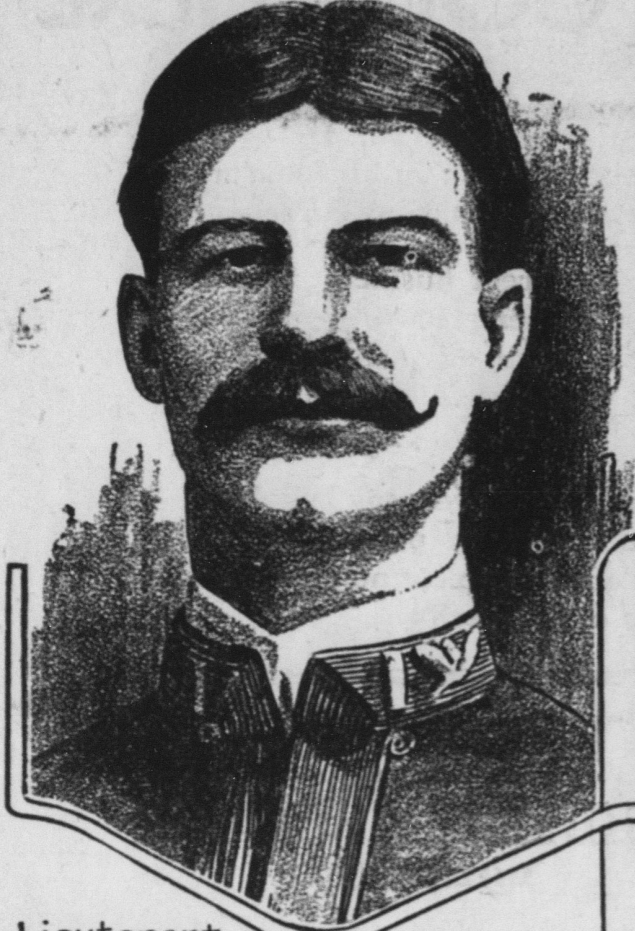


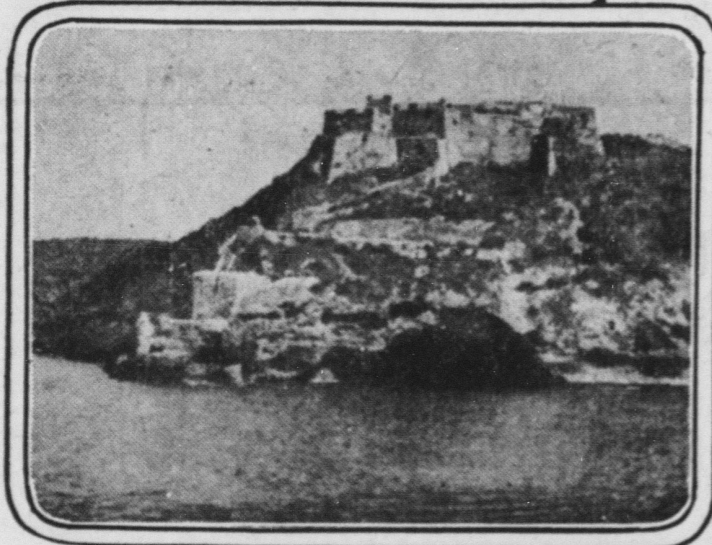
# Recalling An Heroic Deed of 1898



Lieutenant Richmond Pearson Hobson



The Sinking of the Collier Merrimac  
From a Contemporary Drawing



Morro Castle



The Medal of Honor of the United States

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

THE other day congress authorized the presentation of a medal of honor to a man who, as a lieutenant in the United States navy during the Spanish-American war, had won worldwide fame overnight. He was the Col. Lindbergh of his day. He was the leader of an expedition, the story of which thrilled the whole nation and put his name on the lips of every American. Of him the author of an article in a Boston magazine in September, 1898, said: "The Spartans who held the pass at Thermopylae may be forgotten, the 600 Englishmen who made the charge at Balaklava may go un-sung, but in this land under the Stars and Stripes forever will linger the memory of the gritty Christian gentleman, Richmond Pearson Hobson of Alabama."

"Sic transit gloria mundi . . ." Indeed! For Richmond Pearson Hobson had to wait nearly 35 years for the official recognition of his deed and when it finally came, the newspapers, which had once emblazoned his name in streaming headlines, recorded the award of the medal of honor in a news story of only a few brief paragraphs.

Hobson was born at Greensboro, Ala., August 17, 1870. Educated in the Greensboro public schools and in the Southern university, he became interested in the navy during a visit to New Orleans and won an appointment to the United States Naval academy at Annapolis, from which he was graduated in 1890. In the academy he had devoted himself to naval construction and in 1891 he was made an assistant naval constructor with the rank of lieutenant, which he held at the outbreak of the Spanish-American war.

Just before Dewey's memorable victory at Manila bay in the Philippines a Spanish fleet consisting of four armored cruisers and three torpedo-boat destroyers, led by Admiral Cervera, left the Cape Verde islands for Cuban waters. Cervera succeeded in eluding the "Flying Squadron" of the United States navy, commanded by Commodore Schley, which had set out to find the enemy, and entered the harbor of Santiago in safety. Schley followed him to Santiago and established a blockade of the enemy fleet while awaiting the arrival of Captain Sampson, acting rear admiral and commander in chief of our naval forces, who was hurrying to Santiago with a fleet led by his flagship, the New York.

The story of how Hobson got his chance for fame is told by John R. Spears in his "History of Our Navy" as follows:

"After reaching Santiago and taking one look at the narrow entrance to the harbor the possibility of sinking a ship there to effectually close it, and so prevent Cervera's exit, was apparent to many of the officers of the squadron. Sampson, knowing the width of the channel, had considered the plan of sinking a ship in it . . . and in a dispatch dated May 27 had ordered Schley to sink the collier Sterling there, but Schley ignored the order. On the very day he reached Santiago, Sampson began to carry out the plan.

"There was the Merrimac. She had been sold to the government at a price twice her value. She was a bad ship—she could serve the nation much better in blocking the channel than in any other way, and preparations to sink her into the channel were immediately begun. At the earnest request of Mr. Richmond Pearson Hobson, assistant naval constructor, he was put in charge. He had been placed on the New York

to watch her workings in actual war, and write a report thereon for the chief of his bureau. His knowledge of ships fitted him for the task and he had already showed his courage when he worked the range-finder on the New York during the bombardment of San Juan de Porto Rico. "About two hundred men were employed in stripping the Merrimac, for it was intended to send her in just before daylight next morning. However, after stripping her, it was necessary to fit her with torpedoes that would sink her instantly when the time came, and this took so long that day had arrived on June 2 before she was ready. Hobson was anxious to go then, but the admiral ordered him to wait.

"Meantime a crew of six men had been selected from among the hundreds that crowded aft to volunteer. They were Daniel Montague, chief master-at-arms of the New York; George Charette, gunner's mate, first class, of the New York; J. E. Murphy, coxswain on the Iowa; John P. Phillips, a machinist; Oscar Deignan, coxswain, and Francis Kelly, a water tender, all of the Merrimac. To this crew of six men Coxswain Rudolph Clausen of the New York added himself by eluding the vigilance of the officers . . .

"At 3 o'clock on the morning of June 3 these men headed away for the harbor. A steam launch from the New York under Naval Cadet Joseph W. Powell followed to pick up the crew of the Merrimac, should they succeed in getting away from her after performing their work, in either the rowboat or the lifeboat that had been provided for them.

"It was a cloudy night, but because the channel was so narrow it was absolutely certain that the Merrimac would be discovered before she reached her destination, and that a heavy fire from the batteries of all kinds would enfilade her, while the sentinels and the troops encamped along the shore were likely to spatter her deck with Mauser bullets as a tropical rain-storm would melt her with drops of water. In short, there was not one chance in a thousand, apparently, for any of these men to live through that adventure and yet they had eagerly volunteered for it, and one had stowed himself away on board without permission! Nor was the chance of Cadet Powell and his men much better, for it was his duty to follow the Merrimac to the mouth of the harbor where he, too, would be as easy a target as the men on the ship, and there to wait until after daylight.

"Getting his bearings by the outlines of the Morro against the sky, Hobson drove the old ship into the center of the narrow channel. A hell of flame leaped out on both sides as she passed the Morro, while the Vizcaya, that was on guard just around the bend, began firing with her broadside battery. The Spaniards thought we were coming with our squadron to force the harbor, and all the guns, big and little, that would bear and many that would not, were fired with feverish rapidity. Immediately the shots began to reach the ship but no vital damage was done.

"Then the time to sink her had come, and Hobson pressed the electric button. Three of the torpedoes that were placed at her water-line exploded tearing open her sides. The man at the anchor cut it loose, bringing up her head just opposite the point, while her stern swung slowly around with the tide. It seemed for a moment that she must sink as they wished, right across the channel, but she filled so slowly, that she lay lengthwise of the channel and well at one side before she finally struck bottom."

Spears then quotes Hobson's narrative of the rest of the action as follows: "We were all aft, lying on the deck. Shells and bullets whistled around. Six inch shells from the Vizcaya came

tearing into the Merrimac, crashing clear through, while the plunging shots from the fort broke through her decks.

"Not a man must move!" I said; and it was only owing to the splendid discipline of the men that we were not all killed. We must lie there till daylight, I told them. Now and again one or the other of the men lying with his face glued to the deck and wondering whether the next shell would not come our way, would say "Hadn't we better drop off now, sir?" but I said "Wait till daylight." It would have been impossible to get the catamaran anywhere but on to the shore, where the soldiers stood shooting, and I hoped that by daylight we might be recognized and saved.

"It was splendid the way those men behaved. The fire of the soldiers, the batteries and the Vizcaya was awful. When the water came up on the Merrimac's decks the catamaran floated amid the wreckage, but she was still made fast to the boom, and we caught hold of the edges and clung on, our heads only being above water.

"At daylight the fire ceased and a Spanish launch came toward the wreck. We agreed to try capturing her and running for the open sea, but as she drew near a dozen Spanish marines aimed their Mausers at us and I saw that, in western parlance, they had the drop on us. "Is there any officer in that boat to receive a surrender of prisoners of war?" I shouted. An old man leaned out under the awning and waved his hand. It was Admiral Cervera. The marines lowered their rifles and we were helped into the launch.

"Then we were put in cells in Morro castle. It was a grand sight a few days later to see the bombardment, the shells striking and bursting around El Morro. Then we were taken into Santiago. I had the court martial room in the barracks. My men were kept prisoners in the hospital."

In his prison Hobson was visited by Spanish officers who asked permission to shake his hand and congratulate him for his courage. At his request a message was sent to Admiral Sampson, telling the commander that he and his men were safe and, except for minor wounds of two, Kelly and Murphy, that they had come through their terrible experience unscathed.

At first the Spanish authorities refused to exchange the prisoners. But at last on July 6 Hobson and his men were marched blindfolded through the Spanish trenches and the American lines and the formalities of exchange were completed by Spanish and American officers under a big ceiba tree.

Even before Hobson's release from prison the news of his deed had made him the man of the hour in America. So when he was sent up to New York with instructions to report to the secretary of the navy at Washington on the condition of the Spanish ships wrecked in the battle of Santiago which followed soon after his exploit, he was given such an ovation as no man, since his time, except Colonel Lindbergh, has known.

Next followed the "kissing bee" which made him almost as famous as his deed in Santiago harbor. At Long Beach in August, 1898, a St. Louis girl asked permission to kiss the Merrimac hero and he, blushing, gave permission. After that—the deluge! Wherever he went, hundreds of women mobbed him for the privilege of paying their osculatory respects.

Other honors came to him rapidly. Alabama, his native state, was the first to propose giving him a jeweled sword. He was raised ten numbers in the ranks of naval constructors and was made a captain. For more than a year he enjoyed the hero worship of the nation. Then the fickle public began to forget him when the newspapers ceased to chronicle his every movement.

He was put in charge of raising the wrecks of Spanish ships and in the course of this duty he went to China to superintend the repairing of the Spanish ships sunk by Dewey at Manila. While there he began having trouble with his eyesight and he asked to be retired was denied and in 1903 he resigned his commission. After his retirement he began making speeches throughout the country advocating a large navy and as early as 1902 he predicted the World war which came 12 years later. In 1906 he was elected to congress from his home district in Alabama and during his eight years in congress he served on the committee on naval affairs. Since his retirement from congress he has devoted his time to the cause of prohibition and to fighting the spread of the use of narcotics.

(© by Western Newspaper Union.)

## Rest Not Always Welcome to Aged

"You have seen this news item on the seventy-fourth birthday of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, a woman whom I have always admired. I think it is inspiring to learn that at seventy-four she is as alert and healthy as twenty years ago. But when it comes to not having time to think about herself, don't you think that's overdoing it a bit? When one has led a useful life to the age of seventy-four, doesn't one deserve to enjoy the fruits of it? Shouldn't a woman like that now sit back on her laurels a bit and take it easy?"

The news item referred to describes the daily life of the great suffrage leader and humanitarian as quite the same as it was 20 years ago. "Instead of reminiscing," we are told, "she looks forward and she is interested now in campaigning for peace. As president of the committee on the cause and cure of war, she went to Washington for a conference. Birthday celebrations? About that Mrs. Catt said, "There are too many other things to think about. When I reach eighty, it will be time for a celebration."

"Do we think that is 'overdoing it'?" No. Speaking in the vernacular, we think it's swell! What does a woman like that deserve at seventy-four? She deserves to have fun! And that's what she is doing—not by "sitting

back and resting," but by heading another march forward! That is what she has always done, and doubtless what she hopes always to do. And more power to her!

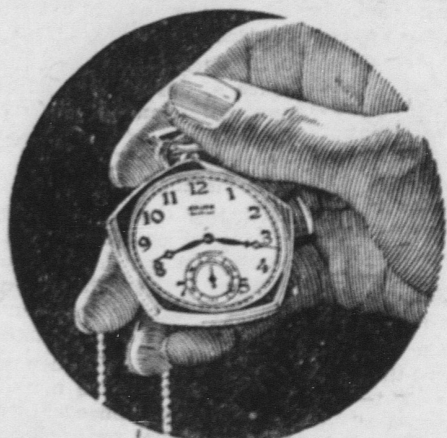
One thing for the young to learn is to let older people have their fun in their own way. Those who have looked forward to resting as fun should be allowed their well-earned rest. Those who still want to march—or gallop—providing their bodies are in accord, should not be interfered with. To my mind these are the lucky ones. There is nothing that pulls so quickly as rest, and trying to rest can be the hardest job on earth. Whereas to those who like it, work can always be fun.

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## INDIGESTION, GAS . .

Hagerstown, Md. — "I had indigestion badly — everything I ate seemed to sour and ferment in my stomach and I belched gas frequently. I felt tired and weary all the while and housework became a burden to me," said Mrs. L. Muller of 35 Fairground Ave. "I used two bottles of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery and it certainly relieved me of the heartburn and helped to rid me of that bloated condition. I felt stronger and had more energy also." Sold by all druggists.

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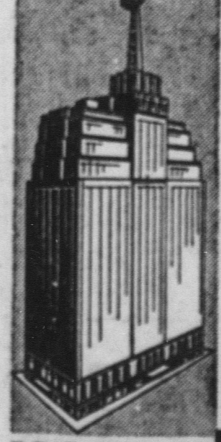
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