twenty-eight knots an hour on her trial trip," thus assuring her builders an ad-

ditional \$60,000. "Should she succeed in doing this, she will be the fastest torpedo-boat in the world."

Orders for material and supplies were placed at once and preparations were speedily made for commencing construction at the earliest possible moment. Plans were made and schedules arranged by Ernest M. Dickey, "the young and capable manager of the works", and by William Hopkins, superintendent of the yards who, having learned his trade on the Clyde, had ample experience in ship-building to qualify him for almost any undertaking. Lieutenant W. A. Windsor, Chief Engineer, and Lloyd Bankson, Assistant Naval Constructor of the United States Navy, were detailed by the Secretary of the Navy as resident inspectors to superintend the construction of the boat for the government. Much credit must be given these men for the superior qualities of the completed vessel, as they gave their work "unceasing care and attention". Every detail of the construction received their most scrupulous inspection.

Many details, in the aggregate requiring considerable time, had to be looked after before a single rivet could be driven into place in the hull of the boat; plans had to be checked; working drawings, patterns, and castings had to be made;

steel, iron, and other materials going into the boat had to be subjected to "rigid chemical and microscopic analysis" and inspected to see that all conformed to government specifications. Many unforeseen delays occurred, and from the very start it seemed as though fate had decreed that no speed record should be made in the construction of the *Ericsson*. Indeed, on the contrary, the construction work proved to be very difficult and slow, due mainly to many unfavorable circumstances rather than to any lack of ability or facilities at the Dubuque plant. At the start there was a long delay in securing the steel plates on account of the memorable strike and lockout at the Homestead steel mills. Finally, however, after everything was in readiness the keel was laid on July 21, 1892, more than nine months after the contract was let.

A local strike, and the "exceeding care in construction and adjustment of bearings found to be involved in meeting the speed requirements of 24 knots", further retarded construction. Another tedious and exacting task was the building and installing of the boilers and engines which, though relatively small, were designed to develop the enormous capacity of two thousand horse-power. "It is doubtful if a finer set of engines was ever built in this country" and no boat of the size of

the *Ericsson* had greater potential power. In order to generate the highest steam pressure with minimum weight and space the "Thornycroft" boiler was employed, royalty being paid the English patentee for the privilege of manufacturing the boilers in Dubuque. The principle upon which these boilers were constructed was not new, but the ratio of heating surface to size was carried to the limit. Each boiler contained over twelve thousand tubes, "both straight and coiled". It was said that they were capable of developing steam pressure upwards of six hundred pounds, which proved troublesome. The *Ericsson's* machinery failed repeatedly "when about to be brought to official speed tests for acceptance." On more than one occasion, after the boat had been placed in commission, serious injury to the crew and some loss of life was sustained due to the rupture of the boiler tubes and pipe-connections.

And so the work progressed throughout the years 1892 and 1893. During the severe winter of 1893-94, very little was done, and at times work ceased altogether. In the following spring, however, the building was prosecuted with renewed vigor, and at last, in April, the end was in sight. By the first of May it was realized that the time of the launching was close at hand. An im-

portant date in the annals of any vessel is the day when she is first baptized by the waves, and, by all tradition, this is particularly true of naval vessels. However, owing to the inability of the builders to fix, far in advance, the date upon which the launching would occur, government officials did not participate in the exercises, which were held at 3:30 o'clock on the afternoon of May 12, 1894.

From the standpoint of naval etiquette there was no celebration, for the rules of the Navy Department required that official launching ceremonies must be under direction of the Secretary and that he must designate who shall do the christening and invite the presence of the officers of the navy who shall participate. In spite of all such obstacles the people of Dubuque were determined that they should not be denied the "thrill that comes but once in a lifetime", and so got in touch, by telegraph, with the Secretary of the Navy, who gladly authorized an impromptu celebration and approved of arrangements made by the local committees. Speeches were delivered by Judge Fred O'Donnell and by M. M. Walker, who was president of the local Board of Trade.

Climaxing the notable event came the actual ceremony of christening the boat. It was, indeed, an inspiring spectacle. In the presence of expectant thousands who stood tense, awaiting the mo-

ment, rejoicing in the glories of a perfect May afternoon, United States Torpedo-boat No. 2 was christened. Miss Carrie Kiene, "the accomplished daughter of Peter Kiene, Jr., of Dubuque", stepped forward. Eloquently she proclaimed,

In spite of rock and tempest roar,
In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on! Nor fear to breast the sea,
"Ericsson," I christen thee.

And over the bow of the boat she broke a bottle of American champagne. "At a given signal the cannon on an adjacent bluff pealed out in hoarse and deafening tones that awakened the echoes for miles up and down the glistening path of the Mississippi, Father of Waters; the moorings were loosened; and, like a bird springing from its nest to greet the beauty and gladness of a summer morning, the *Ericsson* started from repose and gracefully glided into the blue depths of the harbor."

The shores of the spacious harbor, the crests of the surrounding bluffs, the housetops in every direction "pulsed and quivered with humanity". It was estimated that more than ten thousand people viewed the baptism of the *Ericsson*, which was "quite as perfect in reality as it was impressive in effect. Over its rounded hull of steel the waters rushed, wrapping it in a gossamer veil of foam

and spray, which for a moment danced and shimmered in the sunlight, and then fell like a shower of glistening jewels upon the new-born queen of the American navy."

Following this delightful event, came the more prosaic task of completing the vessel. Much actual work yet remained to be done before she would be in condition to start on her journey to New York, where she was to receive her equipment and be placed in commission. June 10th was the date set when she was to get under way to the Gulf of Mexico, but it was actually fifteen days later before the boat was ready to leave Dubuque. It was impossible at this stage of her construction, without crew and with incompleted machinery, to make the early part of the journey under her own power. She was therefore taken in tow by the *Dolphin*, and, in order to facilitate her completion, a barge was attached upon which an improvised machine shop was set up, about twenty-five men being employed on the craft each day. It was thought that by the time Saint Louis was reached, she would be able to proceed to the Gulf alone.

Few boats on the river ever created so much interest. Enthusiastic and eager crowds greeted the boat at every river town. Having been so widely heralded by the press, everybody was anxious to see this new naval wonder. The journey from

Dubuque to Keokuk was a succession of gala occasions. While all admired her neat, trim appearance and her intricate machinery, the impression received by many was a bit disappointing. "They expected to see a craft as big as a man-of-war or as large as the *St. Paul* anyway, and when the little engine of destruction hove in sight and proved to be about the size of a tug boat, the spectators seemed to feel as though they had been swindled."

The last port visited in Iowa was Keokuk, a place where unusual interest is always exhibited in river affairs. On the afternoon of July 1st, when she entered the canal at Galland, the fact was telephoned to the city and, "in accordance with previous arrangements, the firebells gave a four-times-four signal which everybody understood". The more thoughtless, forgetting that it would take an hour and a half for the boat to get through the canal, made a rush for the river front and stayed there in a broiling sun until she arrived. Some old-timers remarked "that they had not seen such a crowd on the levee since the formal opening of the canal about twenty years ago". All day long the telephones at the lower lock, the bridge, the Diamond Jo Packet office, and other places on the river front were constantly ringing for persons who were anxious to know when the boat would arrive.

It was just 5:30 in the afternoon when the *Dolphin*, with the *Ericsson* and the barge in tow, came around the bend in the canal and was visible to the crowd at the lower lock. Thousands of people viewed her from the bluff and river bank and to every one "she was a distinct disappointment. On every hand was heard the expression, 'Oh! what a little thing!' The ladies were especially disappointed and spoke as though the *Ericsson's* diminutiveness was a personal offence". The crowd wanted to go aboard but, under strict orders from those in authority, the officers prohibited admission. Government employees were admitted, however, and a *Gate-City* reporter also was allowed to explore the craft.

To those who understood her full significance, she was heartily admired. "Economy of space has been carried to perfection in the *Ericsson*", wrote the local reporter, "not one cubic inch has gone to waste. The apartments are very cramped and life aboard her will be like living in a closet. All the apartments are below the water level and pure and cooling air will be supplied by fans, so that there will be some comfort after all. The workmanship of a watch could hardly be finer than on this craft, and it is a source of great pride to Iowans that this addition of the Navy was built in Iowa."

At about 6:30 the *Dolphin* and her tow departed for Saint Louis. Within a few minutes she sailed past the mouth of the Des Moines and, like a grown child, left her native State never to return, yet to distinguish herself and bring honor to the home folks who followed her career upon the high seas with no little pride and interest.

BEN HUR WILSON

In Line of Battle

The outbreak of the Spanish-American War found the *Ericsson* attached to the Atlantic fleet, a heterogeneous collection of more or less antiquated war vessels, including battleships, monitors, cruisers, and gunboats, in addition to the "Torpedo Flotilla". Among this later class were the *Du Pont*, *Porter*, *Rodgers*, *Foote*, *Winslow*, *Cushing*, and the *Ericsson*, all of modern construction, fast and formidable; and the *Gwin*, *McKee*, and *Talbot*, which were small second-class boats.

These torpedo-boats proved seaworthy craft, fulfilling their respective rôles creditably. The *Porter*, for example, won distinction on a long voyage with the fleet to San Juan. One of the "best of the boats was the *Ericsson*, which was almost the oldest". Having arrived at the New York Navy Yards on June 19, 1896, for completion and equipment which, in spite of all possible haste, required a period of eight months, she was placed in commission on February 18, 1897, Lieutenant Nathaniel Reilly Usher commanding. Her first battery consisted of three eighteen-inch Whitehead torpedo tubes, and four one-pound rapid-fire guns. The total cost of construction at the time

of commission amounted to \$144,142.08. Then followed a period of organization and training of the crew, and from July 7, 1897, to February 3, 1898, she cruised leisurely up and down along the coast of the United States from Boston, Massachusetts, to Mobile, Alabama. During February, March, and most of April, 1898, she was stationed at or about Key West, Florida.

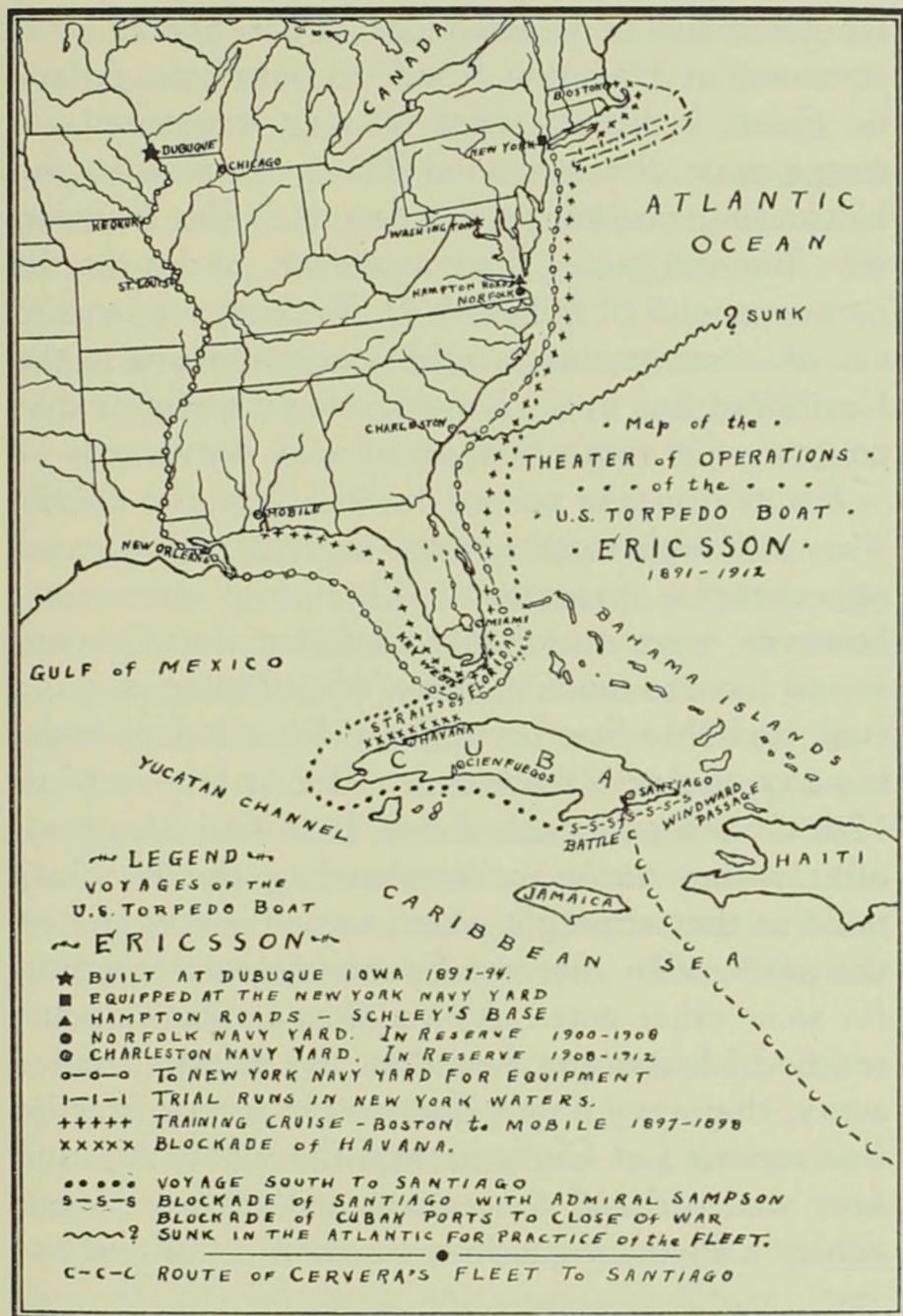
Immediately following the ultimatum issued on April 20, 1898, by our government to Spain, the fleet was concentrated at Key West and ordered to blockade Havana and other Cuban ports. In these maneuvers the *Ericsson* took an active part from April 22nd to June 1st. "She is a long, lean, cigar-shaped craft," wrote a reporter concerning the *Ericsson*, "with lines as fine and as gently curved as ever beautified a vessel. Forward she looks the racer she undoubtedly is, with a long rangy bow providing both the buoyancy and reach and yet offering the slightest friction as she passes through the water. Aft she is gull-like and spare, carrying no material not absolutely necessary to carry her machinery and retain her symmetry of form."

But patrol, blockade, and messenger duty was the most dangerous service afloat and the most uncomfortable work in the whole navy. The cramped quarters and the violent pitching of the

boat made life disagreeable for the crew. The little torpedo-boat, never intended for navigating heavy seas, crossed and recrossed the treacherous passage between Key West and Cuba. Her "low free-board" meant that the men on deck were wet to the skin before the boat had passed the flagship on the way to patrol duty. An officer on the *Cushing* was washed overboard and lost. The brass buttons on the uniforms of the torpedo-boat crews, turned green by the sea water, became badges of high courage and honor.

On the twenty-ninth of April, Admiral Cervera left the Cape Verde Islands, in command of a Spanish squadron consisting of four armored cruisers and three torpedo-boat destroyers, the newest and most feared type of war vessels. This movement on the part of the enemy created grave anxiety all along the eastern seaboard, as nobody in America knew whether Cervera was headed for Cuba or intended to surprise and bombard some important Atlantic seaport, few of which were adequately fortified.

The plan of naval strategy adopted for defense against this double threat was to divide the North Atlantic Fleet into three sections — the blockading squadron which was later known as the North Atlantic Squadron, the Northern Patrol Squadron, and the Flying Squadron. The latter, under



the command of Commodore W. S. Schley, was stationed at Hampton Roads to patrol the Atlantic Coast, ready to ward off any threatened attempt upon the seaboard cities. It was to the blockading portion of the fleet that the *Ericsson* was first assigned. This squadron, under the direct command of Admiral W. T. Sampson, was to cut off communication with Cuba and cruise the Caribbean Sea in the hope of encountering or discovering Cervera's fleet on its way westward.

For two weeks no one knew where the enemy was, although rumors were current and general apprehension prevailed. The navy strategists, however, were reasonably confident that Cervera would have to touch at some West Indian port for coal, probably San Juan, Porto Rico, before making any offensive movement. But as late as May 12th he had not reached San Juan and Sampson, after rather aimlessly bombarding the fortifications at that strategic point, turned westward on the assumption that the Spaniards were heading for some other port. As a matter of fact Cervera reached Martinique, less than five hundred miles away, that very day. Forty-eight hours later he was reported at Curacao, and the whole Atlantic fleet was ordered to concentrate at Key West. Schley's Flying Squadron steamed south and ar-

rived on May 18th, several hours ahead of Sampson's squadron.

It was anticipated that Cervera had orders to cooperate with the Spanish army in Cuba and would therefore attempt to reach Havana, or some port on the south side of the island connected with the capital by rail. Admiral Sampson chose to patrol the north coast of Cuba, in order to intercept the Spanish fleet if it tried to reach Havana by way of the Windward Passage. Commodore Schley was ordered to proceed around the western end of Cuba through the Yucatan Channel to Cienfuegos in anticipation of meeting the enemy, finding him at Cienfuegos which was his most likely destination, or waiting for him there. Starting with the *Brooklyn*, *Massachusetts*, *Texas*, and *Scorpion*, he was joined within the next two days by the *Iowa*, *Marblehead*, and the collier *Merrimac*. Without encountering any signs of the enemy, Schley arrived before Cienfuegos on May 21st and established a blockade. The *Ericsson* was left behind at Key West.

Santiago, on the southeastern coast of Cuba, also offered an alternative port of refuge for the Spanish fleet, but since this place was then cut off from General Blanco's army, it did not seem likely that Admiral Cervera would go there. Being short of coal, however, and unable to obtain a sat-

isfactory supply at Curacao, Cervera determined to touch at Santiago, hoping that he might be able to refuel and slip out again before being discovered by the Americans. Shortly after daybreak on May 19th, lookouts stationed on the Morro (a fortified hill) guarding the entrance to the harbor at Santiago de Cuba sighted the vessels of the Spanish squadron. The entire fleet, short of rations, coal, and water and manned by a crew whose morale was at a very low ebb, slipped haltingly into the harbor under the protection of the fortress, whose garrison, themselves illy supplied with provisions of any kind, was in poor position to succor their almost destitute comrades. If his force had been in better condition, Cervera might have reached Cienfuegos before Schley and established contact with the army.

Meanwhile the Navy Department notified Sampson that spies had reported the presence of the Spanish fleet at Santiago and suggested that he order Schley to that port. But Sampson hesitated. When Schley finally reached the vicinity of Santiago, a scout cruiser told him that nothing positive was known about the Spaniards, whereupon he headed back around Cuba bound for Key West! Two days later, however, he reversed his course and returned to Santiago. It was not until the end of May that the American naval forces

were concentrated before the harbor of Santiago and established a close blockade. Cervera's fleet was effectively shut in, unable to escape or to fight advantageously.

In the meantime, about the first of June, the *Ericsson* was assigned to duty as a convoy to the transports bearing General W. R. Shafter's troops from Tampa, Florida, across the channel to Cuba. This duty having been successfully discharged, she, together with other vessels, was transferred to duty with Admiral Sampson's squadron at Santiago. The blockade proved to be a monotonous task. For several weeks the Spaniards made no apparent effort either to attack or escape. One episode, however, enlivened the situation, when Lieutenant R. P. Hobson made a gallant though unsuccessful attempt to bottle the enemy's fleet in the harbor by sinking the disabled collier *Merrimac* across the mouth of the channel.

And so the blockade wore on throughout the month of June. The duties of various members of the fleet became perfunctory and routine. Early on Sunday morning, July 3rd, the *Massachusetts* left her station with the fleet, and headed for Guantanamo to coal. The morning routine was in progress. The engineers were utilizing the respite of daylight for overhauling their machinery and cleaning the boiler tubes. At about nine

o'clock the flagship *New York* left the line, accompanied by the *Ericsson*, and proceeded slowly down the coast towards Siboney, east of Santiago, where Admiral Sampson was to land for the purpose of conferring with General Shafter on the best measures to be adopted for the relief of the hard-pressed expeditionary forces.

On the preceding evening six columns of smoke had been noticed above the hills, far back in the land-locked harbor. As this had occurred before, it aroused no undue anxiety. Nevertheless the lookouts on the *Iowa*, stationed directly opposite the mouth of the harbor, were on the alert. About the time the *New York* left her position, a sailor on the *Iowa* observed smoke moving toward the mouth of the harbor, and at 9:15 called the attention of several officers to it. Eager eyes soon confirmed their suspicions, whereupon the *Iowa* fired the alarm gun and hoisted signal No. 250, "the enemy's ships are escaping." This was about 9:30. As quickly as possible the blockading fleet closed in, according to the prearranged plan. The *New York* heard the signal and returned to the fight, though too late to take a prominent part. Cervera's flagship, the *Maria Teresa*, first emerged from the mouth of the harbor and headed west along the shore, followed immediately by the *Vizcaya*, *Cristobal Colon*, *Almirante Oquendo*,

and finally the dreaded destroyers, *Pluton* and *Furor*.

The details of the remarkable battle which ensued are well known. One by one the great ships of the Spanish squadron steamed out of the harbor and ran the gauntlet of American fire. The *Teresa*, having faced the first attack, was soon ablaze and had to be beached about six miles west of the Morro. Ten minutes later the *Oquendo* met a similar fate. The *Indiana* and the *Gloucester* pounced upon the destroyers so furiously that the *Furor* was sunk and the *Pluton* was run ashore almost immediately. On down the coast fled the *Vizcaya* and the *Colon*, trying to outdistance their pursuers. The *Indiana* dropped behind, and the *Iowa* was ordered back to guard the transports, but the *Brooklyn*, *Oregon*, and *Texas* kept up the chase. At eleven o'clock the *Vizcaya* turned ashore about fifteen miles from the Morro, and two hours later the *Colon* surrendered thirty miles farther west. Not a single vessel escaped.

Fate prevented the *Ericsson* from distinguishing herself as the engine of destruction she was reputed to be. By the time she arrived upon the scene, the major part of the engagement was over.

As the *New York* and the *Ericsson* passed the mouth of the harbor, however, the shore batteries,

which had previously been directing their fire on the *Gloucester*, turned to them as better targets. Though both vessels were going at full speed as they drew near the entrance, the guns of the *Morro* almost got their range. "Several shells struck near us, short or beyond, and two burst overhead and over." The *Ericsson* was not struck, however.

When the *Vizcaya* "struck her flag", the *Ericsson* was close astern of her, preparing to launch a Whitehead torpedo. It is to the credit of the gunner and her commanding officer, Lieutenant Usher, that the death-dealing missile remained undischarged, thus sparing many lives. Instead, she drew off and headed after the *Colon*.

Lieutenant Usher's report of the battle to the commanding officer of the fleet on July 5th best describes what followed. "As the *Ericsson* was hauling away from the *New York* in the chase, signal was made, interrogatory, No. 2872, 'Request permission to continue the chase.' The flagship hoisted negative and by wigwag signal directed the *Ericsson* to pick up men in the water astern. Turned with port helm and found and picked up one man afloat on a piece of wreckage, and then returned to the chase, and *New York* in the meantime chasing fast after the *Colon*. As we came up with the *Iowa*, lying about 2 miles

seaward of *Vizcaya*, the *Ericsson* was hailed and directed to go inshore and rescue the crew of the *Vizcaya* from the burning vessel. Ran close alongside the *Vizcaya* and sent small boat to her, boats from *Iowa* pulling in also at same time. Explosions from the ammunition on board the *Vizcaya* began about this time and her guns, which had been left loaded, were fired one after the other by the flames. The *Vizcaya* was on fire fore and aft, but the mass of the fire was aft, and the position of the *Ericsson* was perilous in the extreme and only the urgency of the occasion caused her to remain. Rescued 11 officers and about 90 sailors and marines from the vessel, many of them sorely wounded. The Spanish were no sooner taken on board than they urged immediate withdrawal of the *Ericsson*, but this vessel remained until all alive had been taken from the *Vizcaya* by the *Ericsson's* small boat and the boats from the *Iowa*. One of the *Vizcaya's* large cutters was also used. The *Ericsson's* deck was then crowded with prisoners, most of them naked and many of them wounded, and she returned to the *Iowa*, towing the *Vizcaya's* cutter, also filled with prisoners. These were all put on board the *Iowa*, and the *Ericsson* was by her directed to verify the information given by the *Resolute*, which came up from eastward, and signaled, 'Enemy's ships to east-

ward'. Spoke *Resolute*, which reported that she had made out an enemy's battle ship off Siboney; then spoke transport *Comal*, which had only seen the signal displayed by the *Resolute*; then spoke *Harvard*, which reported having made out an enemy's battle ship; requested *Harvard* to notify *Iowa*, and proceeded under full speed to eastward. Off vicinity of Siboney sighted *Indiana* and an Austrian battleship. The *Indiana* signaled *Ericsson* to come within hail, and directed that we proceed under full speed to westward to notify our vessels of presence of Austrian battleship *Infanta Maria Theresa*, which, desiring to go into Santiago, had been referred to the commander-in-chief in view of the existing conditions. Proceeded as directed until up with *Iowa*; reported to *Iowa*, and that our coal was almost gone, and that we were using salt feed in the boilers, the vessel only carrying two hours' fresh feed at full power, and the *Ericsson* then having been over four hours under full power. Received permission to return to eastward, and proceeded until signaled by *Harvard* to come within hail; by her was directed to tow her boats to and from the burning wrecks of the *Maria Teresa* and *Oquendo*. This was accordingly done until no more persons remained to be rescued from the vessels, the remaining prisoners being all ashore on the beach. Received permis-

sion from the *Harvard* to proceed to eastward. About 6 p. m. spoke *Iowa*, and received permission to go to Guantanamo for coal and water, at which harbor *Ericsson* arrived at 9:45 p. m., and reported the victory to commanding officer U. S. S. *Massachusetts*, the senior officer present.

"There were no casualties on board this vessel."

Thus in the course of a few hours came and passed the climax in the career of the *Ericsson*, one of the best, most popular, and most feared vessels of her class in the entire navy. Singularly, fate decreed that she should never discharge a single torpedo at an enemy's ship or destroy a human life. On the contrary, this vessel, though potentially a dreaded engine of destruction, actually became an apostle of mercy, saving many lives by the dauntless courage of her crew and her ability, on account of her shallow draught, to run in close to shore where larger vessels dared not go.

The *Ericsson* remained in Cuban waters until August 10, 1898, assisting in the blockade of Cuban ports, when she set sail for the United States, arriving at New York harbor on August 23rd. Meanwhile, peace having been reestablished, she was placed out of commission on September 21st, and was so disposed throughout the years 1899 and 1900. In 1901 she was entered upon reserve at the Norfolk Navy Yard, and attached to the

"reserve torpedo flotilla" until 1908. In 1909 she was transferred and remained on reserve at the Charleston Navy Yard until 1912, when on April 5th she was placed out of commission, being stricken from the navy list on the following day, April 6, 1912.

Some time subsequently the *Ericsson* was employed as a target for practice of the fleet. Although available records do not disclose the date or place of her demise, she now lies somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic.

BEN HUR WILSON

Comment by the Editor

BUILT IN DUBUQUE

At the time the *Ericsson* was launched, another steel-hulled seagoing boat was on the stocks at the yards of the Iowa Iron Works. The *Windom*, begun in 1893 and launched two years later, was built for the revenue cutter service. But early in the war with Spain this boat was transferred to the navy. Thus the Dubuque boat yard supplied two vessels that saw active naval service. There might have been more, but the bids of the Iron Works on three additional torpedo-boats in 1895 were too high to be accepted. It is not recorded that the *Windom* was ever under fire; but from May until August she was stationed at Key West and operated between that base and Havana.

While the construction of these seafaring vessels in Iowa was unique, the building of river craft was far more extensive. Dubuque was the boat-building center on the upper Mississippi in the nineties. The Diamond Jo yards at Eagle Point were making wooden packets and raft-boats and doing much repair work, while at the ice harbor the Iowa Iron Works had launched their twenty-second steel-hulled craft in 1890. Before

the end of the decade this company had built more than a hundred vessels. As many as eight boats were under construction at one time, including a ferry over three hundred feet long. The pay roll for the two hundred and thirty men employed in 1898 amounted to \$11,000 a month.

Before the boat-building industry reached its height, river traffic had begun to decline rapidly. Within a few years the packet and rafting business practically disappeared from the upper river. Nevertheless the Dubuque Boat and Boiler Company, successor to the Iowa Iron Works, continued to build huge ferry-boats, like the *Albatross*, and enormous towboats for the Ohio and lower Mississippi service. Powerful steel steamboats with their immense steel barge tows supplanted the graceful wooden packets. On one trip from Pittsburgh to New Orleans the Dubuque-built *Sprague* towed fifty-six 1000-ton barges of coal—four acres in area and the equivalent of twenty-two train loads.

Since the establishment of the government barge line in 1918, many of the towboats and barges have been built in the Dubuque yards. In some respects the *Herbert Hoover*, the largest Diesel-powered towboat on western waters, launched in 1931, is the acme of Iowa boat-building achievement.

J. E. B.

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