

# 'AMERICA'S MOST-KISSED MAN' DIES

Richmond Pearson Hobson, the "Man Who Sank the Merrimac," Was Strange Paradox of Hero and Public Heckler.

By WILLIAM C. UTLEY

REAR ADMIRAL RICHMOND PEARSON HOBSON probably was kissed by more women than any other man who ever lived, and now he is dead.

Admiral Hobson, from the time of his youth, was a paradoxical combination of Frank Merriwell and Sissy Bly. He was to one generation the perpetrator of what may be the most romantic, adventurous and heroic deed ever performed in the service of the American flag. Yet he was to be remembered by the last American generation that knew him as a blue-nosed reformer, a trite flag-waver who nursed a penchant for frightening little children with staggering accounts of foul oriental evils lurking in wait for them at every school corner.

When, in 1889, Hobson was graduated first in his class from the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis he was cheered enthusiastically. He was leaving. Most of his classmates hadn't spoken to him for two years. It was one of his duties as a cadet to report the misdemeanors of other cadets; this he had done so expertly and consistently that he was easily the most unpopular cadet in the academy.

He was a crusader from the start. In his post-academy days he attempted to convince the country, through scientific journals, that there was inevitably to be a World War, but he failed to arouse America enough to begin arming for it. The outbreak of the Spanish-American war found him a naval constructor with the rank of Lieutenant, aboard Rear Admiral William Thomas Sampson's flagship, the New York.

### Hobson Volunteers.

Aboard the New York, young Hobson was crusading for the construction of five unsinkable vessels, and told Admiral Sampson they could be used to sweep the mines from the entrance to Havana harbor. When Sampson told him that he was far more interested in sinking one American ship than building five unsinkable ones, the lieutenant was astounded but offered to do the job anyway. It was in the line of duty.

Sampson had ordered Admiral Schley, who was off Santiago de Cuba, to sink a collier in the narrow channel at the harbor entrance and thus bottle up the Spanish fleet inside. Schley, not believing in the wisdom of the act, ignored the order. Sampson still favored the idea and, on their way to Santiago, he and Hobson discussed plans for sinking the collier Merrimac on a night in early June when there would be sufficient moonlight for the navigator to place the ship in position, yet there would be an hour or so of darkness between moonset and daybreak. Torpedoes abreast the bulkheads and cargo hatches were to be fired by an electric primer to sink the craft.

The entire American fleet received the call for volunteers to accompany Hobson. This was no child's play. With the exception of Admiral Sampson, there was hardly a soul aboard the New York who believed the emergency crew would return alive. Yet hundreds offered to go.

Seven were taken: George Charlette, Daniel Montague, Francis Kelly, Randolph Clausen, Osborn W. Deignan, J. E. Murphy and George F. Phillips. Hobson also took along an American flag, to be unfurled at the proper moment, just as the Merrimac was starting her dive toward Davy Jones' locker.

### A Motley Crew.

The flag was never unfurled, for just about come time for the unfurling, there were shot and shell popping all around our hero's ears and there was little room for tradition. Even at the outset, the odds were perhaps against the Merrimac's ever getting to the narrow part of the channel. She had to steam right under the nose of the Morro Castle fortification and the great battery behind it. The Spanish gunners' aim was notoriously rotten, but at such close range!

A weird looking crew they were as the collier got under way at 1:30 a. m., June 4, 1898. Their apparel consisted of long underwear, two pairs of socks each, life preservers, cartridge belts and revolvers. Just as if a Hollywood scenarist had written it, there popped from nowhere the inevitable stowaway. It was Clausen, who had not been chosen, but came of his own accord. It was a brave gesture and Hobson, after reprimanding him, permitted him to continue.

Hobson's plan was to cruise to within 2,000 yards of the channel, then order full speed ahead (for here they were almost certain to be discovered and fired upon) until there were only 200 yards left to go. Here the engines would be shut off and the Merrimac allowed to coast into the channel, where it would be sunk. Any of the crew who survived the sinking were to swim to a life boat astern or to a catamaran (raft) brought along as a last resort.

At the outset Hobson, speaking in the dime novel hero fashion which was to characterize his countless public orations in later life, exclaimed, "Charette, lad, we're going to make it tonight! There is no power under heaven that can keep us out the channel!"

He was talking through his hat. The Merrimac proceeded, apparent-

ly without the Spaniards' notice, to 300 yards from the channel, when a Spanish picket boat began firing at its rudder without success. Then the first of the land batteries opened and as the collier neared its objective more batteries joined the firing.

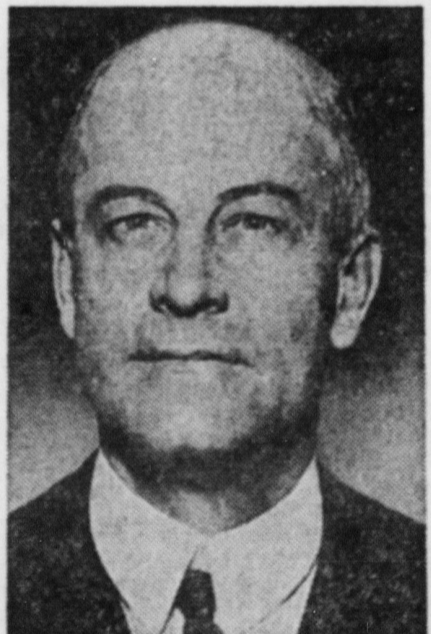
### Aid from the Enemy.

One projectile tore the pilothouse completely off the Merrimac. By some miracle, no one was injured, although Hobson and Deignan were inside it at the time. But the steering gear was gone and they could no longer control the ship. Exploding shells destroyed the connections with the torpedoes and they were unable to sink it where they wanted to.

They began to realize that the Spanish gunners might accomplish their purpose for them, and sure enough, after a few direct hits and after striking a few mines, the Merrimac began to settle to the bottom. But it was not sinking fast enough to go down before it had drifted past the narrow channel where it would have trapped the Spanish fleet.

Unable to pursue his plans for the flag, young Hobson decided to amuse himself by feeling his pulse, and despite the shot and shell he found it normal. "If anything, more phlegmatic than usual," he later wrote.

In another few minutes the Spanish cruiser Reina Mercedes and the destroyer Pluton let fly with



Admiral Hobson Shortly Before His Death.

two torpedoes at such close range that even Spaniards couldn't miss, and down went the Merrimac to a hero's watery grave. The eight men, two of them wounded, went down, too—and came right back up again.

### Rescued by Spanish Admiral.

Their lifeboat had been shattered, so they swam to the catamaran, hanging on with only their heads above water so they were less likely to be spotted. But they were, after an hour and a half in the cold water, found by a launch containing no less a person than Admiral Cervera of the Spanish fleet.

They were treated gently. Cervera himself helped Hobson aboard. The latter and his men were given hot coffee and dry clothes. Hobson was even then melodramatic in speech. "Oh, God," he exclaimed, perhaps twirling his mustaches which curled romantically two inches from either side of his lip, "has life ever gone through such a fire and never a man lost!"

The Spaniards, hearing that not a man was lost, and having rescued only eight, were dumfounded and were doubly dumbfounded when Hobson told them that he had been trying harder than they had to sink the Merrimac. Hobson and his men became heroes, even to the Spaniards, and were treated with every courtesy, although they were imprisoned in Morro Castle. When Cervera visited him in his cell, decked out in an admiral's full dress splendor, Hobson struck an attitude and declared, "All chivalry is not yet dead!"

After a few weeks Hobson and all of his men were traded back to the American navy for the release of an equal number of Spanish prisoners. Their welcome was one which befitted them as heroes, and from that moment until his death, Richmond Pearson Hobson was to bask in the reflected glory of his adventure with the Merrimac. His seven aides were soon given the congressional medal of honor, but Hobson, being an officer, could not receive



Hobson as a Young Officer.

it. He was finally presented with it by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933.

Arriving back in New York, Hobson was mobbed by hero-worshippers. Wherever he went, they sang after him:

"Mr. Hobson, Mr. Hobson, You're a dandy, you're a peach, And the brightest blooming pebble That is shining on the beach."

One woman threw her arms about him and kissed him. This started a craze which greeted him wherever he went, for he was a handsome devil and a hero. One newspaper reported that in Kansas City alone 417 women kissed him at the railroad station. At Topeka it was reported that at least 200 women kissed him, indicating that perhaps the prairies are not so dry, after all. He didn't object much.

### Hobson Becomes Reformer.

But women soon began forgetting to kiss him, and the newspapers began to forget he existed. After rising rapidly in the ranks of the navy, his eyes went bad while he was serving in China. He applied for retirement on a pension, but did not get it, so resigned from the service.

Here began the second phase of his life. He became a crusader in earnest, first to make America mistress of the seas by getting congress to appropriate funds for a navy equal to the combined total of all the other navies in the world. He used as his principal excuse the charge that Japan was preparing to attack us, and was one of the first to bring up the Japanese war scare, trying to get both political parties to acknowledge it in their platforms in 1912. He was exquisitely vague in the evidence he presented, and prone to exaggeration as he was in later campaigns against the demon rum and the drug evil. He made over 1,000 speeches in behalf of his naval building program.

He was continually worrying congress for legislation prohibiting the sale of alcohol, and as a representative from Alabama, he was the first to introduce a prohibition amendment into congress. He soon became the most prominent figure in the prohibition drive. He told congress, "I cannot look upon the saloon otherwise than as an assassin" and "the result of all averages and estimates known showed it (alcohol) to be the greatest single cause of death."

### Congress Turns Him Down.

Once the prohibition amendment was passed, Admiral Hobson took up "dope"—that is, he took up the fight against the drug evil. He asserted that there were a million addicts, many of them children. He tried to have congress print and distribute 50,000,000 copies of a pamphlet warning children of the unutterable tortures that might await them if ever they took the invitation of a stranger to "eat, drink or sniff" anything. A federal expert, called in, testified that there were at the very most, 150,000 addicts in the country. Practically none of them children. He testified:

"I think the direct effect of the article would be to create a certain number of cases of severe neurosis and insanity and a certain number of cases of addiction by reason of the psychopath will want this new sensation . . . Some of the statements about the number of addicts are simply absurd; the opium does not exist to supply them."

Congress refused to print the pamphlet.

But Admiral Hobson continued his crusading, and at the time of his death from a heart attack on March 16, 1937, at the age of sixty-six, he was still starting associations to prohibit something or other, or to secure some sort of legislation. Among them were the International Narcotic Education association, the World Conference on Narcotic Education, the World Narcotic Defense association, the Public Welfare association (and Americanism Clearing House), and if that one doesn't stop you, the Constitutional Democracy association.

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Hello everybody

## "Skirmish Line"

By FLOYD GIBBONS

TODAY'S Distinguished Adventurer, boys and girls, is Charles Levine of New York city, an old soldier, and a veteran of the Philippine campaign. Charley has an army citation for gallantry in action—and here's how he won it.

It was the night of January 22, 1913, and word had come to the army barracks at Jolo that a Moro stronghold had been located eighteen miles in the interior. Charley Levine's outfit—Troop H, Eighth Cavalry—augmented by two companies of Philippine scouts and one company of native constabulary, started out after the insurgents. With them went a "jackass battery" consisting of one three-inch mountain gun hitched to four balking mules, and Charley was one of twelve men assigned to that battery.

All night long they forced their way through matted jungle. At daybreak they were in sight of the Moro retreat—a rectangular trench, surrounded by a wall of bamboo palings, covered over with a thick matting of cogon grass, and stocked with enough food and supplies and ammunition to withstand a long siege.

The Skirmishers Went Too Far. There was no time for rest. The Moros espied the cavalymen and discharged a blast of rifle fire. The Americans set up their mountain gun on a knoll five hundred feet away and let loose a rain of shell-fire as the rest of the men deployed in a long skirmish line and advanced on the fort.

The skirmishers moved on—the mountain gun shooting over their heads. Then, suddenly, the lieutenant in charge of the gun shouted, "Hold it, boys. THEY'VE GONE TOO FAR." The skirmishers, almost to the fort now, had advanced into the range of fire of their own artillery.

The bombardment ceased. "Somebody will have to go down there and tell them to fall back," the lieutenant snapped. A man was sent down with the message. "We watched him plunge into the jungle growth and strike off toward the line," says Charley. "Suddenly a lithe brown figure streaked out of the underbrush. A bolo flashed and the messenger crashed into the sea of grass—DECAPITATED. It was over in a moment."

"We gritted our teeth with helpless rage. Another man went forward—to his death. The jungle down there was full of Moros. Still another man went down—and again that macabre performance was repeated."

Charley Took the Suicidal Job. It was sheer murder to send a man down into that Moro infested no-man's-land—sheer suicide to volunteer. But in the meantime the skirmishers on the line were firing blindly at the bamboo walls, exposed to the fusillades of the Moros, while they waited for the mountain gun to open a breach. Something had to be done. Charley and a buddy, Claude Underwood, volunteered to try it together.

"It wasn't much more than three hundred feet to the line," says Charley, but it looked like miles. The tall grass rippled sleepily in the early morning breeze. Ahead of us lay the Moro fort swathed in swirls of gun smoke which rose sinuously in the damp air. Rifles roared and blasted.

"We darted and ducked through the cogon. The crepitation of the grass under our feet—the drowsy rustling of the tall shoots—made us grip our rifles hard and pivot from one side to the other in the direction of the sound. Every movement of the undergrowth looked like a Moro—bolo in hand, waiting to pad out silently behind us and cut off our heads, as they had cut off the heads of the others."

But evidently no one Moro wanted to tackle two men. They got through to the line. The line fell back and once more the gun on the knoll boomed out and sent its shells screaming into the fort. Great gaps yawned in the walls. The fire from the Moros became feebler and feebler.

Surrounded by the Moros. Charley and Claude stayed on the line until the order to charge was sounded. Then they leaped forward with the rest. They stumbled over a muddy creek bottom and swarmed through a gap in the wall. The fort was deserted. The Moros had slipped away—those that remained alive—leaving behind their dead, their supplies and their ammunition. The men started back to the knoll. Mopping their sweaty faces, Charley and Claude turned to follow when—

Out of the jungle came eight Moros, spread fanwise, their bolos poised for their work of decapitation. "We gripped our rifles," says Charley, "and retreated slowly, exchanging glare for glare with the insurgents. A scatter of rifle fire sounded behind us. Cut off! SURROUNDED! 'The creek bottom,' I roared to Underwood. 'Let's run for it!' We ran for that slimy asylum, reaching the creek bed as another burst of gunfire crashed over our heads."

They hugged the floor of the creek, breathing hard. It was their last stand. They peered through the grass, but there was no one in sight. Where were those Moros? Why didn't those birds with the bolos come and finish their deadly work. And where were their own pals? Didn't they see the predicament Claude and Charley were in?

Comrades to the Rescue. The suspense was maddening. They decided to make a break for it—try to shoot their way out. The Moros weren't much good as marksmen. They might make it. Another crash of rifle fire, and Charley started to get up. An anxious voice yelled: "Get down, Charlie. Stay down, Claude." And Charley says that for the next ten seconds you couldn't have slipped a cigarette paper between him and the ground.

Another volley or two and it was all over. The rifle fire had come from the Americans, who had seen those eight bolo-swinging Moros and were trying to drive them off by shooting over Claude's and Charley's heads. Ducking into the creek had saved both their lives, because it gave their buddies a chance to shoot over them and drive off the enemy.

Twenty years later, almost to a day, Charley Levine received the army's silver star citation—"for gallantry in action against hostile Moros at Jolo, Philippine Islands, January 22, 1913."

## Napoleon Chose Grave on the Island of St. Helena

Jamestown, Island of St. Helena, is the town and countryside where Napoleon spent an exile of six years. Longwood, the house where Napoleon lived, is a long one-story building with a peaked roof, high enough for attic bedrooms for servants. The house is partly of mortar and is as it was when the deposed emperor of France lived there, notes a writer in the Washington Post.

In this house Napoleon was virtually a prisoner, guarded night and day. He was allowed walks about the countryside, but if he strayed too far an alarm bell rang out, calling him back.

During one of his rambles Napoleon came upon a spring beneath a great cypress tree which overlooked a peaceful valley. Many times he returned to the place. He grew to love the spot and finally asked that when death came that he might be buried there. Napoleon died on May 5, 1821, and was buried in the space which is surrounded by an iron fence. The body was removed to Paris October 15, 1840. It is related that on the last page of Napoleon's copybook, used when he was a schoolboy in Corsica, where he was born, these words are written in his own handwriting: "St. Helena, an island in the South Atlantic; British possession." St. Helena lies 1,200 miles west of the coast of Angola, Africa, and about twice this distance east of Brazil. It is in practically the same latitude as Mozambique.

## Household Questions

Date Kisses — Thirty stoned dates, one cup almonds, white one egg, one cup powdered sugar. Chop dates; blanch almonds and cut into long strips. Beat egg very stiff, add sugar, dates and almonds. Drop in buttered tins with teaspoon and bake in quick oven.

To keep the crease in men's trousers, turn them inside out and soap down the crease with a piece of dry soap, then turn back to the right side and press, using a damp cloth. The crease will remain for a long time.

If you store eggs with the small ends down they will keep better.

If sirup for hotcakes is heated before serving it brings out the flavor of the sirup and does not chill the hotcakes.

When the frying pan becomes slightly burnt, drop a raw peeled potato into the pan for a few minutes. Then remove it, and all traces of burning will have disappeared.

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