

FICTION

Frank Gee Patchin

The Battleship Boys at Sea

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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The Battleship Boys at Sea

OR

Two Apprentices in Uncle Sam's Navy

By

FRANK GEE PATCHIN

Author of The Battleship Boys' First Step Upward,
The Pony Rider Boys Series, Etc.

Illustrated

PHILADELPHIA

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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CHAPTER I--THE LURE OF THE BATTLESHIP

"That must be the place over there, Sam."

"Where?"

"Just across the street on the next block. I see something in front of the building that looks like the picture we saw in the post office at home."

Dan Davis turned to a passing policeman and, respectfully touching his hat, asked:

"Will you tell us, sir, where we may find the United States Navy recruiting station?"

The policeman pointed to the building in front of which Dan's eyes had caught sight of a highly colored lithograph.

"Thank you, sir. Come on, Sam; I was right. That is the place we are looking for. See that flag up there in the third story window? That's the flag you and I are going to serve under if we are lucky enough to be accepted."

Sam Hickey nodded and started after his companion across the street. A moment later the lads stood before the picture that had attracted their attention. In the foreground of the picture stood a sailor clad in the uniform of a seaman in Uncle Sam's Navy, while on beyond him, in the distant background, lay a white battleship, the Stars and Stripes floating from her after staff, a line of signal flags fluttering from the signal halyard just aft of the battleship's navigating bridge. Palm trees and similar foliage showed it to be a tropical scene.

For several moments the lads stood gazing on the picture with fascinated interest. Each seemed unable to withdraw his gaze from it. At last, with a deep sigh, Dan turned his shining eyes upon his young companion.

"Isn't it beautiful, Sam?" he breathed.

"What, the sailor?"

"I was not thinking of the sailor; I was thinking of the ship--the battleship--and that Flag floating there, the most beautiful Flag in the world. At least I guess it must be. I've never seen any of the other flags, except in pictures, but that one is handsome enough for me. Shall we go upstairs to the recruiting office now?"

"Don't be in a hurry," objected Sam. "I want to look at the picture some more."

"We can do that afterwards. The first thing is to see whether we shall be able to enlist. This letter that I got from the station says we have to be examined, though I don't know just what sort of examination they will give us."

Sam Hickey still lingered.

"Are you coming, Sam?"

"No."

"Not coming?"

"No; I've changed my mind."

"I don't understand," rejoined Dan, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"I guess I do not want to enlist. I think I shall go back home to Piedmont."

"Look here, Sam Hickey, you will do nothing of the sort! We came down here to enlist in the Navy and that is exactly what we are going to do, providing they will have us. You say you are going back home. How do you expect to get there?"

"The way we came--on a train, of course."

Dan smiled grimly.

"I guess not. You forget that we have no money left--that is, not more than enough with which to buy one more meal."

"I can walk," grumbled Sam.

"No, you cannot. We are three hundred miles from Piedmont. Why do you wish to back out at this late hour? You were so anxious to enlist, and now you are talking the other way. Why?"

"I've changed my mind; that's all."

Dan grasped his companion firmly by the arm.

"You come along with me! You have changed your mind too late this time."

Sam hesitated, then reluctantly accompanied his companion up the stairs. A few moments later, they were knocking at the door of the recruiting office.

Sam Hickey felt a strong inclination to bolt, and no doubt he would have done so had it not been for the firm grip on

his arm. He ran one hand nervously through his shock of red hair, shifted his weight from one foot to the other and muttered something that was unintelligible to his companion.

But Dan's ears were keenly alert for the response to his summons, and he straightened up ever so little as he heard footsteps approaching the door.

It had been the dream of these two young American boys for many months to join the Navy. They had talked and talked of the day when they should have arrived at the age that permitted them to make application for admission to the service. A few weeks before reaching the legal age, which is seventeen, each had received a letter from a recruiting station in New York City pointing out the advantages that the service offers to young Americans.

Correspondence had been immediately opened with the recruiting office, with the result that the lads made their preparations to go directly to New York City and present themselves at the recruiting station.

Dan, who lived with his widowed mother, was a clerk in the general store in his home town; while Sam, an orphan, had been serving an apprenticeship in a small machine shop. It had been therefore no small effort for the boys to get together enough money for their expenses to the metropolis; and, as already stated, they were now practically at the end of their resources. But this did not discourage them.

"If we are rejected we shall be able to find something to do in New York that will let us earn enough money to take us back home," Dan had declared resolutely, his pale face lighting up, his eyes sparkling with purpose and determination.

"Yes; I had just as lief work in New York as in Piedmont," agreed Sam.

"I hope, Sam, we shall have to do neither."

The door was thrown open abruptly, and the boys found themselves confronted by a middle-aged man clad in a blue suit. On the right sleeve he wore three bright red chevrons enclosing a white pilot wheel, surmounted by a white eagle, showing that he was a quartermaster in the United States Navy.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded rather brusquely.

"We wish to join the Navy, sir," answered Dan firmly.

The quartermaster surveyed the lads keenly.

"Come inside," he said.

The boys entered the waiting room, where they were directed to seat themselves at a table. A printed blank form was placed before each.

"Fill out those applications," directed the petty officer who had admitted them. "If your answers to the questions are satisfactory you will be asked some further questions; then we shall have you examined."

Having spent three years in high school, after finishing at the grammar school, the boys found themselves well able to fill out the application blanks without having to ask questions of the quartermaster. This they did with much care, giving such facts about themselves as the application blank demanded.

Sam nudged his companion.

"See that man sitting over there to the left of you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I think he must be a general or something of the sort."

"Humph! There's only one general in the Navy, and he is in the Marine Corps," answered Dan reprovingly. "I know what that officer is."

"What is he, then, if you know so much?"

"He is a commander."

"How do you know?"

"I know by the three gold stripes on his sleeve. If he had two and a half stripes there he would be a lieutenant-commander. If he had four he would be a captain."

Sam looked incredulous.

"How do you happen to know all about that?"

"I read about it in a dictionary. They were all pictured out there. I know a lot more of them, too, only I'm too busy to tell you about them now. Have you finished filling out your blank?"

"Not quite."

"Then you had better get busy. If we take too much time it *may* count against us. I don't know about it for sure."

For several minutes thereafter the lads wrote industriously. Dan was the first to lay down his pen, waiting in silence for his companion to finish, which Sam did shortly afterwards.

"What shall we do now?" questioned Sam, glancing up into the face of his friend.

"I do not know. Give me your paper and I will hand both to the officer over there."

Dan stepped to the commander's desk, handing the applications to him.

"What's this?" demanded the commander sharply.

"They are our applications, sir."

"Give them to the quartermaster."

"Yes, sir," answered Dan respectfully, turning away. As he did so, the eyes of the commander were fixed inquiringly upon him.

"That is a likely looking lad," muttered the officer. "In fact, they both look like excellent material--good, clean-cut American boys--just the sort of material the United States Navy is looking for."

In the meantime Dan had stepped to the door through which he had observed the petty officer who had first greeted them, and walked towards him.

"Here are our papers, sir. What are we to do next?"

"Go back and sit down. I'll tell you when we want you."

The quartermaster seated himself at a desk, where he went over the applications carefully. He looked them over a second time, nodded approvingly, then glanced up quickly at the flushed, expectant faces of the two lads.

"You men come with me," he said, rising.

"He called us 'men.' Did you hear it? I guess we are, all right," whispered Sam.

The quartermaster conducted them into an adjoining room, where they were turned over to the examining surgeon, who, after scanning their applications, began asking them pointed questions about their parents and their life. In fact, he asked more questions than either lad knew how to answer, for the inquiry went back more years than they had lived.

The examination lasted fully an hour, after which the lads were directed to return to the room where they had filled out their applications.

"He knows more about me than I ever thought there was to know," confided Sam to his companion.

Just then the surgeon came hurrying in. He laid their applications on the desk before the commander, engaging in earnest conversation with that officer.

"I think they are going to turn us out," whispered Dan.

"I hope they do," grumbled Sam, brushing a hand across his freckled cheek. "I don't see why they have to go through all this rigmarole. Reminds me of the time they tried a fellow up in our place for stealing a yearling heifer."

"It is well worth the rigmarole if we can get in," answered Dan, ignoring the comparison. "I do not care how much they put us through. And, besides, it proves that everybody cannot get into Uncle Sam's Navy. A fellow has got to be a real man if he wants to be a jackie these days," added Dan somewhat proudly. "I wonder what they are talking about?"

"We'll know in a minute. There comes that quartermaster fellow," answered Sam.

The lads rose as he stepped up to them.

"Have we passed?" questioned Dan, unable to repress his anxiety.

"Your examination has been satisfactory, but the commander desires to speak with you. That is the commander at the roll top desk yonder. Step over, but be very respectful. Remember, he is an officer in the United States Navy, and----"

"We are not likely to forget that we are young gentlemen, sir," interrupted Dan, flushing slightly.

The lads walked over to the commander's desk, where Dan, with heels together, made a correct military salute, raising the right hand smartly till the tip of the forefinger touched the forehead just above the right eye, then dropping the arm smartly to his side.

Sam did the same, but rather more clumsily.

Instantly the commander's right hand went up in a return salute, while the faces of the boys flushed rosy red.

"You have had some previous military instruction?" asked the commander, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Nothing very much, sir," replied Dan. "We belong to the village fire company at home--that is all."

The commander smiled.

"You are a pair of very likely lads."

"Have we passed, sir?"

"You have."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" breathed Dan, unable to conceal his delight.

"Then--then we are in the Navy?" stammered Sam.

"Not quite. You will be, very soon, providing you have fulfilled all the requirements."

"What are we to do?"

"Have you the consent--the written consent--of your parents?"

"Yes, sir. That is, I have my mother's consent. My friend, Sam, here, has no parents."

"Has he a guardian?"

"Yes, sir."

"And has his guardian given his written consent also?"

"He has, sir."

"Let me have both of them."

The papers were handed to the commander, who perused them carefully.

"How did you lads chance to come so well prepared?"

"We had written to find out, so that we might not be disappointed when we got here. We could not afford to make the trip back home, so we did what we could before coming on."

"You did well. Young men, I am proud to see lads of your type entering the service. I predict for you both a rapid rise. You will, of course, meet with hardships. These are a part of the life, but it is a noble career, and if you are the lads I believe you to be you will overcome all these things. You have in you the making of splendid men, and the United States Navy will surely bring out every dormant good quality that you may possess."

"Thank you, sir; we shall do our best," answered Dan.

"I am sure of that."

"What are we to do now, if it is proper to ask?"

"You will be furnished with transportation to Newport, R. I., where you will go to-night. You will enter the apprentice training school there. After a course of three months, if qualified, you will be given an assignment on one of the ships of the fleet. You understand, you will enter the training school as apprentices. While there you will receive a salary of seventeen dollars and sixty cents a month. Your board and lodging, of course, will be furnished by the government, as will your uniforms and equipment."

"Thank you, sir," reiterated Dan.

The commander then administered the oath of allegiance to the lads in slow, impressive tones, while they stood rigidly at attention, their eyes fixed upon his.

"You will now report to the quartermaster," announced the commander after the lads had subscribed to the oath. "I shall expect to hear good reports from you, my lads." He cordially extended a hand to each, much to the amazement of the quartermaster, who never had seen his commander do that to an apprentice before.

The remaining details were disposed of in a very few minutes thereafter, and the boys made their way downstairs, out into the street, light-hearted and happy.

"Look!" cried Dan, pointing off to the East River.

"What is it?"

"It's a war ship. I wonder which one it is. Can you tell me, sir, what ship that is?" asked Dan of a passer-by.

"That is the United States battleship 'Idaho,'" was the answer.

"I wonder if we ever will be placed on a ship like that," mused Dan, gazing in fascinated interest at the slow-moving vessel as she plowed her way under the Brooklyn bridge, heading for the open sea.

Dan Davis drew a long sigh.

"Come," he said.

"Where?"

"Somewhere where we can spend our last fifty cents for a meal. That will be the last meal we shall have until we get to Newport. Then we will look about some. We have several hours before the boat leaves. We shall probably get lost the first thing we do, but we have plenty of time in which to find ourselves," added Dan, with a short laugh.

Naturally, the ships that lined one side of South Street, along which they were strolling, held the greatest interest for them. There were sailing ships from the four quarters of the globe, tramp steamers, coasters from southern ports, interspersed with ferry boats and tug boats of every size and class. There was such a confusion of craft that the boys could scarcely make out one from the other.

They had reached a cross street, up which they decided to turn, having learned that it would lead them to Broadway, which thoroughfare they were anxious to see, when there occurred an interruption that changed their plans entirely for the time being.

Sam had paused beside a little two-wheeled cart to purchase an apple from an old woman who had asked him to buy. He had just handed over his nickel for the apple when a crowd of firemen from a tramp steamer came rolling up the street, the grime of the stoke hole still on their faces.

Freed from the restraint of their floating prison, the men were hilarious and bent on mischief. But neither of the lads

observed them, nor did they hear the shouts and songs of the stokers above the roar of the traffic in the busy street.

The first intimation the boys had that trouble was abroad was when a hulking stoker let fly a heavily booted foot at the little apple wagon.

His aim was true. Up shot the wagon, apples flying in all directions, showering over the heads of the lads and into the muddy gutter. The apple wagon itself turned bottom upward, landing fairly on the head of the aged woman, carrying her down with it, and flattening her in the gutter amid the ruin of her precious wares.

Sam wheeled like a flash. The freckles on his now pale face seemed to stand out like scars.

Without an instant's hesitation he let go a fist.

It caught the stoker fairly on the side of the jaw. The fellow dropped as if he had been shot, his face burrowing in the mud of the gutter, where he lay motionless for a few seconds.

So astonished were his companions that for the moment they stood gaping. Then the humor of the situation seemed to strike them all at once. All hands broke out into a roar of mirth. That a slender lad should have put out one of their number was to them a huge joke.

Just as soon as he got over his bewilderment at having been so easily handled by a boy, the stoker got to his feet.

He did not immediately follow up his intention of soundly trouncing that forward youngster. This for the very simple reason that the stoker had gone down on his face in the mud. Now he held more than a mouthful of that plastic stuff. Growling, the stoker thrust two fingers of one hand into his mouth, trying to force the sticky mess out.

"Fine, isn't it?" jeered Sam, cocking his head on one side and leering comically.

"What?" queried one of the stoker's own mates, for the one who had just struggled to his feet could not speak.

"Mud pies, of course," grinned Sam. "Healthful, nourishing and great food, for they make you think and work. But only a hog would gulp down a mouthful like that."

"I'll--whoof--make you eat some--ugh!--of that--br-r-r!--blamed--waugh!--mud pie--gr-r-r!--o' your'n!" raged the humiliated stoker as he pawed out the last remnants of that muddy mouthful.

Of a sudden the stoker, crouching low, made a vengeful bolt forward. But he did not catch Sam Hickey unawares. That young man dodged, then landed a second and harder blow on the fellow's jaw. This time Mr. Stoker struck the mud puddle, again face downward, with a force that made the man fairly bury his face in the ooze.

"Last call to the dining car!" yelled Sam, dancing about. "Gone back for a second helping of mud pie! Wow, but it's good!"

This time the stoker did not regain his feet quite so soon. He had measured his full length in the gutter again, where he lay stretched out, none of his companions making an effort to assist their fallen shipmate nor to avenge the blow that had laid him low.

"Right hot off the bat," jeered the stokers.

The fallen man was making desperate efforts to pull himself together when a policeman laid a heavy hand on Sam Hickey's collar.

"That's the time I caught you in the act, young man. You come with me!" commanded the officer sternly.

"You leggo of me! I'll do nothing of the sort," retorted the lad belligerently, struggling to free himself, surprised at his inability to throw off the officer's grip. It was Sam's first experience with a New York policeman.

"Yes, let the kid go," shouted the crowd. "He's all right. He is a winner, even if he did hand it out to a shipmate."

Dan edged his way around in front of the policeman. He saw that Sam's lips were set tight and knew that this meant trouble.

"Take it easy, Sam," warned Dan in a low tone. "Officer, this boy has done nothing worse than to punish a ruffian. It is the other man whom you ought to arrest, if anyone."

"What's this you say? Don't you dare interfere with an officer, young man, or in you go!"

"I am not interfering, sir."

"You are, but you'd better not."

"I am just trying to explain. That fellow there, picking himself up from the ground, kicked the old apple woman's wagon into the air. See, she's just crawling out from under it now. I should not be surprised if she were hurt. Pretty much all her wares are spoiled, as you can see for yourself."

"He did----"

"My friend Sam punched the fellow, but the man deserved it. I should have done it myself if he had not, though I am sure I could not have done so thorough a job."

"You--you say the stoker there kicked the old woman's cart over?" questioned the policeman.

"Yes, sir."

"And your friend handed him one for it?"

"*Two* of them."

"And who are you fellows, anyway?"

Dan gave the officer their names and addresses.

"What are you doing here?"

"We are sailors in the United States Navy," answered Dan proudly. "We are on our way to the training station at Newport. You had better not detain us, or there may be trouble."

The policeman grinned broadly.

"Beat it, then," he commanded, giving Sam a sudden shove that excited that young man's anger somewhat. "Get out of here both of you, before I run you in for disturbing the peace. Here, you stokers, you clear out, too, and don't you let me catch you raising any more rows on my beat or your ship will sail without you when she goes out again. Off with you!"

While all this had been happening, the old apple woman had been busily engaged in gathering her stock in trade. The loss of a few dozen apples would have been serious to her. But now she hobbled toward Hickey, resting a withered hand on his coat sleeve.

"I--I don't know how to thank you, young man," she quavered.

"I'm glad you don't, ma'am," answered Sam, uncovering as quickly as though the little old woman had been an admiral's wife. "The thanks of the ladies always embarrass me, ma'am. But I'm glad I settled your bill against that sea-going miner."

Now the two brand-new fighting men of the Navy edged quickly away from the crowd that was growing every instant.

"Come on, Sam," urged Dan. "Let's go over and take a look at Broadway," linking his arm within that of his companion and leading him from the scene. "We have begun our fighting career rather early, it strikes me."

"No; I've changed my mind. I don't want to go to Broadway," objected Sam, pulling back.

"What do you wish to do?" demanded Dan suspiciously.

"I want to hang around here and see the fun," answered Hickey.

"Right about face! March!" commanded Dan.

Sam eyed his companion resentfully, then, turning sharply about, fell into a military stride, with his face turned toward Broadway.

CHAPTER II--IN UNCLE SAM'S NAVY

"Do you know where you are going?"

"No, but I shall find out pretty soon, Sam."

Dan Davis paused, pointing off over the beautiful Narragansett Bay to where the cage masts of two big battleships were observable, towering high above a point of land.

"Do you see them?"

"Yes."

"Who knows but we may be on one of those ships in three months from now. I wish we were going there to-day."

The lads were standing on a rise of ground just in front of the executive building of the Newport, R. I., training station. A long, green lawn sloped down to the water's edge where a fleet of cutters belonging to the station, swayed idly at their moorings. On beyond, lay the old "Constitution," fully rigged, a handsome craft despite the fact that more than a hundred years had elapsed since she left the hands of her builders. The boys did not know her name, but they did know that she belonged to another age. To the right, lay the "Cumberland," a full rigged sailing ship; the "Boxer," a barkentine, and some distance from the latter they saw moored to a wharf the "Reina Mercedes," captured during the war with Spain.

Dan's eyes lighted up and his face glowed with pleasure.

"Beautiful!" he breathed.

"It might be if I had some breakfast inside of me," answered Sam Hickey. "We haven't had a thing to eat since we had that plate of ham and eggs in New York yesterday. I'm hungry enough to eat anything."

The hour was still early, and few of the apprentices of the training school were to be seen on the grounds of the station.

"Then come along. We will see whether we can find some one to direct us."

The lads started on again. As they came abreast of the flagstaff from which floated the Stars and Stripes, Dan halted. Coming to attention he saluted the Flag respectfully.

Sam Hickey grinned, but he did not salute.

"Why do you do that every time?" he questioned.

"Because it is the Flag of our country, Sam. Always salute the Flag whenever you see it. You will find that we shall be expected to do so from this time on."

"You never did that to the Flag in front of the High School at home."

"Perhaps I did not know then," answered Dan, with a smile.

They moved on, gazing about them with the keenest interest. A moment later Dan caught sight of an officer, clad completely in white, approaching them at a brisk pace.

"I'm going to ask him where we should go," said Sam.

"No; let me do that. I am afraid you will make a mess of it," laughed Dan. "Officers are very particular as to how they are addressed. Perhaps I shan't do it right, but I think I know how it ought to be done."

Sam muttered something that his companion did not catch. In fact, Dan was not listening. His eyes were fixed on the dignified figure approaching them. When within eight or ten paces of the officer Dan halted, raising his right hand in salute as he came to attention.

The salute was answered by the officer, who, noting that the boy wished to speak to him, also halted.

"What is it, my lad?" he demanded in a sharp, incisive tone.

"We are new recruits, sir. Will you kindly direct us where to go?"

"When did you get in?"

"This morning."

"From what station?"

"We enlisted at the recruiting office in South Street, New York, sir."

The officer surveyed them inquiringly for a moment. His examination evidently was satisfying, for he nodded approvingly.

"You will go to the detention barracks first."

"Will you kindly tell me where that is, sir?"

"Follow this walk. The detention barracks is the third building on your left."

"Whom shall we ask for, sir?"

"Inquire for Chief Quartermaster Broder, if you do not see him at once. He will probably see you first, however. You had better make haste, for the men are about ready for breakfast there."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," answered Dan, saluting and moving on.

"My, he's so full of dignity it's a wonder he doesn't explode," commented Sam, after they had gone on a few steps.

"He has a right to be dignified," replied Dan.

"How so?"

"He is a captain in the United States Navy. I would rather be that than President of the United States."

"Does he earn as much money as the president does?"

"Oh, no; not by a great many thousand dollars."

"Then me for the presidency," concluded the irrepressible Sam.

"There's the barracks."

A few minutes later the lads presented themselves at the door of the detention barracks. They were met by an officer wearing the insignia of a chief quartermaster.

"Are you Mr. Broder, sir?" asked Dan.

"Yes; who are you?"

"My name is Dan Davis. My companion is Sam Hickey. We enlisted in New York yesterday. We have come to report for instruction."

"Where are your papers?"

The lad presented them.

After reading the papers, the quartermaster turned on his heel.

"Come with me," he said.

The boys were conducted to a bathroom, where they were directed to disrobe and take a shower bath. After the bath, they were once more examined by a surgeon, who pronounced them to be in splendid physical condition.

Sam's face wore a smile. It was all highly amusing to him, but when the quartermaster finally conducted them to another room, where several uniforms were laid out on a table, the boy began to feel a keener interest.

The petty officer glanced over the display of clothes, then picking out two suits, handed them to the lads.

"Put these on," he said, "then report to me."

It did not take the boys long to get into their new white uniforms.

"I wish I had a looking glass," grumbled Sam.

"What for? I can tell you how you look."

"How do I look?"

"Well, barring the freckles, you look as if you might be a jackie some day. But don't stand there with your shoulders slouched forward. Stand up and act as if you were proud of the uniform you are wearing. Here, we haven't put on our leggins yet."

"Leggins? Do we wear those things?"

"Yes. Otherwise we shall be dressed just like the sailors on the war ships."

At that moment the quartermaster entered. He stood surveying them critically.

"What shall we do with our citizen clothes?" asked Dan.

"Leave them. I will have them taken care of. Do you wish them sent to your homes?"

"No, sir; it is not necessary. I presume we shall be permitted to take them aboard ship with us when we leave here?"

"That depends upon what ship you join."

"What are we to do now, sir?"

"In the first place I will instruct you about your clothing. These bags here will answer for your trunks. All your belongings will be kept in them," said the quartermaster, exhibiting two canvas bags, about three feet long, and on which the names of the boys had been stamped with a stencil. "Each piece of clothing must be folded neatly, rolled up tightly and secured with a white cotton stop two inches from the end of the roll."

Sam measured off what he thought to be two inches with his fingers.

"The clothes are to be stowed in the bags in layers of three pieces, each layer at right angles to the one below it."

"What's all that for? Why not stuff them in till the bag's full?" interrupted Sam.

The petty officer fixed him with a stern eye.

"Don't ask unnecessary questions, young man," rebuked the officer, whereat Sam subsided.

"Is there any system, other than what you have spoken of, for stowing the clothes, sir?" questioned Dan respectfully.

"Yes. I'll explain. Place the blue clothes and cap in the bottom of the bag, white clothes and hats next, small bags, socks and other articles on top. Secure the bag with two turns of the lanyard as close down on the contents as possible--this way. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"That will be all for the present. Have you had your breakfast?"

"No, sir, and we're half starved," spoke up Sam Hickey quickly. "I could eat a horse."

"No comments, please. Remember, men, you are now full fledged rookies. You are in the service of the United States Government and you must remember to conduct yourselves accordingly. I will see that you get further instruction after breakfast."

The bugle was blowing the breakfast call at that moment. The quartermaster conducted the lads outside the building and around into another apartment where a group of white-uniformed young fellows were standing about waiting for the command to seat themselves at the tables.

"Fall to!" commanded the officer.

There followed a rattling of dishes and a scraping of feet as the apprentices seated themselves at the long table, each with a keen zest for his morning meal.

CHAPTER III--WHO THREW THE PIE?

The breakfast consisted of creamed chipped beef, potatoes and hot corn bread, topped off with apple pie.

"This looks good to me," muttered Sam Hickey in a low tone, because out of the corners of his eyes he saw the quartermaster observing him attentively.

After they were well started on the meal, the officer left the room in order that the new boys might get acquainted, which would not be likely as long as he was in the room.

"Hullo, red-head!" greeted an apprentice across the table from Sam. "What might be your name?"

"It might be 'most anything, only it isn't. I'm Sam Hickey; who are you?"

"Louis Flink. Where you from?"

"Piedmont. Where do you live when you are at home?"

"Pennsylvania."

"Then you must be a Pennsylvania Dutchman. I've heard of that kind before, but you're the first one I ever saw."

There was a titter at this, and Flink's dark face flushed.

"Sam, you shouldn't have said that," warned Dan. "It was not very courteous."

"Neither is he. I don't like him."

"I'll lick you for that when we get outside," growled Flink. "You're too fresh."

Sam was about to make a retort when Dan pinched him sharply.

"Keep still. You will get into trouble."

Sam's freckles were standing out again and his shock of red hair seemed to be rising higher.

"He--he threatened me--he gave me a dare. I'll make him wish he were back in Pennsylvania," protested Sam belligerently.

"Take my advice and do nothing of the sort. You forget that everything we do now will count for or against us. It won't do to start in on our career with bad conduct marks against us."

"I don't care; I---"

Dan's hand closed firmly over the arm of his companion. Sam twisted angrily, but gradually he regained control of himself. He did not look toward the scowling face of Flink, not daring to trust himself to do so.

Dan's grip relaxed. The two lads bent over their plates and resumed their interrupted meal.

"Look out!" sang out a voice.

Dan's head was inclined slightly toward that of his companion, he being about to make some remark to Sam. Both lads glanced up quickly their ears caught the warning.

"Duck it!" came the second warning. But the warning was too late.

Smack!

Something hit Dan Davis squarely in the face, filling mouth, eyes and nostrils. He could not see a thing.

Sam Hickey started to his feet with an angry growl.

Smack!

Something smote him on the face with the same result.

A piece of pie had been hurled at Sam, but the first piece had missed him, Dan catching the full force of it. The second shot had been delivered with better aim, and Sam that time got the pie that was intended for him.

"Who did that?" demanded Dan, wiping the sticky stuff from his eyes and glaring about.

About that time Sam had succeeded in freeing his own eyes. His face was pale and the patches of freckles stood out in bold relief.

"You threw that pie, Flink."

"Yes; he threw the pie," answered a chorus of voices.

"Never mind; you need not tell me about it, fellows. I'll take care of Mr. Flink. I'll hand him back as good as he sent, and it will not be pie either."

Sam, whom Dan had pulled back into his chair, started to rise again.

"Look out! Here comes an officer," warned a boy sitting on the other side of him.

Sam sank back into his chair and began mopping the remnants of the pie from his face, while Dan was doing the same for himself.

"Not a word," whispered Dan warningly.

The quartermaster was standing in the doorway, eyeing the group of rookies sternly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

No one answered. All hands bent over their plates.

"Attention!"

The lads, after an instant's hesitation, straggled to their feet. That is, all did save Sam Hickey. Sam coolly helped himself to another chunk of hot corn bread, which he proceeded to eat.

"Attention!"

The eyes of the quartermaster were fixed upon him, but Sam did not move.

The officer walked over and touched the lad on the shoulder. Sam looked up in well-feigned surprise.

"Did you not hear my command?"

"Oh, talking to me, were you?" questioned the boy innocently.

"Do you understand the meaning of 'Attention'?"

"I suppose it means to pay attention."

"It means that you are to come to attention. If you are sitting, when the command is given, you are to rise instantly and come to attention."

"Yes, sir."

There was a broad grin on the faces of all the apprentices, save that of the dark-faced Louis Flink. His head was slouched forward and he was peering up at the officer, a resentful scowl on his face.

"Attention!"

This time Sam Hickey got to his feet, wiped his face and mouth with his handkerchief, and slowly came to attention.

"Next time you will be put on extra duty," announced the officer. "I will excuse you this time, as you do not understand the regulations thoroughly. Now what has been going on here?"

There was silence in the mess hall.

"Something has been thrown--some one has been throwing food. I see remnants of it on the floor there," the officer added, pointing accusingly.

Sam turned, looking at the spot indicated as if in surprise.

"Attention! Keep your eyes to the front. If I am not----"

"It was pie," piped a voice at the lower end of the table.

"Pie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Some one threw it?"

"Yes, sir."

"At whom?"

The lad, a very young recruit, pointed to Sam and Dan. There were traces of pie on Dan's cheeks still.

Dan had given the young recruit a warning glance, whereat the lad checked himself and volunteered no further information.

"Davis, is this true?" demanded the quartermaster sternly.

"Yes, sir."

"One of these men threw a piece of pie at you?"

"A piece of pie hit me in the face. There were two pieces thrown."

"Both at you?"

"I think not."

"At whom, then?"

"One struck me in the face and the other hit my friend Sam, sir."

"You know who threw the pie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Name him."

Dan was silent.

"Point out the man who did it."

"Sir, I would rather not," answered Dan, eyeing the officer steadily, but with nothing of disrespect in his gaze.

"I repeat, point out the man."

"Sir, I have no wish to inform on one of my shipmates. I wish you would not press the question, sir. I wish to obey orders strictly, but I cannot be a sneak. Perhaps the pie was thrown in a spirit of fun. I am sure the man who threw it is sorry for his act now, and then there was no harm done, except that my uniform is slightly soiled."

The quartermaster turned to Sam Hickey. For a moment he eyed the freckled-faced boy steadily. Sam did not quail. He returned the quartermaster's gaze steadily.

"You were hit also?"

"Yes, sir."

"With the same piece?"

"No, sir; with a second piece."

"Then the first one must have been intended for you," decided the officer shrewdly.

"I think it was, sir, but it was not a good shot. I could beat that myself."

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know who threw the pie?"

"I could guess, though I didn't see much of anything when the pie hit me. I got a mouthful, too."

"Who threw it?"

Sam hesitated, shifted his weight from one foot to the other, twisting about as if seeking some means of escape from his present position.

"I can't tell you, sir," he said in a low, determined voice.

"You mean you will not?"

"I mean, sir, that I would rather not. If you will excuse me I'll take care of the fellow who struck me with the apple pie, all in good time. He won't use my face for a target another time, after I get through with him."

The apprentices, forgetful of discipline, burst out into a roar of laughter.

CHAPTER IV--PIPING UP HAMMOCKS

The quartermaster eyed the two boys sternly for a moment. He did not ask any of the other men who had thrown the pie.

"Carry on!" he commanded, the suspicion of a smile playing about the corners of his mouth. But he hid the smile from them by passing a hand over his mouth.

No one moved in obedience to his command.

"When I say 'Carry on,' it means that you are to resume whatever you were doing at the time attention was commanded. In this instance you were at your breakfasts. Continue it. Carry on!"

The boys sat down to finish their breakfasts which now proceeded without further interruption.

"I've changed my mind," Sam informed his companion in a low tone.

"How so?"

"I am going to quit."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want to be a jackie."

"You already are one--that is you are a rookie, which is practically the same thing. We shall be jackies in twelve weeks if we have good luck."

"I won't. I won't be here then."

"Where will you be?"

"Back in Piedmont."

"Look here, Sam Hickey, what do you propose to do?" demanded Dan.

"Go home; that's what I propose to do."

"Do you know what would happen to you were you to do a thing like that?"

"Nothing very much, I guess."

"Were you to leave now, you would be a deserter. You would be arrested and sent to prison. And that is not all."

"Go on; what else?"

"You would be disgraced for life. Why do you even think of doing a thing like that?"

"Well, I reckoned I'd like to lick that Pennsylvania Dutchman and then go back home. They'd probably make a fuss about it here, if I give him what he deserves," replied Sam slowly.

"I should say they would. Forget it. Do your duty. Have too much respect for the Flag under which you are serving, to disgrace it by doing any such foolish thing as you propose. There goes a bugle. It must be some sort of command for us."

It was.

"Attention!" commanded the officer.

The men rose from their seats.

"Those whose names I call will fall in with bags and equipment and march to barracks A."

He then called off the names of the apprentices who were to leave the detention barracks, Sam and Dan's names being among them. This done, the boys gathered their bags and falling into line started off across the grounds, led by the officer.

Barracks A was to be their quarters for the next three weeks. Here, they were turned over to another quartermaster, who proceeded to instruct them in their duties.

To each man he assigned a billet, that is a place where he should sling his hammock each night before he turned in, for the lads were to live just as they would when aboard ship.

The hammocks were made of canvas, and were suspended from hooks in the ceiling, so high up that a person could walk under the hammocks by stooping slightly.

"Each of you," said the instructor, "will be expected to sling his hammock every night and lash it in the morning. If you will observe me I will show you how it is done."

The apprentices gathered about.

"You first hook the ring of the clews to the hammock hook; then pass each outer nettle from out inwards through the eyelet on its own side of the hammock. Square the two nettles and take a half hitch with each. Pass the remaining nettles in the same manner, extending the end of each through the hitch, following it toward the center. Sling the other end in the same manner. Is that clear?"

"Yes, I think so," answered Dan rather doubtfully.

"How about you, Hickey?"

"Maybe I could do it, now that I've seen you go through the motions, sir, but I couldn't tell a fellow how to do it to save my life."

The apprentices grinned broadly.

"Attention! Now, in the morning, to lash the hammocks, you place the mattress squarely in it, fold the blanket, placing it in lengthwise and roll it up taut. Lash with seven marline turns. Turn the hammock over several times to twist the clews, unhook one end at a time and tuck the clews under the lashing and haul them taut. When the reveille is sounded hammocks must be stowed within fifteen minutes. Is that clear, Hickey?"

"Clear as mud--sir," added Sam, flushing hotly as he realized a moment later that he had said something that might bring a rebuke upon him.

It did. The quartermaster read him a stern lecture on the necessity for speaking in a respectful manner at all times. Sam was told that a direct question called for a direct answer, "without any trimmings."

"I seem to be getting all that's coming to me," whispered the boy to his companion.

"You talk too much; that's your worst fault, and the one that is likely to get you into trouble if you don't look out."

"I didn't talk when the other officer was trying to make me tell who smashed me with the pie, did I?"

"No; you showed yourself to be a man in that case, Sam. Sh-h-h! He's speaking to you."

"Sir?"

"You will now try the hammock."

"How do you mean, sir?" questioned Sam.

"Get in it."

"Yes, sir; where's the ladder?"

"Ladder?" exploded the quartermaster.

"Sure! You don't think I can get into that thing without using a ladder, do you?"

"We do not use ladders. Watch carefully. I will show you how it is done. This is the way you will have to turn in all the time that you are in the Navy."

The officer reached up, grasping the rope that held the hammock to the hooks above. With an ease born of long experience he lifted himself clear of the floor, curled his body upward and placed himself on his back in the hammock without the least apparent effort. The officer got out of the hammock by a reverse movement and with the same ease.

"Did you see how it was done?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Think you can get in now?"

"I can make a bluff at it--sir."

"Answer 'yes' or 'no' sir."

"No, sir."

"Try it."

Sam took hold of the rope as he had seen his instructor do, glanced up at the spot where he was expected to place himself, then set his teeth tightly together. He sought to draw himself up slowly, after the manner that he had been shown, but somehow, strong as he was, his feet refused to leave the floor.

Sam let go, wiping the perspiration from his brow, and gripped the rope again. This time he made a leap. His head hit the ceiling and he sat down on the floor heavily.

"Ouch!" howled Sam, bringing a laugh from his companions and a smile to the face of the instructor.

"Attention! You will get the knack after a little. Did you hurt your head?"

"No--sir," answered Sam, "but I think I made a dent in the roof."

"Carry on again."

The apprentice gripped the rope rather more cautiously this time, measured his distance, and with head well inclined forward, so that he might not hit the ceiling again, he gave a mighty leap.

Sam did not stop when he reached the hammock, however. He kept right on. The hammock turned over, spilling the

bedding and mattress out. But this was not all that had happened. Hickey had lost his grip on the rope. The result was that he struck the floor on the other side, flat on his back.

The floor was of cement, and the shock of the fall was severe. Sam managed to save his head, however, and sat up rubbing himself, red of face and thoroughly disgusted.

"Clumsy!" complained the officer.

"Yes, sir; but you see I've never had to go to bed that way before."

"Try it again."

"If it's all the same to you, sir, I think I should prefer to sleep on the floor."

This reply brought another sharp reprimand from the officer. But their instruction in slinging hammocks was over and they turned to other matters.

CHAPTER V--TRYING OUT THEIR GRIT

Sam's billet was next to that of Louis Flink. The former was not aware of this until that night, when the lads turned in at the sound of the bugle. So close were their hammocks that either boy might have reached out and touched the other. Sam had turned in after several disastrous attempts and much quiet grumbling. Dan caught the knack of it more quickly, and so did Flink.

"Say, freckles, you're a thickhead," jeered Flink.

"I'd rather be a thickhead than a Pennsylvania Dutchman, any day," retorted the freckle-faced boy. "There's some hope for a thickhead, but there isn't any for you."

"I'll settle with you some other time," sneered Flink. Both were speaking in low tones, knowing that they would get at least a rebuke, were any of the officers to overhear them.

"Yes, that's your measure all right. I didn't give you away this morning. Neither did my friend, but it wasn't because we loved you. No, Blinkers, it was because we wanted to wait for the proper moment to give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life. Don't bother me now; I want to go to sleep."

The first night of their stay at the training station passed uneventfully. At the sound of the bugle, on the following morning, all hands started up suddenly. Sam Hickey muttered drowsily and turned over.

"Get up, thickhead!" jeered Flink, giving the lad a vicious dig with his fist.

"Wha--wha----" demanded Sam sleepily.

"Turn out, old chap," called Dan. "Didn't you hear the bugle?"

Sam suddenly bethought himself of his duty, but he did not give thought to the fact that he was in a hammock. He thought he was in bed. Without opening his eyes he started to get out in the usual way.

The result was inevitable. Sam once more flattened himself upon the hard cement floor underneath his billet. He was awake without further urging.

"Say, Dan, how long did we enlist for?" he demanded.

"Four years."

"Oh, help!" moaned Sam, pulling himself together and starting for the shower bath with his clothes under his arm. At the door of the bathroom he paused long enough to shake his fist at Flink.

"Blinkers, I remember now, something hit me this morning before I got my eyes open. Much obliged. That's another score you'll have to answer for when the day of reckoning comes around."

Flink grinned sarcastically, as he climbed down from his hammock and prepared to follow to the bathroom.

Breakfast that morning was more interesting. There were all of fifty boys in the mess of barracks A, all of whom marched across the grounds to the mess hall, the newcomers bringing up the rear in a straggling line.

"I guess we are not making much of a showing," grinned Dan. "Our fire company at home could beat the alignment of this bunch. But see how those boys up ahead are marching."

"Yes; nobody would think they were going to breakfast," replied Sam, with a hand slyly laid upon his stomach. "I have a goneeness here that nothing except a hot breakfast will satisfy."

Practically the first duty of the day was drill. The apprentices were instructed in the rudiments of company drill. Led by a drum and bugle corps, they marched back and forth across the field in the sunlight, with the sparkling waters of the bay almost at their feet. Dan Davis had had some experience in drilling, and he proved himself an apt pupil.

After the drill the boys were marched to the drill hall, where they were given guns and instructed in the manual of arms.

"This is something like," grinned Sam, who was thoroughly at home with a gun in his hand. "I'd like to take this piece out and hunt woodchucks with it. I'll bet it's a dandy for chucks."

"Wouldn't it be likely to blow them off the face of the earth?" questioned Dan, with a smile.

"It might that."

"Attention!" commanded the officer, who had caught the faint sound of voices. "No talking in the ranks."

The lads subsided instantly.

"We will now have a little physical drill, and after that a cock-fight," announced the officer.

Dan and Sam glanced at each other in surprise.

"Going to have a rooster fight?" whispered Sam. "They're real sports up here, after all."

"Sh-h-h," warned Dan. "I think it must be something else. They wouldn't have rooster fights here."

The officer was explaining to them the various movements in the physical drill, calculated to give the boys a powerful physique as well as great suppleness. He described the movements as "full sweeps," "body circles" and "side stoop," which latter Sam characterized as the back porch movement. These, after being executed, were followed by a hurdle race.

When the announcement was made that this would be next on the program the boys could scarcely repress a cheer. But the hurdle race was not to be the harum-scarum, go-as-you-please contest that they had been in the habit of playing. Instead, it was an orderly, systematic race in which the line formation was supposed to be kept throughout.

However, the lads went at it with a will. The variety of the work kept them constantly interested. There was not a dull or tiresome moment in all that morning's work, the instructor leading them from one thing to another until the faces of the apprentices glowed and their eyes sparkled with excitement and pleasure.

"Halt!"

The movements had come to an end for the day.

"Next will be a cock-fight. You young apprentices may not understand the game, so we will let the older men go through a brief battle while you look on."

The plan of the game was for the boys to form in two lines some ten paces apart and at the command "hop," they were to hop forward on the left or right foot as the case might be and attempt to bowl their adversaries over.

"I've played that game," whispered Sam. "Let me get into it and I'll show them a cock-fight that will make the fellows green with envy."

"Fall in, apprentices!" came the command.

The lads obeyed with alacrity.

"Do you see the Pennsylvania Dutchman over there on the other side?" whispered Sam.

"Yes."

"Well you watch Pennsy. I'm going to pluck that rooster's tail feathers, or my name isn't Sam Hickey."

"Be careful that you do not do anything that will bring a reproof. You will get a mark against you, if you do."

"Don't you worry. The marks will be on Blinkers, not on me."

"Attention!"

The boys straightened. There was a grin on the face of Sam Hickey, and had one been an observer, he would have noticed another on the face of Louis Flink.

"Right foot, hop!"

Fifty apprentices began hopping across the floor, some losing their balance and measuring their length upon the drill floor at the first jump.

Sam did not appear to be noticing the adversary he had picked out. Neither did Flink seem to have Sam in mind. However, all at once both boys made a sudden turn. They lunged toward each other like two human projectiles.

The impact of their bodies when they came together, was heard all over the drill room and the lads bounded back, hopping in a circle, for several seconds, to catch their balance.

Once more they came together, followed by a rebound of greater force than before.

"Too much for you, eh?" laughed Dan, as he hopped by his companion.

"He's tougher than I thought, but I can stay on my feet as long as he can, though my hopper weighs a ton at this minute."

The men were falling out rapidly now, here and there one toppling over, another touching the floor with his free foot or grasping a pillar for support. All such were ruled out of the game.

After five minutes the battle had narrowed down to Sam Hickey and Louis Flink.

"I've got you now, Blinkers," announced Sam, with a grin.

"No talking," commanded the officer. "Hands at sides and keep fighting until one of you is down."

"Look out, I'm coming," warned Flink in a low tone.

"Thank you; so am I," returned Sam.

Neither boy swerved, but, as they neared each other, they turned so that their shoulders met, sending them far apart again. By this time, the officers and assembled apprentices had become deeply interested. They realized that this cock-fight was different from anything they ever had seen. Two gladiators of the pit were before them, and, providing there was no interference from the officers, there was excitement ahead.

The petty officers in charge so far lost themselves in the unusual battle as to overlook the fact that the apprentices were not only talking, but urging on the contestants and giving them suggestions.

It was noticeable, however, that the sympathy of the crowd was with the red-headed, freckle-faced boy, Sam Hickey. Sam's face wore a broad grin. No matter how hard a rap he might get the grin remained. If he was the least bit angry he kept the fact well hidden.

Flink, on the other hand, was getting more and more angry as the minutes passed. He had reckoned on making short work of his opponent, but found that the raw-boned country boy was as hard as nails, and not to be downed except by superior strength, nor to be frightened by a bluff.

Back and forth the two boys hopped, smashing together, bounding apart, dancing about each other in circles, sparring for an opening as it were. Thus far each had proved himself too wary for the other.

Hickey, either through design or accident, had been crowding his opponent toward the broad doorway on the west side of the drill room. But, if there was a motive in the action, no one appeared to understand it. Now, Sam was hopping about his adversary so rapidly that Flink was forced to keep spinning until he was giving a very good imitation of a top. So ludicrous were his movements that the apprentices shouted with laughter. At the same time Sam was darting in and out, but not landing on Flink at all. His sole purpose now appeared to be to confuse the other man.

Flink was growing weary. The onlookers noticed that his movements were becoming slower and slower. Sam had observed this already, and his eyes lighted triumphantly.

The dark-faced apprentice had spun himself about until he was just opposite the open doorway, a few paces from it, when Hickey uttered a loud grunt and hurled himself upon his opponent.

At that moment, Flink's back chanced to be toward Hickey. Sam landed in the small of the other's back with irresistible force.

Flink shot toward the door, the apprentices setting up a howl, followed by a cheer. But their merriment died on their lips. Lieutenant Commander Devall, the executive officer of the station, attracted by the noise in the drill hall, had hurried down the walk to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. His trim, white-clad figure appeared in the doorway, just as Louis Flink was making his flight.

Flink hit the executive officer with great violence, the two landing on the cement walk outside, with the apprentice on top.

Beyond the narrow walk was a steep bank leading down almost to the water's edge. On over the bank rolled the apprentice and the lieutenant commander, each making desperate efforts to save himself.

It was a most undignified position for a lieutenant commander to find himself in, to say nothing of the unpleasantness of going over a bank with a raw apprentice on top of one.

"They're over!" shouted a voice.

Dan sprang forward to the quartermaster, saluting.

"May I go over and help them, sir?"

"Yes. Make haste."

Dan sprang out through the doorway and down the bank.

CHAPTER VI--IN THE MIDST OF THE BATTLE

"A nice mix-up. There'll be an awful row about this," muttered Dan, as he slid down the steep bank on his feet.

When he reached the bottom, Flink, the apprentice, still bore the greater part of his weight upon the officer.

"Here's my chance," decided Dan. Springing to his feet, he grabbed Flink by the collar with both hands. Giving him a violent tug, Flink came away, Dan hurling him to one side with surprising strength.

"May I help you, sir?" he asked courteously.

The officer did not answer, but there was an angry gleam in his eyes.

Dan proceeded to brush him off, using the sleeves of his own jacket for the purpose, while the officer stood still until the brushing was finished. He then stepped back and saluted.

"Thank you, my lad. Are you the one who is responsible for this?"

"No, sir."

"Who is?"

"The men were holding a cock-fight under orders, sir."

"Ah, I see. Who is that apprentice?"

"I believe his name is Flink, sir."

"Who threw him out?"

"My friend, Hickey, sir."

"Very well; you may go."

Dan made his way around the base of the embankment, and a few moments later joined his companions in the drill hall, where he saluted his superior, fell in and began his practice work once more.

Sam's face was as solemn as he could make it. Flink, on the contrary, when he rejoined the squad, was scowling angrily. He was dust-covered, his face smeared and altogether he presented a most ludicrous sight.

They were once more being put through the manual of arms when a messenger approached the quartermaster. A brief conversation ensued.

The quartermaster ran his eyes down the line.

"Hickey, fall out!" he commanded.

The red-haired boy did so.

"Do not lose your temper. You are going to be called down. Be respectful and use your head," warned Dan in a whisper, as Sam stepped back from the line.

"Report to the executive officer in the chief yeoman's office on the balcony above," commanded the quartermaster.

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Sam, with a salute.

He made his way up the stairs, and at the door of the office gave the orderly his name. After a moment the orderly reappeared, motioning Sam to follow him.

The lad walked into the private office of the executive officer, where he stood twisting his hat in his hands awkwardly. The executive officer eyed him disapprovingly.

"What's your name?"

"Samuel Hickey, sir."

"How long have you been here?"

"One day, sir."

"You are the man who threw the man Flink against me, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Sam, making a great effort to suppress the grin that curled the corners of his mouth.

"Tell me how it happened?"

"We were having a cock-fight, sir."

"Yes; go on."

"They were all down except the fellow Flink and myself. We were fighting it out. He was a pretty tough proposition, and I had a hard time of it."

"You employed no unnecessary roughness?"

"I was not very gentle about it, sir," answered Sam truthfully. "I was trying to bump him over."

"And you did not care particularly how hard you hit him?"

"I hit him as hard as I could every time, sir."

"There is bad blood between you and this man, is there not?"

Sam looked surprised. He was not aware that the executive officer knew anything about that.

"I don't like him, sir, if that is what you mean."

"Why not?"

"I would rather not say, sir."

"Has he done anything to you?"

"I can't say, sir."

"You mean you will not?"

"I would rather not, sir."

"Young man, you are new here, else I should be inclined to treat you with great severity. I am satisfied that you threw the man Flink out of the drill hall with malicious intent. That, of itself, is sufficient to merit calling you before the mast for examination and sentence. I do not wish to do that, in view of the fact that you do not fully understand the ways of the school. But discipline must be maintained. I will see to it that no marks are laid against you in this instance. However, as soon as you have finished your routine, you will take an extra duty tour of two hours, carrying a rifle. You will so report to your commanding officer."

"Yes, sir," answered Sam meekly. "What do I do with the gun?"

"Carry it. You will receive your instructions from the quartermaster. Return to your company."

Sam saluted and walked back to the drill hall. He did not feel particularly humiliated, well knowing that, while he was to blame in a way, the other fellow was more so.

"What happened?" whispered Dan as Sam fell into line once more.

"I got mine."

"Punishment?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Extra duty tour--with a gun. I'm glad he told me to carry a gun. I can amuse myself with the gun. I wish he had told me to load it and go woodchuck hunting."

Dan looked a bit troubled, but Sam took his punishment good-naturedly.

An hour later, found him tramping up and down the drill ground in the hot sun, with a rifle slung over his shoulders. He had not been there long before he saw Louis Flink approaching him, the latter having been sent to quarters on some mission or other.

Sam pretended not to see him until Flink halted before him with a stealthy glance to the rear to make sure that he was not observed.

"Hullo, red-head. Got what's coming to you, didn't you!" sneered Flink.

"That's where you've got the best of me Blinkers. You haven't got what is coming to you yet, so you have something to look forward to. Go on about your business before I put down this gun and thrash you. Go on!"

Sam made a move toward his tormentor, whereat Flink made haste to get out of the way. From a safe distance he taunted Sam until he saw a blue-coated figure approaching. Flink hurried on about his business, Sam taking up his steady march.

The figure, which proved to be that of a lieutenant whom Sam had not seen before, came on, but the boy did not appear to see him. He was too busy marching apparently, to heed even an officer. But Sam was suddenly called to his duty by a sharp command.

"Halt!"

Instinctively the lad stiffened.

"Attention! Young man, do you not understand what 'attention' means?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what is that gun doing on your shoulder?"

"I--I don't know, sir."

"Don't you know that you should come to present arms when an officer passes?"

"No, sir. No one ever told me that before."

"Don't you study your Handy Books?"

"Yes, sir, but I have been here only a day."

"Present arms!"

Sam came to a present.

"Carry on!" came the sharp command, after which Hickey again shouldered his weapon and began his measured pacing back and forth. The lieutenant passed on, Sam gazing after him with a scowl upon his face.

"I hope to get to be an officer some of these days. Won't I make the rest of the bunch step around lively? I don't seem to be able to do anything to suit anybody."

For the next two hours the lad continued his extra duty tour, this time, however, keeping a sharp lookout for approaching officers. No officers showed themselves in his vicinity. Now and then a group of apprentices would pass with the invariable greeting, "Hullo, red-head!"

To this Sam made no response. He was determined to take his medicine and show himself to be a man, even if he was being punished.

At last the sky became overcast. Dark clouds began sweeping in from the sea, swirling and tumbling riotously.

"It looks like rain," decided the red-headed boy, halting long enough to gaze anxiously seaward. "I wonder whether they are going to keep me here all the rest of the day?"

The storm broke with a suddenness that he had never before observed, for Hickey never had had any experience with coast storms. The lightning seemed to be everywhere, followed by peals of thunder and deafening crashes, as if the coast artillery were at work the whole length of the Atlantic seaboard.

"It looks like rain," reiterated the apprentice, shifting his rifle to the other shoulder. "I shouldn't be surprised if that bolt struck somewhere. I should feel badly if it were to hit Blinkers, for I want to get a crack at him myself. I guess----"

Sam Hickey did not finish what he was about to say. A blinding flash reflected the buildings of the station in the dark waters of the bay. When the thunder had died away in a rumbling echo Sam was not in sight. He lay in a little depression of ground, half immersed in a puddle of water.

How long he lay there he did not know, but gradually he began to realize that he was very wet. He tried to open his eyes, but the rain dashing into them almost blinded him.

"I must be drowned," he decided; then he resolutely pulled himself together, struggled to his feet and began hunting about for his rifle. That weapon, when finally he found it, was a sorry-looking object.

"Well, well, I wonder what happened," muttered Sam. "I know--the thing has been struck by lightning."

The barrel of the rifle, he found, was twisted out of shape, the stock was hanging in splinters, while some parts of the weapon had entirely disappeared.

Sam viewed the wreck ruefully.

"I expect I'll get about ten years in the brig when they see that," he wailed. "They'll have me in jail for life, first thing I know. Who'd ever think a streak of lightning could cut up such pranks as these? I remember, now, the thing did feel awfully hot before I went to sleep."

Sam considered for a moment, gazed longingly off to the roof of barracks A, faintly visible above a rise of ground. Then, shouldering his ruined rifle, he began plodding up and down again, the rain beating on him in blinding, drenching sheets.

Every little while, he would glance hopefully toward the barracks, where he knew all hands were snug and dry in their white suits, perhaps having a good time. His discontent was added to when he heard the bugle blow for the midday mess.

"There, I'll lose my dinner," complained Hickey. "I knew something serious would happen before the day was over. I wonder if they have forgotten me?"

"They" had. But now the roll was being called as the apprentices formed for the mess. About that time the sun came out, and Sam discovered an officer in a rain coat rapidly approaching him. It was Lieutenant Commander Devall. The officer had his eye on the boy long before reaching him.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, gazing with surprise at the mud-covered, torn uniform and the twisted, ruined rifle on the shoulder of the plodding figure of Sam Hickey.

"My rifle was struck by lightning, sir," answered the lad, coming to a present arms.

CHAPTER VII--THE RED-HEADED BOY'S SURPRISE

"I should say it had!" exclaimed the amazed officer. "Let me see the rifle."

He examined the weapon critically, Sam standing at attention, expecting every moment to be severely rebuked.

"When did this happen?"

"About an hour ago, sir."

"You were hurt?"

"I don't know. I was laid out. I guess I would have drowned if I hadn't come to when I did," answered the lad, forgetting to add the "sir." The lieutenant commander appeared not to observe the slip.

"You regained consciousness, and have been on your extra duty tour ever since?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come with me."

Sam wonderingly followed his superior officer to barracks A. The officer led the way right into the mess hall. Looks of surprise greeted the appearance of the couple, which soon gave place to broad grins, for Sam Hickey at that moment was the most disreputable figure possible to imagine.

"Attention!" called the petty officer in charge of the mess when he saw the lieutenant commander entering.

Dan saw at once that something had happened, yet he could not understand it at all, unless Sam had been in a fight. That was the first thing that occurred to Davis.

All hands had risen to their feet, and had come to attention at command.

"Mr. Coda," said the lieutenant commander sharply, "you assigned this man to extra duty, did you not?"

"Yes, sir," answered the quartermaster. "Acting on your command, as delivered to me by the man himself."

"Exactly. How long did he tell you he was to remain on duty?"

"Two hours, sir. I was to give him his orders when the tour of extra duty was ended, sir."

"Do you know how long he has been on duty?"

"About four hours, I think, sir."

"Exactly," answered the line officer dryly.

"The storm came on and I lost sight of this man. There were three other extra duty squads out in different parts of the grounds. These I rounded up, but I will confess that I entirely forgot the man Hickey, sir," continued the quartermaster, saluting as he spoke.

"After mess, report to my office. I have something to say to these men now."

"Are they to carry on, sir?"

"By no means until I direct them to do so. What I have to say should be heard standing."

"Very good, sir."

"Men," began the lieutenant commander, running his eyes over the brown faces of the apprentices, "I am very glad to be able to give you an object lesson. I hope every man of you will keep it in mind for the rest of his career in the Navy."

The officer paused, glancing at the attentive faces before him.

"It is in reference to this young man, Hickey. He was assigned to extra duty for a slight offense. The offense, I am now satisfied, was without intent to violate any rule of discipline, and the punishment was intended more to point a moral than otherwise. Hickey was told to patrol his tour until relieved by the quartermaster. Those were your orders, Mr. Quartermaster, were they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hickey walked his tour over his time. A severe storm came up, but still he walked. He was obeying orders. Thunder and lightning even could not swerve him from doing that. Then Hickey was struck down by a bolt of lightning. You see his rifle, or what is left of it."

The lieutenant commander took Sam's gun from him, and, stepping over toward the others, held it out for their inspection. The boys looked at the twisted weapon, then at Sam Hickey. Amazement was written on their faces.

"Hickey was struck as well, as that mark on the left cheek will prove to you. He fell in a puddle of water, where he lay half-drowned, until finally he regained consciousness. I wonder how many of you here would not have started for

cover as fast as he could run? I hope none of you would have done so. Hickey did not run, either. Instead, he straightened out his broken, ruined weapon as best he could, came to a right shoulder arms and began his tour of duty once again. I have not the least doubt that he would have continued all night had he not been relieved. He was obeying orders. As I have said before, not even lightning could swerve him from that. Young men, that is the kind of man the United States Navy wants--men who will obey orders, who will carry them out, no matter what may happen; who will do their full duty as long as there is a breath left in them. Quartermaster, are there any marks against this boy?" The petty officer consulted the records.

"No, sir. He has been here a very short time, sir, hardly long enough to get any."

"Very good. You will see to it that his name is placed on record and read out in General Orders. Hickey, you will be appointed apprentice gunner's mate, your promotion to take effect immediately. It will not, however, continue after you go aboard a ship on a regular detail. The appointment is for the Training Station alone. It carries with it a slight increase in pay. You have made a good beginning, and I shall look for you to continue. Do so, and your rise in the United States Navy will be rapid. You are relieved from duty for the rest of the day. Carry on, men!"

Mess being over, the quartermaster, as directed, repaired to the office of the lieutenant commander to receive the reprimand that he supposed was in store for him. He was right. The lieutenant commander was very severe upon the quartermaster for the latter's failure to relieve Hickey at the proper time. The quartermaster, in his turn, had nothing but words of regret and apology, and was dismissed with a word of caution for the future.

CHAPTER VIII--ON THE RIFLE RANGE

Sam took his seat at the mess table mechanically. As a matter of fact he felt dazed. He had expected a rebuke and he had received a promotion instead.

He was aroused from his abstraction by the voice of his chum.

"Good boy!" breathed Dan. "I am proud of you. Fine! I knew you would show them the material you are made of when you got the chance. Were you really struck by lightning?"

"I don't know. I think it must have been the thunder clap that hit me, though I didn't hear it. But wasn't that gun a sight? Nearly tore the clothes off my back in the bargain."

"Burn you anywhere?"

"I guess not." Sam turned his palms up mechanically and opened his eyes in amazement. They had been burned by the electric fluid until they were black to the finger tips.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed. "Good thing it didn't do that to my face, or I'd look just like the Pennsylvania Dutchman."

Sam, having his liberty, made a trip to the town that afternoon. It was his first trip there since arriving at the Training School. First, however, he procured his new rating badge and, after consulting with a petty officer, sewed it on his sleeve. Sam strutted around for some time after that, holding up his arm so that he might feast his eyes on the red-lined rating mark. He felt very proud of it, and his companion, Dan Davis, was no less proud of him.

In the town Sam found many other apprentices on liberty, and at their invitation he joined them, spending the rest of the afternoon in wandering about. They made him tell about his experiences in being struck by lightning that morning, which Sam did with more or less relish.

"I imagine it was almost like being in a battle, fellows," he said.

"If you got a clip like that in battle, I reckon you wouldn't be bragging about it afterwards," suggested one.

"I'm not bragging about it," protested Hickey indignantly. "What's the matter with you? Besides, I'm an officer, now, and officers don't have to brag. They do things that speak for themselves."

"Hear him talk! He's got a swelled head already," jeered one of the party. "You'll have a chance, to-morrow, to see whether you are any good or not."

"What do you mean?"

"Can you shoot?"

Sam grinned.

"Don't make me laugh. I can shoot the eyes out of a spud as far as I can see it."

"What's a spud?" piped a voice.

"You a sailor, and don't know what a spud is?" scoffed Sam. "A spud is a spud, otherwise known as a potato. I am surprised at your ignorance."

"Louis Flink says he's going to clean up the whole crowd of us, to-morrow, when we get to shooting."

"Shooting?"

"Yes."

"Shooting at what?"

"Targets."

"Are we going to do that?"

"Sure, and the ones who make the best scores will be promoted, I understand. The officers always do that. They are going to try out the apprentices, to see who is good enough to qualify for the sharpshooting record of the station."

Hickey's eyes glowed. As soon as possible thereafter he excused himself. Boarding a street car, he returned to the station.

"What do you think, Dan?" questioned Sam, as soon as he had gotten his chum off away from the others.

"Well, what is it? Been getting into more trouble, young man?"

"Not I. It's news, and you'll say it's real news when you hear it."

"Well, I am listening," smiled Dan good-naturedly.

Sam's face was flushed with excitement, for this had been an eventful day for him.

"Tell me all about it?"

"We are going to shoot to-morrow," whispered Sam in a stage whisper loud enough to be heard a dozen yards away.

"Shoot what?"

"Target work."

"You don't say?"

"Yes," chuckled Hickey. "We won't do a thing to the targets, will we?"

"I don't know about you, but as for myself I never thought I was much of a marksman. Of course, I have done some shooting, but there are boys here who have done much more, I guess. What's the range?"

"I haven't heard. But, being an officer, perhaps I might ask some one."

"Do not presume too much on your promotion," warned Dan. "You are only a very little officer. You may lose that rating if you are not careful."

"Then I'll get struck by lightning again, and get another one," answered Sam confidently.

That night the boys swung themselves up into their hammocks, full of anticipation of what lay before them on the following day. It seemed as if they had no sooner gotten to sleep than the bugle sounded the reveille.

They were up and at their shower baths, laughing and chatting, a few minutes later. A happier, more care-free lot of hardy, brown-faced young fellows it would be difficult to find.

The early morning duties were quickly disposed of, for the word had been passed along that they were to take their first turn at the targets that day. Some of the boys who had never handled a gun before were more curious than those who had. The latter, however, were no less anxious to be at it. When the command, "Fall in for target practice," was given, all hands felt like setting up a shout of joy. They restrained themselves, knowing full well that such a demonstration would bring swift and sure punishment.

After they had lined up, the officer in charge ordered certain of the men to fall out, they being wanted for other work. There were disappointed ones among these, but these were told they would be given their chance later in the week, as very many men could not be accommodated at one time. The target practice was to last nearly a week, two hours a day being devoted to it during this time.

All preparations having been made, the men were marched to the armory where they were equipped with their rifles and ammunition for the day.

The apprentices were to fire five rounds apiece, each day, only the average for the week to count.

"Keep your nerves steady, and don't try to do anything fancy, just because you are an officer," warned Dan.

"You squint through your own sights; I'll look after mine," retorted Sam.

Immediately after arriving at the range, the shooting began, one man taking a shot, then giving place to another.

Dan took his place and fired. He missed. Sam followed, a few numbers later, and he also missed. But when it came the turn of Louis Flink he made a bull's-eye the first shot. Flink favored the two boys with a sarcastic grin as he stepped aside to give the next man a chance.

The Battleship Boys had adjusted their sights in the meantime, and with their next shots they, too, each made a bull's-eye. When the five rounds had been fired it was found that Flink was one point ahead of them.

The lads were disgusted with themselves. On the following day the score was the same; that is, each of the two boys made center every time and so did Flink. Their only hope now was that he might make a miss, but this he evidently had no intention of doing, for he shot with rare judgment and coolness.

"I've got a good notion to break him up by saying something to him to-morrow," Sam confided to his companion that night.

"I should be ashamed of you, if you did," rebuked Dan.

"Ashamed of me? Why?"

"Because it would be an unsportsmanlike and a cowardly trick. If we cannot outshoot Blinkers, as you call him, we shall take our medicine like men. It seems he's the better man at the butts."

The last day of the target practice arrived. It was Saturday morning when the boys started out for the shooting grounds. The targets stood out strong and clear in the morning sunlight, against the big mound of earth before which they had been placed. By this time the shooting of the three boys had aroused no little interest among the others of the apprentices, and even the officers began to feel more than ordinary interest, for such shooting was not usual among the rookies in their early days.

The range had now been extended to three hundred yards. It was safe to predict that the story of the week would be changed at this range.

The firing began almost at once, the men with lower scores competing first, it having been decided to let the three leaders take their turns at the butts after the others had finished.

"Keep your eyes open," suggested Dan. "Get your range well, for we mustn't miss a shot to-day."

"We're beaten anyway," complained Sam.

"Stop it. You're a fine sailor, you are. We are not beaten. We are never beaten until the last shot has been fired, and even then we won't run up any white flag. See that Flag over there?"

"What flag?"

"The one on the staff--the Stars and Stripes."

"Sure."

"Well just imagine you are under that, and that those targets over against the hill are enemies shooting at the Flag. What would you do to them?"

"You know what I would do to them if I could--I'd put them every one out of business."

"That's the talk! Well, they are enemies--our enemies. You must put them out of business."

"All right; I'm it. I'll drill them in the eyes. You watch me when I go to bat."

The firing, which had been going on for the past hour, suddenly ceased.

"Leaders shoot off scores," came the command.

"It's our turn," nodded Dan. "Keep cool."

"I'm as cool as the hot sun will allow me to be, but I wish they would let me take off my jacket. I'll ask them."

"No, no, no," protested Dan.

"Flink take your place."

The dark-faced Pennsylvanian, a confident smile on his face, took his place toeing the mark. He took careful aim, pulled the trigger and lowered his weapon to his waist line.

"Bull's-eye," wig-wagged the signal man at the butts.

"Davis!" called the officer in charge.

Dan stepped to the mark, stood for a moment gazing off at the range. Then, raising his gun, he took aim and fired without loss of time. The onlookers thought he had missed, for his shot was apparently carelessly executed.

"Bull's-eye," came back the wig-wag signal.

A number of officers of the post had gathered to see the shooting, and a murmur of comment ran over the little throng.

"Hickey!"

"To the bat!" muttered Sam under his breath, taking his place. Hickey took long and careful aim, lowered his gun for a free look at the target then raised the weapon again. At last he fired.

He too, made a bull's-eye.

One round had been fired and without a single miss on the part of any one of the three contestants. This was continued for three more rounds with no change in the result.

Excitement ran high. Nearly every apprentice on the grounds was hoping that either the red-haired boy or his companion might win. Flink had few admirers, though all gave him full credit for what he had accomplished so far in the contest.

This time Dan was called to the mark first, the officer in charge varying the routine for some reason of his own.

Dan scored a bull's-eye.

Flink came next. This time he shot with less caution than before, and missed. Sam, however, made a bull's-eye.

"Tied, sir. Shall they shoot it off?" asked the quartermaster, saluting the commandant of the station.

"Shoot it off," was the reply.

"Aye, aye, sir. Leaders take their places for another round."

Flink was called to the mark first. He was plainly nervous. Perhaps his nervousness was not lessened by the glimpse he caught of Sam Hickey's face. Sam was grinning broadly, but he could not be accused of attempting to interfere with Flink, because he was not looking at him. Sam was looking at Dan at that particular moment.

Flink took his sight, then pulled the trigger with a nervous finger.

"Miss," came the wig-wag signal.

Dan took his place and fired. He made a bull's-eye.

Sam came next. As before he took a great deal of time in preparation.

"He's posing," muttered Dan. "He might better attend to his business."

However, Sam Hickey knew what he was about. If he missed, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that it was not through carelessness.

At last he seemed satisfied as to his position, arriving at which decision, he lost no time in bringing the rifle to his shoulder and pulling the trigger.

"Bull's-eye!"

A great shout went up from the apprentices. Discipline, for the moment, was swept aside. Even the officers smiled approvingly as their young charges threw hats high in the air, yelling lustily, shouting the names of their champions. Dan Davis and red-haired Sam had outshot them all. As it had grown late, there was no time for the two friends to shoot it off. Between them, it was a tie.

CHAPTER IX--BETRAYED BY A STREAK OF RED

Dan got his promotion on the following day, with an increase of pay, so that the two boys now had the same rating in the school.

Flink, however, had grown very surly. As the days wore on he became more and more ugly so far as the boys were concerned, but the latter gave little heed to him.

In the meantime, Sam and Dan had been progressing rapidly. They had learned many things. First, they had perfected themselves in signaling, splicing, knot-tying and seamanship, so far as was possible in the limited time at their disposal. The Battleship Boys by their application, hard work and keen minds, had won the respect of their officers as well as of their own associates. The frequent cruises about the bay and down Long Island Sound of the "Boxer" had given them practical experience and agility; for by this time Sam and Dan were able to cling to a yard arm in a rolling sea with out being in the least disturbed. They were as agile aloft as if they had been at sea in sailing ships for years.

And now they were just completing their course. A week remained for them to put the finishing touches to it. Already they were looking forward with keen anticipation to the day when they should receive their summons to join a ship. This might not come for some time, but on account of their high standing they were reasonably certain that they would be chosen with the first detail of their class that went out.

During all this time, however, the Battleship Boys had been subjected to petty annoyances that both troubled and mystified them. Perhaps they may have had some slight suspicion as to the cause of their troubles, but if so, there was no definite clue on which to base their suspicions.

First, something was found wrong with the mechanism of Hickey's rifle. Then next, Dan's Krag rifle was discovered at inspection to be in a sad state of neglect. The inspection officer said it was quite evident that the gun had not been cleaned in weeks.

For both these offenses the lads were disciplined, not seriously, but enough so that the lesson might be impressed upon their minds.

Dan and Sam held many quiet talks over these incidents. Sam was for going to one of their superior officers and voicing their suspicions, but of this Dan would not hear.

"We have got to prove ourselves men, no matter if we do get some bad conduct marks by so doing. And, besides, these things that have happened to us may be the result of a mistake. For instance, you remember that rifle on account of which I was ordered to do extra duty?"

"Yes," nodded Hickey.

"Well, that wasn't my gun at all. It was some one else's Krag."

"Then some one else took yours?" questioned Sam, with rising color.

"Yes, but I think perhaps that was a mistake."

"It wasn't any mistake at all," snapped Sam, "and I'm going to keep my eyes open. I'll get even with the fellow who is trying to get us into trouble--I'll get even with him before we leave the station, if I lose my job doing it."

That afternoon there was to be a battalion drill, and, after the morning's work, all hands hurried to quarters to get into their bright, clean white uniforms. It was the one time in the week when the apprentices were given an opportunity to show themselves at their best. Many people came out from town for this regular Thursday afternoon drill, when every apprentice at the station appeared on parade, with flags waving, bands playing, the sunlight glistening on polished weapons.

"This will be our last drill here, I hope," glowed Dan, as all preparations having been made, the lads hurried out and falling in, started for the drill ground, marching by fours.

All went well until the company in which the two boys were marching had swung into line. Then there came a sudden command:

"Halt!"

The petty officers in command ran their eyes over the line in some surprise. They did not understand what it meant. They knew, however, that something had gone wrong.

The executive officer was standing to the rear of the line, at some distance, while the battalion was going through its evolutions. His observant eyes had suddenly caught sight of something that filled him with amazement and indignation.

Quickly striding down to the line, the men facing away from him, he called the chief quartermaster to him.

"Take those men out of line."

"Which ones, sir?"

The executive officer, pointed, and then the petty officer saw that which also amazed him. A moment more and he had tapped both Dan and Sam on the shoulder.

"Fall out!" he commanded.

They obeyed promptly, but wonderingly.

"Report to your quarters, and remain there in detention."

The boys saluted and moved away.

"Now, will you tell me what this means?" demanded Dan.

"That's what I was trying to find out. We haven't done anything."

They had reached their quarters when, all at once, Dan uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" demanded Sam.

"Look at yourself."

"What's wrong with me?" growled the freckle-faced boy.

"Take off your jacket and you'll see."

"You had better take off your own while you are about it," replied Sam, opening his eyes wide as he gazed at his companion.

With one accord they stripped off their jackets, uttering exclamations of anger as they did so.

The backs of the jackets were streaked with bright red until they resembled the bars of the American Flag, which they no doubt had been intended by the perpetrator of the outrage to represent.

Sam examined his jacket critically; then, glancing up, he met the eyes of his companion.

"Red ink," nodded Sam. "I'll bet the eagle will scream now."

"Who could have done it?"

"The question is not who could have done it, but who did do it."

"We shall be held responsible, in any event. I see ourselves losing our ratings and perhaps missing our detail to a ship. Come, let's get into some decent clothes before one of the officers gets here."

They quickly changed their uniforms, laying out the ruined ones, backs upward ready for the inspection that they felt sure would soon follow.

In this surmise they were right. The drill over, the quartermaster, accompanied by the executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Devall, appeared at the boys' quarters.

Dan and Sam came to attention as the officers entered.

The latter fixed their eyes upon the garments laid out on the floor of the quarters. Lieutenant Commander Devall picked up one of the jackets, examining it closely.

"How did this happen?" he demanded, eyeing Sam sternly.

"I do not know, sir."

"The garment has plainly been inked. How does it happen that you did not notice this when you put on your uniform?"

"We dressed in a great hurry, sir," spoke up Dan. "As you will observe, it is quite dark in here. It seems as if we ought to have noticed that something was wrong, but we did not."

Lieutenant Commander Devall pondered for a moment.

"You have no idea who could have done this thing, men?"

They did not answer.

"Search the quarters, quartermaster."

The lads stood looking on with troubled faces as the petty officer began his search. The Battleship Boys did not know what the lieutenant commander expected to find, and as a matter of fact he probably had no definite idea himself.

Sam moved over to where his bag stood, having observed that it was open. As he drew the cord down tightly he chanced to glance at the bag standing beside it. Hickey uttered a smothered exclamation. What he had seen was a smear of red at the mouth of the canvas bag.

"May I open this bag, sir?" he asked, saluting.

"For what?"

Sam pointed to the streak of red.

"Open it!"

One by one the lad drew out the neatly folded garments from the sea bag, the officers scrutinizing these keenly as they were withdrawn and placed on the floor.

At the very bottom of the bag Sam came upon an object which he quickly drew out, holding it to the light, with a triumphant grin on his face. He nodded to Dan as he did so.

The object was a towel. It was streaked with red, as if some one had wiped his hands upon it. In fact, finger marks were plainly visible all over it.

The executive officer snatched the cloth from the boy's hands.

"Whose bag is this?" he demanded sharply.

"I'll look up the number, sir," answered the quartermaster.

At that moment a figure darkened the doorway. It was Flink. The instant he saw the officers in the quarters his hand mechanically came up in salute.

A ray of sunlight slanted across the hand as he stood there. Sam caught his breath sharply, then an eager look overspread his face. He hesitated a moment; then, springing over to where Flink was standing, Sam grabbed the hand, jerking it sharply down, examining it briefly in the few seconds that elapsed ere Flink could resist.

"Attention!" commanded Lieutenant Commander Devall. "What does this mean?"

"If you will examine this man's hand, I think you will understand, sir," answered Sam, saluting.

The lieutenant commander stepped over to Flink.

"Let me see your hands. Palms up!"

The palms were smeared with red.

"Is that your sea bag yonder?"

Flink nodded.

"So, you are the man who is responsible for this, are you? What have you to say for yourself?"

The apprentice hung his head, making no reply.

"You are released from quarters, Davis and Hickey. I begin to understand a few of the things that have happened here. Quartermaster, place this man under arrest. Turn him over to the master-at-arms with instructions to lock him in the brig."

CHAPTER X--THEIR FIRST DETAIL

Summary court-martial met on the following afternoon. Louis Flink was found guilty, the recommendation of the court being that he be dismissed from the service.

At a general muster the findings of the court-martial, approved by the commandant of the station, were read out by the executive officer. It was an impressive scene to the Battleship Boys--one that they never forgot, showing as it did that the United States Navy is no place for a man guilty of a dishonorable act.

Louis Flink was read out of the service and driven from the grounds of the Training Station, a disgraced man.

"I'm sorry for the poor fellow, though I have no sympathy for him," murmured Dan.

"What's the difference?" demanded Sam.

"Difference between what?"

"The difference between feeling sorry for a man and having sympathy for him? I, for one, am mighty glad to see him go, but I'm sorry I did not get a chance at him first. I'll never get over that."

"He must have been the one who was the cause of our other trouble, Sam."

"Of course he was, beginning with the pie he threw at us. But what are we going to do with the marks against us? We were no more to blame for the things we were disciplined for than we are for having our jackets ruined."

"We shall have to take our medicine; that is all," answered Dan ruefully.

Two days later, the boys were summoned to the office of the executive officer. They went rather apprehensively, wondering what could be the reason for the unusual summons.

Arriving at the executive office the lads stated their business to the sentry, and were admitted after a little delay, coming to a halt and saluting as they reached Lieutenant Commander Devall's desk.

The salute was quickly answered, after which the boys stood at attention, hats in hands.

"I presume you would like to join a ship, would you not?" he asked.

"Join a ship? Indeed we should," answered Dan, his eyes glowing with pleasure.

"You boys, I believe, joined from the same place?"

"Yes, sir."

"H-m-m-m!" mused the executive officer, consulting the enlistment record of the two apprentices. "Piedmont?"

"Yes, sir."

"You would like to be shipmates, would you not?"

"We should like it very much, indeed. If it were possible, I wish we might be placed on the same ship," replied Dan.

"I will arrange it," replied Lieutenant Commander Devall, consulting several papers from the mass with which his desk was littered. "Several details are being sent out to various ships to-day. I was under the impression that one ship on my list asked for two ordinary seamen. Ah, yes, here it is. Yes, that will be all right. I shall assign you, but, of course, I cannot promise that you will be retained indefinitely in that way. You may be reassigned to some other part of the service at any time, but it is not likely that this will be done for some time, yet."

"May I ask, sir, to what ship you will assign us?"

"Yes; the battleship 'Long Island.'"

"The 'Long Island,'" mused Dan.

"The 'Long Island,'" repeated Sam under his breath.

"That is the new battleship, is it not, sir?"

"The newest one in the Atlantic fleet. She has just had her trial trip, and has been accepted by the government. I am very glad to be able to give you this detail, for you are a pair of likely young men. Your record at the station has been a splendid one, and your promotion deserved."

"Thank you, sir. You know we have some marks against us," spoke up Dan.

"I was thinking of that. Let me see. There appears to be some doubt about those extra duty tours--I mean to say as to whether you men were wholly in the wrong. Have you any reason to suspect that others were trying to get you into trouble?"

"Yes, sir; we have had reason to suspect as much," answered Dan after an instant's hesitation.

"Whom did you suspect?"

"There can be no harm now, sir, in saying that we suspected the fellow Flink."

"Yet you made no report of it?"

"How could we, sir? We had little on which to base our suspicions, and besides it did not seem the manly thing to do, to carry tales about one's shipmates."

"He's the fellow, sir, who threw the pie," spoke up Hickey.

"What's that?"

"Threw the pie." Sam did not heed the warning look from his companion. "The day we entered the training school."

"I recall the incident, and I also recall that you both refused to state what you knew. Always obey the command of an officer; bear that in mind, young men. No matter if it does mean getting an associate into trouble. Your officers will never make a request of you that is not for the good of the service. You are well fitted for the duties that are before you. Be obedient, courteous and willing. Never allow soreheads--'sea lawyers' we call them on board ship--to make you discontented on board. Remember that there is no more honorable calling in the world than that which you have chosen. See that you do honor to it."

"We shall try, sir."

"And, by the way, you are entitled to a leave of absence for four weeks from this time, with a full allowance of pay. You may join your ship later, at the expiration of leave. I take it that you lads would like to go home and show yourselves in your uniforms."

Dan hesitated.

"Of course, we should like it, sir, but I think we should prefer to join ship at once."

"Very good, then; you will join the 'Long Island' to-morrow. In the meantime I shall arrange to have the marks against you canceled, so that there may be no bar to your progress. You will go aboard with a clean bill of health in every way."

"May I ask where the 'Long Island' is, sir?" questioned Sam.

"New York."

"At the Navy Yard, sir?"

"No, she is lying in the North River; I think about off Riverside Drive. Do you know where that is?"

"No, sir."

"That is nearly opposite General Grant's tomb. You can find the place easily. Any policeman will tell you how to get there."

"Yes, sir; when do we go, sir?"

"On the night boat. You came up here on that, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will have your papers prepared and your transportation ready at five o'clock. You will call here for them. The quartermaster will instruct you as to what you are to take with you and how to proceed. My lads, I trust I shall hear good reports from you. We always feel a keen interest in the young men who have had their first instruction here at the Training School. That will be all."

Two hands were brought to foreheads in precise salute, and, executing a right about face, the Battleship Boys, marched steadily from the room, their faces grave, their shoulders thrown well back.

Once outside, Sam turned a bronzed, freckled face toward his companion.

"We are the people--the real people--aren't we, Dan?" he questioned, with a sly wink.

"We are," answered Dan soberly.

The heads of the Battleship Boys were in a whirl of expectancy for the rest of the day. The afternoon hours dragged slowly along, but at last the evening mess was over, and they quickly gathered their dunnage, starting for the New York boat with light and happy hearts.

Each boy had nearly fifty dollars in his pockets as the result of his three months' service at the Training Station. This money, however, they had decided to deposit with the paymaster of the 'Long Island' as soon as possible after arriving on board.

The next morning Dan and Sam were up just as the Fall River Line boat was about to pass under the Brooklyn bridge.

"Look!" cried Dan. "Do you recognize that yellow building over there?"

"Can't say that I do. What building is it?"

"It is the recruiting station where you and I joined the service three months ago. And now, just think of it, we are jackies. Everybody knows we are jackies as soon as they look at our handsome uniforms."

"Yes," breathed Sam, "and there's the very Flag under which we enlisted."

Instinctively the Battleship Boys removed their caps and came to attention, in which position they stood until the towering Sound steamer had swept on and began rounding the Battery.

CHAPTER XI--ON BOARD A BATTLESHIP

"Small boat with two enlisted men approaching, sir," called out the deck watch of the big battleship "Long Island."

"What ship?" answered the officer of the deck.

"I don't know, sir. Can't make them out exactly."

The small boat, manned by a perspiring boatman, was creeping nearer and nearer to the huge, drab-colored man-of-war, whose towering sides and huge masts dwarfed everything else about it.

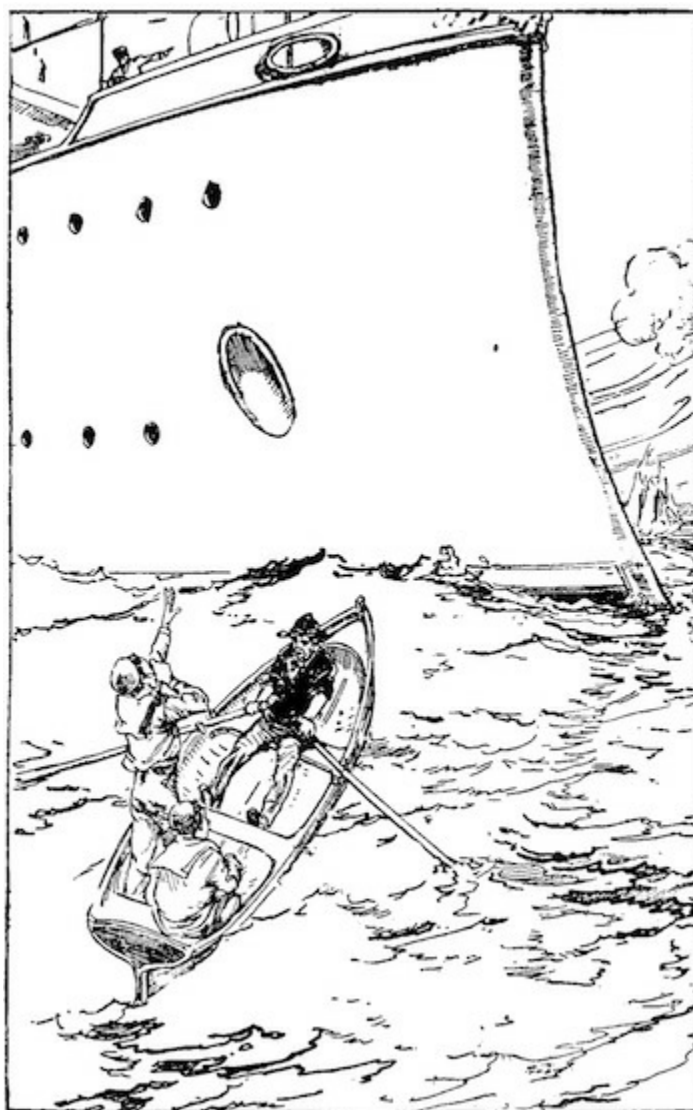
The small boat pulled up to the starboard or right side of the ship, and drifted in.

"Boat, ahoy!" called down the quartermaster, making a megaphone of his hands. "What do you want?"

"We want to come aboard, sir?" answered Dan, rising in the fragile skiff and saluting.

"Who are you?"

"Recruits from the Newport Training Station, assigned to this ship."



"We Want to Come Aboard, Sir!"

"Then you ought to know better than to try to board a man-o'-war on the starboard side. Get around to the port side where you belong."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Dan, touching his cap.

"How are you going to know which is the port side of these tubs?" muttered Sam, shading his eyes from the sun and gazing at the ship. "I'm blest if both ends don't look alike to me."

"Then you must be losing your eyesight, Sam. Don't you see how the quarter-deck is cut away astern, while the bow stands high out of the water? Then there's the Flag astern. You'll never see the colors up forward."

"I can't see everything at once, and you must remember that this is the first time I ever saw a real battleship close enough to touch it."

The ship was at anchor, and some distance out in the stream. A swaying rope ladder hung from the lower boom on the port side, reaching down to within some four feet of the water's edge.

The river was choppy that morning, and the little boat bobbed perilously. The boys were used to this, however, and gave no thought to it.

"Will you please pass a line over here for our dunnage?" called Dan.

"Pass the landlubbers a clothes line," shouted a voice from the forecandle.

A line, coiled, suddenly shot down from above. Sam chanced to be standing up in the boat at that moment. The line hit him fairly on the top of his red head, flattening him on the bottom of the skiff.

A shout went up from the forecandle.

"You lubbers!" bellowed Sam, scrambling to his feet, nearly upsetting the skiff in his efforts to get his eyes on the man who was responsible for knocking him down. "I'd duck you if I had you down here."

"Yes, you would!" came back the prompt answer.

"Yes, I would."

"Come up here and try it, red-head! We've got some shower baths up in the forecandle."

"Don't answer him, Sam," cautioned Dan. "There is an officer watching us, and we do not want him to think we are a couple of rowdies."

"Well, we aren't, are we?" demanded Sam indignantly.

"Certainly not. All the more reason why we should act like gentlemen."

Sam grumbled some unintelligible reply.

"Are you going first, Dan?"

"It makes no difference."

Dan grasped the swaying rope ladder, known as a "Jacob's ladder," and ran up with agility.

"My, the little man must have made a voyage to Africa and taken lessons from the monkeys," jeered a voice.

"It isn't necessary to go to Africa to find specimens of that animal," answered Dan, reaching the lower boom, along which he ran lightly, sprang over the rail and planted his feet on the deck. His first duty was to turn his face toward the stern of the ship and salute the Flag.

By this time Hickey was on his way up the ladder, and in a moment more he awkwardly measured his length on the deck, having caught his toe in the rope railing in scaling it.

The men of the forecandle set up a shout of approval.

"That's the way to do it, lad! A regular human projectile. We don't need any torpedoes when you are on board."

Sam got up, blushing furiously. As he rose a jackie ran his fingers through the shock of red hair.

"Shipmate, you'd better keep away from the magazines with that head of hair, or there'll be an explosion that will be heard all the way to Newport."

"People who play with fire sometimes get burned. You'd better stand clear," warned Hickey, whereat there was another shout, this time at the expense of the jackie who had taken the liberty with Sam's head.

"I'll bet the Old Man will send his orderly on a run for the barber when he sees red-head here," vouchsafed another.

The "Old Man" aboard ship means the captain.

The lads gave no further heed to the chaffing of their new shipmates. Dan nudged his companion and motioned for the latter to follow him.

"Where?" demanded Sam. "You don't know where you are going."

"We must report to the officer of the deck first of all. Lieutenant Commander Devall told me to do so."

"Oh, I didn't think you would know enough to do it of your own accord," was Sam's withering reply as he turned to follow Dan.

The lads made their way over the superstructure, where they were treated to various good-natured criticisms hurled at them by jackies and marines lounging along the deck.

Descending the iron steps that led down to the quarter-deck, the Battleship Boys once more came to attention and

saluted the flag. The officer of the deck brought his right hand to the visor of his cap in acknowledgment of the salute. The boys stepped up to him, saluting once more.

"Well, men, what is it?"

"We are recruits from the Training Station at Newport, sir. We have come to join the ship, sir."

"Very good. Messenger!"

A sailor came to him on the run, saluting as he brought up sharply in front of the young ensign who was acting as officer of the deck.

"Take these men to the master-at-arms."

The messenger crooked a finger; the Battleship Boys saluted the officer of the deck, and, turning, followed their guide. He led them through narrow corridors, up through the gun deck, where the butts of the great eight-inch guns lay shining in the sunlight that filtered down through open hatches.

At last he halted before a curtained doorway and rapped.

"What is it?" came a voice from inside.

"Officer of the deck directs you to receive two recruits who have just come on board, sir."

The curtain parted and the lads saw before them a kindly faced man, whose weather-beaten features testified to many months of exposure to wind and sun on the high seas.

"Come in, lads," he said. "Have you your papers with you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Dan, extending their record papers.

"All clear," said the master-at-arms after a brief glance over the documents. "The Training School gives you a special good-conduct mention, I see. That is well. Follow me."

Once more the process of diving through narrow passageways, down iron companionways, with chains for hand rails, turning sharp corners, tramping their elbows on projections and the like, was gone through with.

"What are they trying to do with us?" whispered Sam.

"I don't know."

"Guess they're trying out our wind to see whether we are any good or not. This certainly is a sprint. If they keep it up much longer I'll change my mind again and go ashore."

Just then the master-at-arms rapped on the casing of another door, and, at command, entered, motioning the boys to follow.

They were now standing before the ship's writer. The writer, after looking over their papers, entered their record in a large book on his desk. Following this he asked them many questions about their past life, going over much the same ground that the recruiting officer had done when they enlisted in New York. After satisfying himself on all points, the writer said:

"I will assign you to a deck division for the present. Here are the numbers for your sea bags and hammocks. Here are your ditty boxes." He handed to the lads two boxes each about a foot square, neatly made and varnished. A lock and key was attached to each, and on the top of each box was a number.

Sam took his box under his arm. He seemed to be doubtful as to just what he was expected to do with the box, but at the moment he had no opportunity to ask, for once more the master-at-arms was beckoning the boys to follow him.

"There he goes again. Another sprinting match," muttered Hickey. "I shall have an appetite when I get through with this race."

"You don't need exercise to give you an appetite," retorted Dan. "That's one of the things you always have with you."

They were going forward through the interior of the ship, though by this time Sam had lost his bearings entirely. He could not have told whether they were going forward or aft.

"Two recruits just come aboard, sir," announced the master-at-arms.

This time it was to the boatswain's mate that they were introduced.

"Come in, lads," he said in a voice that Sam afterwards decided must have come from the boatswain's boots. The voice was deep and hoarse and fearsome, but the smile that followed the words was entirely reassuring.

"He isn't half as fierce as he looks," muttered Hickey in a whisper so loud and plain as to reach the ears of the boatswain's mate. The latter smiled broadly.

"No; you need not be afraid of me, my lads. The boatswain's mate is supposed to be a sort of father and mother, all in one, to the raw recruit. I suppose you have learned everything there is to know since you have been at the Newport station, have you not?"

"We have learned some things, but I fear there are still many things for us to learn," replied Dan, with a half smile.

"Just so. You have learned to make all the various knots that a sailor is supposed to be familiar with?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boys in chorus.

"And belay a fall?"

"Yes, sir; we know how to take a turn on a cleat with a rope.

"Very good. Hickey, my lad, now that you know how to belay a fall, I will ask if you can pass a stopper?"

A blank expression appeared on Sam's face, while a twinkle showed in the eyes of the boatswain's mate.

"I--I don't know, sir. If the stopper were good to eat I don't think I should pass it unless I were walking in my sleep."

The boatswain's mate leaned back and laughed uproariously.

"Passing a stopper, my lad, means to wrap a rope about a fall while another belays it. There are a lot of these sea terms that you will learn as you go along. I see you have been assigned to the deck. What branch of the service would you prefer to be in, or haven't you thought about the matter seriously?"

"I think we should prefer to be on one of the guns--in a gun squad, sir."

"That's my idea, too; but, first of all, serve some time on deck. You will learn a great deal there. I will instruct you carefully in your duties and show you your billet, after which you will go forward and get acquainted with your shipmates."

"Will you tell me, sir, what I do with this casket?" inquired Sam.

"The ditty box?"

"Yes, I guess that is what the other man called it."

The boatswain's mate smiled good-naturedly.

"That is for the purpose of holding your valuables."

"Money?"

"Oh, no, it would not be exactly safe. You had better place your money in the hands of the paymaster."

"That is what we intend to do," spoke up Dan.

"The ditty box, my lads, is the sailor's most treasured possession. In it he keeps his trinkets, his pictures, his letters, his pen and paper. But this is not all. The ditty box serves as the jackie's desk, his table, his seat and many other things. Never interfere with another man's ditty box unless you are looking for trouble. You will get it fast enough if you do so."

"I'll be too busy looking after my own to want to bother chasing the other fellow's ditto box."

"Ditty," corrected Dan.

"All right. It's all the same."

"I will now show you through the ship, as you will be required to be familiar with it. Learn all you can. Learn the name of everything on board, for all this knowledge will be needed some of these days when you come up for promotion. I presume you have ambitions to rise to higher grades?"

"We are going to do so, sir," answered Dan promptly.

"That is the way to talk. You will win with that spirit. Nothing can stop you. Now, come with me and take a look at the 'Long Island.'"

"There we go again," laughed Sam. "What time do we mess, sir?"

"Very soon, now. I shall get you back in plenty of time."

They started out on their first tour of inspection of a battleship and the boys uttered many exclamations of wonder as the parts of the great floating machine and implement of war were revealed and explained to them.

The boatswain's mate took them first to the bridge, where the compass and steering wheel were located; thence to the fire control, a steel-bound enclosure, open at the top, just forward of the bridge. It was from there, he told them, that the electric signals were given for torpedo firing.

"Is this a torpedo boat also?" questioned Sam innocently.

"Certainly not. This is a battleship. It is provided, however, with two torpedo tubes, a starboard and a port tube."

From this point the lads went down, deeper and deeper into the ship, By this time there were no stairways to walk down. In place of them were narrow ladders running through narrow apertures in the various decks.

As he went along the boatswain's mate briefly explained everything, going into detail regarding the handling of the big guns, the ammunition hoists and the electric signaling plant far down amidships. They did not complete their journey until they were far below the level of the water in the very bottom of the ship.

From there they made their way upward to the wireless telegraph room, where the operator was sitting with receiver on his head, listening for the faint ticking of the messages that might be hurled through the air.

Now and then the operator would nervously clutch his key.

Sam jumped when the resonators crashed forth their message to another far-away operator; then the sending instruments settled down to a steady squealing.

"Reminds me of Bill Thompson's pigs," nodded Sam. "That's the kind of a noise they make when they get an appetite."

At last the lads completed their tour.

"Stand by the starboard anchor chain!"

The command was given from the bridge as the lads emerged from the forward hatchway. Glancing up they saw several officers in their white uniforms standing on the bridge of the ship.

"I guess we must be going to get under way, sir," said Dan.

"Yes."

The "Long Island" had swung with the tide until she was headed down the river. Groups of expectant jackies thronged the forward deck. To one side stood the members of the ship's band, instruments in hand.

"Stand clear of the starboard anchor chain," came the second command from the bridge. "Up with the starboard anchor."

A rattling of chains followed instantly as the anchor was quickly raised by electric power until its stock was level with the forward deck.

"Starboard anchor shipped, sir," was the answer from the forward deck.

"Aye, aye!"

The captain, who had been standing looking over the forecandle from the bridge, now turned to the midshipman at the bridge telegraph, from which signals are transmitted to the engine room.

"Slow speed ahead, both engines," commanded the captain.

A tremor ran through the ship and at the same instant the Stars and Stripes fluttered from the gaff, showing that the ship was under motion.

At that moment the band struck up a lively tune. With one accord the jackies threw their arms about each other and began waltzing about the deck, raising their voices in song as they spun around.

The Battleship Boys, however, did not sing. Their eyes were swimming with happiness, their hearts were full of patriotism. The throb of the engines was borne faintly to their ears, and the great ship, turning her prow seaward, headed slowly for the Narrows.

CHAPTER XII--IN THE DECK DIVISION

"Deck division turn out to swab down decks!" bellowed the boatswain's mate.

The ship had poked her nose out into the open sea by this time, the "Long Island" rising and falling gracefully on an easy swell.

"What did he say?" questioned Sam.

"I'll confess that I did not understand a word of it," answered Dan. "I don't see why those mates cannot talk plain United States."

The command was followed by a bustling about the decks. Men hurriedly brought out their deck swabs, implements somewhat resembling mops. Others brought pails which they filled from the taps on deck, while still others coupled hose to pipes along the sea gutters.

Sam felt a hand on his shoulder.

"What division are you in?" demanded a gruff voice.

"The deck division, sir."

"Then what are you doing here?" said a boatswain's mate that they had not seen before, glaring at them.

"I--I don't know, sir," stammered Sam.

"Will you tell us what we are to do?" spoke up Dan. "You see, it is our first day on board."

"Do? Do?" exploded the mate. "Get a swab and go to work; that's what you are to do. What do you think this is, a liner where you can loll around and look pretty?"

"We are ready to work, if you will show us. Where will we find swabs?" questioned Dan.

The mate conducted them to a chest in which the swabs were kept.

"Take your swabs and hurry aft to the quarter-deck. That's your station," he directed.

By the time the boys reached the quarter-deck their mates were already at work, moving along swiftly, pushing their swabs ahead of them.

"Take off your shoes. What do you mean by coming here with your shoes on?" demanded the mate.

Somewhat hesitatingly Dan and Sam removed their shoes and stockings, rolled up their trousers and joined their fellows in scrubbing down the decks.

Sam was surly. He plainly did not like the assignment.

"This is a tough job," he confided to his companion. "I didn't join the Navy to make a washerwoman of myself."

"We have got to learn, old chap. We must take our turn. If we complain, we are not fit for the service. You may be an admiral some day; who knows?"

"An admiral? Huh! Nice chance I've got to become an admiral--admiral of the scrub gang, you mean."

"Pipe down the guff," commanded the mate sternly.

"What's that mean?" muttered Sam.

"I think he means we are to stop talking."

For the next hour there was a steady splash, splash as the swabs worked back and forth over the deck, the latter running rivers of water from hose and pail.

"Well, how do you like Field Day?" questioned the mate who had first instructed the lads in their duties.

It was after the mess hour and all hands were resting preparatory to taking up the duties of the afternoon.

"What's a Field Day?" asked Sam.

"When all hands turn to to clean ship. You see, ships get in rather bad condition, regarding cleanliness, after having been in port for some time."

"Do the men like to clean ship?"

"They love it. Give a jackie a deck swab, put him in bare feet, and he is happy."

"I don't see anything to get excited about in scrubbing decks," grumbled Sam.

"You will after you have been in the service longer. By the way, the smoke lamp is lighted. Fall to, lads."

"You mean----"

"Go take your smoke. Light up your pipes."

"We do not smoke, sir," replied Dan.

"No, we don't smoke," added Sam. "But we eat."

"That is all right. A great many of the boys do not smoke these days, and it is a good thing. Now, in my time, everybody smoked. But things have changed on the sea as well as elsewhere."

"Attention!" called a voice.

The boys stiffened instinctively. They did not know the reason for the command, but experience had taught them that it was well to obey that command whenever heard.

It was the captain who was approaching, on his way to the bridge.

His hand came up in salute as he glanced quickly at them.

"Carry on, lads," he said, whereat the Battleship Boys and their shipmates resumed their interrupted conversation.

"You will find the Old Man a splendid officer and very kind to you boys," said the mate. "I've been under him for ten years, and there ain't a man in the world who's got a bigger heart than he, especially for the jackies. He loves them, every one of them."

Soon after that, the boys went forward. Sitting under the shining twelve-inch guns, either of which would carry an eight hundred pound projectile twelve miles, they talked in low tones until the bugle sounded the command to scrub decks again.

Throughout the afternoon, until eight bells, that is four o'clock, the steady scrub, scrub, continued, the men now and then conversing in low tones.

"How long does this scrubbing business keep up?" asked Sam when he met the boatswain's mate later in the afternoon.

"Let's see; you enlisted for four years?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's it."

"What is it?"

"The scrubbing. We are always scrubbing aboard ship; that is, when we are not painting. Do you like to paint?"

"I never tried."

"You will have a chance to do so to-morrow. We shall probably anchor off the Delaware breakwater to-morrow morning; then all hands will turn to and paint ship. Next to scrubbing decks the jackie is never so happy as when he has a paint brush in his hands."

But Sam was doubtful. He decided that he would much prefer to be an officer. When the day was ended both boys had appetites that would not bear trifling with. Mess, that night, was a real meal so far as they were concerned. Sam had a third helping of everything on the bill.

"Have some more canned Willie," urged a shipmate.

"Willie? Who's he?"

"Willie is meat."

"Red-head, you keep on eating that way your first day out, and Pills will have a job putting you on your feet again," suggested another sailor.

"I'll take the chance," mumbled Sam, his mouth full of food. "It won't be the first chance I've taken in this line of duty, either. But who is Mr. Pills?"

"Pills," laughed the sailor, "is the doctor."

By the time supper had been finished the breeze had freshened considerably and the "Long Island" was pitching heavily. The watch was called on duty about this time, but being raw men the two boys were not to have this duty put upon them just yet. Instead, they repaired to the forward deck, where they lay down against the big gun turret, to rest after their day's work.

The smoke lamp had been lighted, and many of their companions were stretched about on the deck, smoking, telling stories or discussing the latest news that they had heard while in port. In the lighted corridors men might be seen sitting on the floor with their ditty boxes on their knees, writing letters.

About this time, the band came out, electric lights were strung over the deck on the starboard side, where the musicians would be protected from the strong breeze, and chairs brought out for the players.

Soon the regular evening concert began. The voices of the sailors were stilled; under the spell of the music many heads drooped, many tired eyes closed for a few moments of delicious sleep.

"Isn't it glorious?" breathed Dan.

"It might be if things weren't so upside down," complained Sam.

"What's the matter? Aren't you feeling well?"

"I have felt better," answered Sam in a husky voice. "I guess I'll take a walk."

His walk did not last long. Sam took a turn once across the deck, then settled down beside his companion, holding his head between his hands.

"Why, Sam, are you really ill?" questioned Dan, his voice full of concern.

"Ill? I think I'm going to die. Ugh!" Sam stretched out on the deck flat on his back.

"Sam Hickey, I believe you are seasick," exclaimed Dan.

Sam's only answer was a long-drawn moan.

CHAPTER XIII--RESENTING AN INSULT

The services of two jackies were required to boost Hickey into his hammock that night at nine o'clock, when hammocks were piped up.

At five o'clock next morning, when the bugle piped all hands out, the red-haired Jackie was in a sad state. His hair was standing up like the quill of a porcupine, fairly bristling with disorder. When Dan helped him down to the deck Sam fell in a heap.

"Brace up!" urged Dan. "Don't let them think you a landlubber."

"I don't care what they think. I'm a sick man."

"Never mind; you will feel better after you get some hot breakfast inside of you."

"Breakfast! Waugh!"

Dan helped his chum to the shower baths, where Sam took a cold bath that tuned him up considerably. He was still very uncertain on his feet, however, as he made his way forward for his deck swab, for the first duty of the day was to take up his occupation of swabbing decks.

Sam's footsteps lagged that morning. He was several paces behind the other swabbers all the time.

"What's the matter, red-head?" questioned one of the jackies.

"I'm sick, that's all."

"Trying to work the list, eh?" asked another.

"I don't know what working the list may be, but I'm anything you want to call me."

"He means getting on the binnacle list,"

"What's that?" wondered Sam.

"Being excused by the doctor for one day on account of a fit of laziness that makes a fellow think he's sick."

"I don't think; I know," was the lad's muttered response. However, Sam resolutely stuck to his work, though every plunge of the battleship threatened him with a final collapse to the deck.

Somehow, he managed to pull himself through that long morning without, as he called it, "disgracing myself." When the command came, "knock off scrubbing decks," Sam broke ranks and ran for the forecabin. He did not dare trust himself to walk, for he feared he would be unable to keep on his feet.

But his headlong course was an unsafe one through the narrow corridors of a man-of-war, and many a jackie and marine's shins were rapped soundly by the handle of the deck swab, during Sam's wild dash. The jackies yelled at him, now and then one hurling something at the fleeing lad, but Sam did not stop until something finally happened to check his mad career.

Somehow his swab handle was thrust between the feet of a man standing with his back to the lad. This occurred on the gun deck.

The man went down flat on his face, and Sam likewise tripped over the handle of the deck swab, plunging headlong on the fallen man.

There was instant commotion. Those of the crew who chanced to be standing about set up a roar of laughter.

"Look out, Bill. His head will set fire to your uniform," shouted one of them.

Sam was struggling to his feet, very red in the face and very much ashamed of his clumsiness. He started forward to help the other man up, when the latter regained his feet with a bound. The man's face was bloody, a deep gash having appeared across his nose.

"Did the red-head do you up, Kester?" shouted several voices at once.

Bill Kester, in falling, had struck a sharp edge on the carriage of an eight-inch gun, and had sustained a painful wound. Besides this, his face was smeared with grease that it had collected in scraping along the carriage.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," begged Sam.

Kester was mopping the blood and grime from his face, regardless of the fact that the sleeve with which he was performing the operation would not stand an inspection.

"It was an accident. Believe me, I could not help it. I was feeling sick and was hurrying to some place where I could lie down."

The injured seaman did not answer at once.

"Is there anything I can do for you? May I get you some water?"

"Go soak his head under the scuttle butt," shouted another sailor.

It was quite plain that, for some reason, all hands seemed to enjoy Bill Kester's unexpected downfall, for no one expressed any sympathy for him, or regret at the accident. This Sam did not observe, however. He was too much concerned over the result of his carelessness. In fact he forgot, for the moment, that the deck was heaving under his feet and that everything movable about him was on the move.

"Hit him again, red-head!"

"I said it was an accident, and that I am very, very sorry. Did you understand?"

"You lie!"

Sam Hickey's face had been pale since the beginning of his recent internal disturbances. But the color now surged to his cheeks, mounting to the roots of his red hair, with which it merged.

"If you were not hurt, I'd make you take back those words. I don't allow any man to apply that term to me."

"That's the talk. Hand him one for luck, anyway, red-head!"

"You lie!" This time it came out with such an accent that there was no misunderstanding. Bill Kester's intent was plainly to goad Sam into attacking him.

The Battleship Boy stood with tightly clenched fists at his side, his teeth grinding in his great effort to control himself. Something of this seemed to convey itself to the jackies who, up to this moment, had looked upon the little scene as a delightful diversion. They saw at once that the red-headed, freckle-faced boy before them was holding himself in check under circumstances that would have driven any one of them into a blind, uncontrollable rage.

"Coward!" shouted Kester.

At the same time he sprang forward, landing a resounding slap on Sam Hickey's cheek.

Smack!

The Battleship Boy's right fist shot out. Sam had gone the limit in self-control. He could endure no more.

The fist landed squarely on Bill Kester's sore nose, but with a force that must have surprised that worthy. The man staggered backward, falling all in a heap, wedged in between the sides of the eight-inch gun carriage.

"Whoop! Now let the eagle scream!" shouted the sailors. "Pretty hot stuff for a shipmate who's on the binnacle list. Go over and give him another on the same spot, red-head."

Sam's deck swab dropped from his hand.

"I'm sorry I did that. I ought not to have hit him, but I just couldn't help it."

"Don't you worry about that, lad," soothed a shipmate. "Bill got what was coming to him, only you ought to hit him once more in the same place. If you want to finish the job we'll see that you get fair play."

"I do not want to fight. I am no fighter," said Sam.

"No fighter?" the sailors laughed uproariously. "Do you know, red-head, that Bill Kester is a bully and that he's licked half the crew already?"

"I don't care if he has licked the whole fleet; he can't call me a liar and a coward. I could stand for the liar business, because maybe he didn't mean it that way. But 'coward' I draw the line at."

By this time Kester had extricated himself from his uncomfortable position. No one had offered to help him, and for reasons of his own, Sam had not gone to the fallen man's assistance. The lad stood calmly awaiting the result of his act. Bill got to his feet unsteadily, blinked his eyes, gingerly felt his now flattened nose, then thrusting out his chin, he glared at his young adversary.

Sam gave back the look unflinchingly.

"Shall we call it square? I'm sorry I tripped you and sorry I had to hit you," announced Hickey in a manly tone, wholly free from anger.

For an instant Kester hesitated.

"All right; shake, shipmate," he said, advancing.

Sam met him half way with a pleased smile on his face, his right hand extended to complete the truce that had been declared.

"Look out, red-head!" warned a voice with a trace of excitement in it.

The warning came too late.

Quick as a flash Bill Kester planted a cowardly blow squarely between the boy's eyes. Sam Hickey settled down on the gun deck, toppled over and straightened out.

For an instant there was silence. Then an angry roar burst from the indignant jackies as they made a concerted rush for Kester, who had sought to follow up his advantage and inflict further punishment on his victim while in this

defenseless position.

CHAPTER XIV--CALLED BEFORE THE MAST

"Steady, boys! Don't maul him up," warned one of the cooler heads, as the men started to take the punishment of the bully into their own hands.

Kester was a man who was very much disliked by his associates and shipmates. He was in his second enlistment. He had once been dismissed from the service, but, by means known to none of his shipmates, had managed to get back again.

"Throw him overboard! It's all the cur deserves."

"No; leave him for the kid to take care of."

"Yes, leave him to me," interrupted Sam, raising himself on one elbow. "I'll take care of him when my head gets plumb on my shoulders again. Did he hit me with a brick?"

Before replying, the jackies conducted Kester to the forward bulkhead door. Through this they thrust him, half a dozen heavy shoes landing on him in swift kicks as he disappeared through the door.

"What did you let him go for?" demanded Hickey getting his feet, leaning against the butt of a big gun for support. He was weak and trembling, but not for an instant did his natural grit desert him.

"That's all right, shipmate. You ain't in no condition to mix it up with Bill. You wait till some other time and you'll get your chance and it'll be a fair and square knock-down fight, no under the belt foul tactics either. You're the right kind, and we're with you, even if you have got a combustible head of hair on you, and that stands all the time."

Sam took his way forward thoughtfully. He was still suffering from his illness and, besides, was weak from the effects of the blow he had received from Bill Kester.

In the meantime, Kester, holding a handkerchief to his face, was making his way toward the surgeon's quarters. His face was in sad need of repair, but he sought to hide that fact from his associates.

"Hello, Bill, what's the matter? Have an argument with somebody?" greeted a shipmate, with a quizzical squint at the bully's face.

"I ran into a stanchion," explained Kester lamely, proceeding on his way, avoiding the curiosity of the men as much as possible.

The surgeon, the instant he had taken a look at the man's face, however, saw that something more than a stanchion had hit Bill on the nose. All his questions, however, were avoided. On his report to the captain, which the surgeon made every night, was the notation: "Bill Kester, seaman, badly battered face, broken nose, with a deep gash in it, evidently made by some sharp instrument. This man has been undoubtedly in a bloody fight."

That was all, but it was quite sufficient to start the wheels of discipline moving. That evening Kester was called upon by the master-at-arms.

"Kester, I have come to ask you with whom you were in a fight to-day?"

"How'd you know I was in a fight?" demanded the seaman in a surly tone.

"Your face answers that question. Who was it?"

"Hickey."

"The recruit?"

"Yes."

There was a quizzical look in the eyes of the master-at-arms. That a bully of Kester's reputation should have been used up in this manner by a raw recruit was somewhat of a surprise to him.

"What did he hit you with?"

Bill hesitated.

"What did he hit you with?"

"A deck swab."

"And you nagged him to it?"

"No, I didn't. I didn't do anything till I got it."

"Very well. Do you wish to make a charge against the man?"

"Yes."

There was no further investigation that night. The master-at-arms' report was made to the captain. But that night Sam

recounted to his companion, Dan Davis, all that had occurred. Dan listened attentively, asking a question now and then.

"I do not see how you could have acted differently unless you had run away, and I shouldn't want to think you had done such a thing. I would much rather see you punished than to know you had acted the part of a coward."

"Don't use that word," begged Sam. "Kester did. That was what clinched the whole business. If he hadn't done that, I might not have hit him, even though he slapped me."

A dull flush suffused the cheeks of the Battleship Boy at the memory of what had occurred, but his voice was calm and without the slightest emotion.

"Do you think there will be a row about it?" he asked.

"I hope not. If there is, take your medicine like a man," advised Dan.

"I will. I'm feeling better now. I guess I needed a good shaking up to jar the seasickness out of me. I haven't that 'went-away' feeling now."

"I guess you must mean a 'gone' feeling, do you not?" smiled Dan.

"Yes; I was gone, all right."

"Well, don't worry about it. Nothing may happen as the result of your fight."

"Fight? Do you call that a fight? It wasn't a fight. If I had been feeling right there might have been a fight. There may be yet. I have an idea I have not heard the last of Kester. If he gives me half a chance I'm going to pay him back for that cowardly blow."

"Be sure you are in the right, Sam," cautioned Dan. "Keep your head. Defend yourself, if you have to, but see to it that you do not stir up any trouble."

Dan's advice always was good, and Sam gave more heed to it than he appeared to. As a matter of fact, he set much store by the advice and counsel of his cool-headed friend, Dan Davis.

That evening passed uneventfully and the lads enjoyed a refreshing night, with the cool breezes from the sea blowing over their swaying hammocks.

On the following morning after breakfast the master-at-arms tapped Sam on the shoulder.

"You will report at mast on the quarter-deck at one o'clock, sharp," he said.

"Mast?" wondered Sam.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"A charge has been laid against you."

"What sort of charge?"

"Assaulting a shipmate and beating him."

Sam uttered a short, nervous laugh.

"Is that all?"

"You will find it is quite enough. At a quarter to one you will report forward of the after twelve-inch-gun turret and there await me. I shall bring other prisoners there for trial. We will join you there."

"Very well," answered Sam. He did not yet realize the seriousness of the courteously executed order. However, he looked up Dan as soon thereafter as possible, relating to him what had occurred.

"Why, Sam, you are under arrest!" exclaimed Dan.

"Under arrest?"

"Of course you are."

"But I thought they locked people up after they arrested them."

"It isn't always necessary on shipboard. You couldn't get away if you wanted to."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of it in that light before. Under arrest? I wonder what will happen to me next? First, I get seasick, get knocked out, then get arrested for being punched. This is a funny business. And the worst of it is that I can't change my mind for four years." Sam grinned a mirthless grin. "Hard luck, isn't it, Dan?"

"No; it is a good thing. All this will make a man of you--of both of us."

The lads went about their duties soon after that. At noon Sam hurried through his dinner, after which he slicked himself up as best he could and went to the after gun turret, where he awaited the master-at-arms, as he had been ordered to do. The latter arrived a moment later, bringing with him two other prisoners and Bill Kester. The latter was accompanied by the surgeon. Kester's face--that is his nose--was patched up with numerous strips of adhesive plaster.

The men were conducted half way down the deck, where stood the captain, the executive officer of the ship and the

captain's yeoman, the latter with his record book in hand, eyeing them carefully.

"Sam Hickey, step forward," called the yeoman.

The lad took his place in front of the captain, who, at the moment, was studying the record sheet giving Sam's history.

"Where is the man who makes this charge?" demanded the captain.

Kester was thrust forward by the master-at-arms.

"State your case," commanded the captain.

"I was standing on the gun deck, facing forward, sir, when this man Hickey comes along and hits me with the deck swab."

"He hit you with the deck swab?"

"With the handle, sir."

"Where did he hit you?"

"On the gun deck, sir, aft the eight-inch gun."

"I should say by your appearance that you had been hit on the nose instead of on the gun deck," replied the captain, without the suspicion of a smile on his face.

"Yes, sir, he hit me on the nose, sir."

"How could he do that when your back was turned toward him?" demanded the captain sharply.

"Somebody cried, 'Look out,' and I turned, sir. Then I got it."

"What did you do?"

"I slapped his face, sir."

"And what did the prisoner do?"

Sam's lips contracted a little upon his being referred to as "the prisoner."

"He hit me on the nose with his fist, right on the sore spot, sir. He knocked me clean off my feet, tumbling me up under the breech of the eight-inch, sir."

"Then what happened?"

"I went to the surgeon, sir, to get myself fixed up."

"You were not the aggressor in any way?"

"Sir?"

"You are quite sure you did not start the trouble?"

"How could I, when my back was turned, sir?"

"I did not ask you that; I asked you whether you were or not. Answer yes or no."

"No, sir."

"That will be all for the present. Samuel Hickey, step forward."

The Battleship Boy moved three paces to the front, looking the commanding officer squarely but respectfully in the eyes.

"You have heard Kester's story. What have you to add to it, if anything?"

"I hardly think the story will stand any more adding to, sir," replied the boy, with a faint smile. The captain appeared not to notice the subtle fling in Sam's answer.

"You will tell me, in as few words as possible, how the row started."

"We had finished scrubbing decks, sir. I had been seasick and was going forward on a run, carrying my deck swab. Somehow it caught this man between the legs and upset him, sir."

"How did he get the wound on his nose, if that is true?"

"He must have hurt himself in falling."

The explanation sounded very lame to all who heard it, though, as the reader knows, it was wholly within the facts.

"You mean to tell me you did not strike him at all?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I struck him. I hit him as hard as I could."

"Where did you hit him?"

"Plumb on the nose, sir."

"What excuse have you to offer for assaulting a man who already, according to your own admission, was injured?"

"He called me a liar, sir; then afterwards he called me a coward. I couldn't stand that, sir."

"Is that all?"

"I think so, sir."

"Oh, why doesn't he tell the captain about Kester's having knocked him down," groaned Dan, who had, from a prudent distance, been an interested listener to the examination.

"You have admitted that you struck the man; you have admitted that you inflicted the wound which, it appears, is of more than ordinary seriousness, as it may cause his disfigurement for life."

Sam made no reply to this. None seemed to be called for under the circumstances. Somehow he felt that he had made out a very bad case for himself. He had told nothing but the truth, and not all of that, so far as his own vindication went, and yet he knew he had been placed in a false light.

"I'm in wrong, but I've got no one except myself to blame for it," thought Sam.

The captain consulted with his executive officer for a moment. Then turning to the prisoner he said, gravely:

"Hickey, you are guilty of a very serious breach of discipline. You are a new man on board ship. Were it not for that fact I should be much more severe. I am inclined to be lenient with you under the circumstances. You will understand that punishments are wholly impersonal. They are punishments because some rule has been violated. Discipline must be maintained."

"Yes, sir," answered Sam meekly.

"Silence!" warned the master-at-arms.

"I hope you will not forget the lesson. Control your temper. Unless you are able to manage your own temper you will never be fit to manage other men. You will have to conquer yourself before you can look for promotion in the service."

"Yes, sir."

"You will be placed in the brig for two days, on bread and water, with one full ration in the middle of the second day. And, Kester!"

"Yes, sir."

"Your record in the past has not been any too good. I trust I shall not hear of your getting into further trouble. You have been long enough in the service to know how to keep out of mischief."

The captain motioned to the master-at-arms to remove the prisoner.

Sam Hickey, with head erect, saluted his superior officers, faced about, marching steadily ahead of the master-at-arms, on his way to be punished for an offense that he felt sure he had not committed.

"I wish I'd hit Kester harder, while I was about it," Hickey muttered.

"I'm sorry, lad, but discipline is discipline," remarked the petty officer as he clanged the door of the brig on Hickey.

"It's all right, Mr. Master-at-Arms. There's one consolation; I don't have to scrub decks for the next two days, anyway. That's some relief."

Sam threw himself down on the steel floor, where he promptly went to sleep.

CHAPTER XV--A BAD BANGED-UP BULLY

"Oh, why didn't he tell the captain that Kester had knocked him down," muttered Dan. "I tried to signal Sam, but he would not even look at me, so interested was he in what was going on. They never would have held him had they known the truth."

The lad went about his duties in a thoughtful mood that afternoon.

Dan, by his close attention to duty, his manly bearing, his enthusiasm, had attracted the attention of his superiors. Their eyes were frequently upon him, which was a distinct gain for Dan, in view of the fact that the battleship's crew consisted of nearly eight hundred men beside her forty officers.

Dan did not know that he was being observed, nor would it have affected his conduct in the least had he known it. He had made up his mind to be an officer some day. He felt confident that this great thing would come to pass. But the goal seemed a long way off at the moment, when, with paint brush in hand, he painted and painted from morning until night, varying his occupation late in the day by grabbing up his deck swab, and, in bare feet, joining the deck division in scrubbing down decks.

Being a sailor by instinct, the Battleship Boy did not consider any work that he had been ordered to do beneath him.

At sunset, that night, the bugle blew for "colors," meaning the formalities always observed in lowering the Flag at sunset when the ship was at anchor. This was the first time Dan had had an opportunity to see "colors" since he came aboard, for the ship had been under way constantly.

A few moments before the sunset hour the different divisions marched aft to the quarter-deck, each division in charge of a midshipman or an ensign. Coming to a halt, the divisions faced midships, banked on each side of the quarter-deck.

Grouped aft on the starboard side was the band. In the center stood the captain, with his executive officer, facing the Flag, and with the marines drawn up just back of the jackies.

A deep silence pervaded the deck.

"Attention!"

The Flag slowly fluttered toward the deck, every face being turned toward the stern, every eye fixed on the Flag as it crept slowly downward.

As the Flag reached the deck the band struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner." The heart of every jackie on the quarter-deck swelled with patriotism, the strains of the national anthem bringing a deeper color to the rows of tanned, manly faces lined up in solid ranks on the quarter-deck of the battleship "Long Island."

"Attention! First division right face. Forward, march!"

To the rhythmic tap of the drum the ship's company began marching from the deck in steady lines, one division following another, until all had disappeared save a group of officers who stood chatting on the quarter-deck.

The day's work was practically done for all except those who were on watch duty. All hands repaired to the evening mess, and for an hour there was quietness on board ship.

Dan asked permission to visit his companion in the brig that evening. The permission was abruptly refused. During the rest of the evening the lad was unusually silent, and as soon as hammocks were piped up, he hurried off to bed, but not to sleep, for his thoughts were with Hickey down in the brig. Had he but known, there was little cause for worry. Sam was not fretting, but was sound asleep on his hard bed.

On the following morning, during the hour when the smoke lamp was lighted, Dan was pacing the forward deck. His righteous indignation over the wrong that had been done his chum was welling up within him until it momentarily threatened to overmaster him, resulting in some act that would bring punishment on himself as well.

Kester had risen from where he had been lounging on deck smoking his pipe. Dan had not observed him. The lad was too fully occupied with his own thoughts to give heed to what was going on about him.

All at once he became aware that some one was speaking to him.

"How's your red-headed friend this morning?"

Dan glanced up quickly, to find himself face to face with Bill Kester.

He eyed the bully with a steady gaze.

"Don't want to speak to me, eh?"

"No. I shall be very much obliged if you will keep away from me. If you don't, I am afraid I shall forget myself."

Kester laughed long and loud.

"Forget yourself! Ho, ho, ho! That's a joke--the funniest thing I ever heard. You think you can bluff Bill Kester, do you?"

"I never bluff."

"You'd better not."

Dan clenched his fists, but started to move away. He dared trust himself no further, for his wrath was rising to the danger point, yet there was nothing in his calm manner to indicate that such was the case.

Kester stepped in front of him.

"See here, you landlubber, them high and mighty airs don't go down with me, and you'll find they don't. You've got a few things to learn on shipboard----"

"I shall have to find some one else to teach me, if I have," retorted Dan sharply.

By this time other eyes had been attracted to them.

"I reckon Bill is trying to pick a row with Davis," said one.

"Let them go. It will do the boy good to get a trimming."

Kester's eyes narrowed.

"Oh, you will, eh?"

"That is what I said. Do you wish me to repeat it? I will do so, if your hearing is not good."

"I said, how's your red-headed friend this morning?" growled the bully, his chin protruding pugnaciously.

"Ask the master-at-arms if you wish to know. I am not obliged to answer your questions. There is no use in trying to be courteous with you. You wouldn't understand it at all."

"You take that back, or----"

"Look here, Kester," hinted Dan, a new light appearing in his eyes. "Red-head, as you call him, may be easy, but don't monkey with DYNAMITE. That's all I've got to say to you."

"You throw it at me, do you? What you need is a good licking, and that's what you're going to get. I'll run both you landlubbers out of the service. I'll trim your jib right now and make the job complete."

Dan gazed at him calmly, and as he stood there facing the big man the Battleship Boy appeared almost frail beside the other and more powerfully built man.

"What is it that you propose to do? Don't keep me waiting. I have things of more importance to attend to."

Kester took one step forward, making a sudden, vicious pass at Dan Davis's head. He followed it quickly with another blow with the left hand.

By this time several jackies had started up.

"Quit it, Bill. Can't you pick somebody of your own size to fight with? If you can't we'll do the job for you. We'll----"

The speaker paused suddenly. All at once things began to happen that caused them to pause in open-mouthed wonder.

Both the bully's blows had landed on thin air. Davis had deftly side-stepped out of harm's way. The lad paused for one brief instant, poising on his toes, then he leaped straight at the husky sailor.

The men said afterwards that they could not tell which was Bill and which was Dan Davis. The air was full of flying fists, and above the shouts of the sailors was heard the sound of heavy blows.

The jackies yelled and shouted their appreciation. Such a lively set-to they had not seen in many a day.

At at once Bill Kester sat down on the deck with a resounding bump, while Dan Davis stood with a calm smile on his face, gazing down at the astonished bully.

Then the sailors discovered that which set them wild with enthusiasm. Both of Kester's eyes were blackened and rapidly swelling, and were almost shut. His lips were puffed out to twice their natural size and on the right side of his head he wore a "beautiful" cauliflower ear.

Bill was dazed. He had been through many hard-fought battles, but never had he quite met with as sure and quick disaster as in the present instance.

"I--I'll fix you for this," he snarled, getting to his feet, groping for the companionway, which he could not see, for by this time his eyes were shut by the swelling.

"Why not do it now!" suggested Dan. "There is no time like the present, and besides we may not get another chance."

"I can't see, or I'd----"

"Let me help you."

To the amazement of the delighted jackies, Dan took the bully by the arm and courteously assisted him to the gun deck.

"Here, you men," he said. "Help Bill down to the sick bay. He's just bumped into something hard."

Dan returned to the deck, where the sailors crowded about him to congratulate him, but Dan would have none of it. He got at his work as soon thereafter as possible, but he felt sure there would be trouble--that he would be disciplined for his action.

"Anyway, I've got even for that blow he gave Sam," muttered the lad.

He was right in his surmise. Trouble did follow. Both Bill Kester and Dan Davis were called before the mast at one o'clock that afternoon.

This time there were several witnesses, all of whom had volunteered to testify in behalf of the Battleship Boy. There were three petty officers among the number, and, to Dan's surprise, two commissioned officers who had chanced to see the whole thing. Each assured the captain that Davis had acted purely in self-defense.

The captain consulted Kester's record and nodded his head.

"I sentence you to three days in the brig on bread and water, with no full rations during that time," announced the captain. "The next time I will make it thirty days."

"Davis," he continued, turning to Dan, "I am fully satisfied that you acted wholly in self-defense. No marks will be placed against you."

Secretly the captain was well pleased that the bully had gotten such a sound drubbing. The man's face was a sight. The plasters over the nose plainly located the spot where Sam Hickey's fists had landed, while the eyes, lips and "cauliflower" ear testified to the power of Dan Davis's muscular punches.

"Remember, however, Davis, that fighting is discouraged aboard ship. Fighting will be severely dealt with in all instances. Providing a man is acting in self-defense, with no fault on his own part, that fact will be considered in passing upon any disturbance that he may become involved in. You understand thoroughly, do you not!"

"Yes, sir," answered Dan, saluting.

"You are a new man. Be guided wholly by your officers. When in doubt consult them."

Kester was led away to the brig to serve his sentence. Sam heard them coming along the corridor. Stepping to the door of his cell he peered out through the grating. A grin spread over his face as he caught sight of the woebegone figure of Kester.

"Hello, Bill," he jeered. "Who have you been thumping?"

The bully made no reply, and a moment later the cell door clanged behind him.

CHAPTER XVI--RECEIVING A CHALLENGE

"No mine drill to-day," sang out a boatswain's mate, as he passed along the forecastle. "Water too rough. If the weather quiets down, however, there may be something else doing."

Instead of a day in the small boats laying mines, as had been planned, the men were to have another field day, painting ship, after the decks had been scrubbed down. Gun crews got out their pots and brushes, then crawled through the narrow openings into the gun-turrets, first having thrown open the hatches on top of the turrets, to let in enough light to enable them to see where to paint.

Walls were painted white, floors red, jackies both red and white. Dan and Sam--the latter having been released from the brig after serving his sentence--not belonging to a gun crew, were put to work in a corridor on this occasion. They were in great good humor, having gained the distinction of being ordered to report for wig-wag signal duty during the mine practice, both being experts with the signal flag. The boys were talking over their good fortune when the captain came hurrying through. Instantly the boys came to attention.

"Good morning, lads," greeted the commanding officer.

"Fresh paint beside you, sir," warned Dan.

"Very careless of me not to have observed it. I see I have gathered quite a quantity of it already," he added, examining his trim braided blouse that was now streaked with white.

"May I speak, sir?" asked Dan.

"Certainly, my lad. What is it?"

"Let me rub the paint off while it is still fresh?"

"How?"

"This way, sir."

Dan examined the sleeve of his jacket critically. Having found a clean place he approached the captain and began rubbing his own sleeve over the soiled spot on the sleeve of the commanding officer. This done he went at the left side of the blouse where there was a larger blotch of white. In a few moments he had so thoroughly cleaned the blue blouse, by rubbing it violently with the goods of his jacket, that all traces of the white paint had disappeared.

Dan stepped back, saluting respectfully.

"Why, you have taken it all off, but you will have the trouble of cleaning your own jacket."

"I shall have to do that anyway, sir."

"Thank you, my lad."

The captain saluted and passed on.

"That boy is as graceful and self-possessed as if he had spent years in the service. I must keep my eye on him. I predict that he will be doing something worth while some of these days."

Dan's face was flushed. He was pleased with himself. Sam glanced over at him and winked gravely.

"I wish I knew how to do things the way you do," he said. "Somehow my feet and hands don't fit the rest of my anatomy. I'm a thickhead and a landlubber, all in one."

"You are all right, if you would only think so," replied Dan.

After the noonday mess the boys were resting on the forward deck when Sam called the attention of his companion to a group of sailors on the port side, leaning against the rail engaged in earnest conversation. The spokesman was no other than Bill Kester. Bill was gesticulating. A sailor appeared to be opposing him in something.

"I wonder what's up?" mused Dan.

"Quarreling again, I guess," decided Sam, rising and strolling forward where he leaned over the bow of the ship, gazing thoughtfully down into the turbulent sea. Now and then a thin shower of spray would mount high in the air and dash over him, the anchored ship having swung about until its bow was headed into the half-gale that was blowing up the coast.

After a time two jackies strolled over to where Dan was sitting, and leaned indolently against the forward twelve-inch turret.

"How's the shipmate to-day?" inquired one.

"Very well, thank you."

"Feeling fit as a fiddle, eh?"

"Never better, though I do feel as if I had been eating paint all my life. I'm all red on the outside and white on the inside. My walls do not need any more dressing," laughed Dan.

"Then we've got a proposition to make to you."

"A what?"

"Proposition."

"What is it?"

"It's usual on shipboard, when one party gets a grouch on against another, to meet according to rules and fight it out."

"Well, what of it?"

"How'd you like to fight, matey?"

"No, thank you," Dan replied, with considerable emphasis, the memory of his previous trouble still being fresh in mind.

"Whom do you want me to fight?"

"We haven't said we wanted you to fight anybody. We ain't very strong on having you fight somebody. Somebody wants to fight you, and we've been appointed a committee to come over and consult with you."

"Some one wishes to fight me, is that it?" questioned Dan.

"That's about it, shipmate."

Dan gazed at them inquiringly.

"Who?"

"Bill Kester."

"I might have known it."

"It's only fair to tell you, Mr. Dynamite, that he's about the scrappiest scrapper on board the 'Long Island.' We've been thinking of getting one of the men from aboard the 'Michigan' to come over and whale the daylights out of him some of these days. He's got to get it before he'll quit picking trouble with other folks. You're under-size and lighter than Bill, even if you did lay him out the other day. But because of your size you've got a right to refuse, if you want to," continued the sailor.

It was plain, however, that he secretly hoped Dan would accept the challenge to do battle with the ship's bully.

"No, boys, I have had one fight, though it wasn't much of a fight after all. You know what happened? I was called before the mast and let go with a warning. Next time they would put me ashore and tell me to go home. I wish to stay in the service. When I fight, let it be under the Flag I serve."

"Nothing of the sort. Bill will be telling, all over the ship, that you are afraid to meet him, and maybe he'll call you a coward. Of course we fellows know you ain't, Dynie." ("Dynie," since Dan's first outburst with Kester, had become a favorite nickname for the boy.)

"He had better not," Dan made answer in a low, tense voice, a dull flush suffusing his cheeks. "If he does that, I may be tempted to use a marline spike on him."

"Then you'd sure get out of the service," replied the sailor.

"You tell him to keep away and let me alone. If he doesn't I'll defend myself, as I did before, that is, if I can. I am not looking for trouble, but I'll face it if it comes."

"Shall we tell him that?"

"Tell him by all means, if you think best. He does not interest me at all."

"You think it over, Dynie. We'll talk with you later. We'll tell Bill something to satisfy him till you make up your mind."

"I have made up my mind. I won't fight."

The committee returned to the group, where they talked for some moments, Dan observing that Kester was scowling more ferociously than usual and his voice rising higher.

"He's a quitter! He's a coward!" exclaimed Bill.

Dan rose hastily and walked away.

"Trouble seems to be getting right in my way. If I don't try to push it out of the way I fall over it. What's a fellow to do?"

"What's wrong, Dan?" questioned Sam, overtaking his companion at that moment. He had observed Dan's troubled face.

"Oh, nothing much. They want me to fight that fellow Kester."

"Have they told you so?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Just now. Two of the boys came to me to ask if I would fight him."

"What did you say?"

"I told them I wouldn't do it, unless he forced me to do so in self-defense, and that then I'd use a marline spike on him." Sam shook his head thoughtfully.

"It doesn't seem to surprise you any," complained Dan.

"No, I can't say that it does. I had suspected something of the sort was in the wind. Are you afraid of him, Dan?"

"A afraid of him?"

"Yes."

"No, I am not afraid of him," answered the lad in a quiet voice. "But I have had my little lesson through your fate, you know. Bread and water don't agree with my digestive organs. Why, what do you think would happen to me were I to get mixed up in that sort of a row?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean?"

"I hear that when men on board these ships have a misunderstanding, they are permitted to fight it out under proper conditions."

"They do?"

"Yes. But the battles, I have heard, don't amount to much. The fighters are provided with boxing gloves and the fight is more of a boxing match than a battle. When it has gone far enough it is stopped, the winner being the one who has scored the most points. One of the men was telling me about it. It isn't very different from the boxing matches you used to take part in when we were in the High School, is it?" suggested Sam.

"No," answered Dan somewhat doubtfully. "But this Kester is a loafer, and I do not like to trust him. I am not timid, but I want to win promotion in the service."

"The others will see that you have fair play."

"You advise me to meet him then?" questioned Dan.

"Of course I do. I wish he had challenged me to fight him. I owe him one."

"I am surprised at you, Sam. You forget you have recently been in trouble for fighting and now you turn around and urge me to go in for a bout with a fellow who intends to knock my head off if he is able to do it."

"Not a fight, a boxing match, Dynie," grinned Sam.

Dan laughed.

"A nice gentlemanly, hand-shaking sort of a bout, eh? Well I'll see."

"Are you going to meet him?"

"I will let you know in a few minutes whether I shall or not."

"What are you going to do?"

"Find out where I am at first," answered Dan, turning away and hurrying below. He went directly to the quarters of the boatswain's mate, and, after calling out his own name at the door, was told to enter.

"What is it, my lad?"

Dan briefly related the story of the proposition that had been made to him to fight Kester. The mate listened gravely until he had finished.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"That is what I have come to ask you, sir. You told us to consult you when we were in doubt or needed advice."

"I certainly did."

"I am in need of advice right now--very much in need of it, sir."

"There is bad blood between you two, is there not?"

"You might call it that. I cannot say that I have any feeling either way. You know my chum was sent to the brig for having a mix-up with Kester. I might share the same fate."

"Tell me the details of that trouble. I have not heard the inside."

Dan did so briefly.

"The coward!" muttered the boatswain's mate, upon hearing how Kester had knocked Sam Hickey down. "Meet him, by all means."

"But, sir, shall I not be disciplined for so doing?"

"No, lad. Fighting, it is true, is severely punished on board the ships of the Navy, but boxing is encouraged. We are all fighting men; therefore we should all know how to fight, under proper regulations. You will get fair play; the men will see to that."

"I think I shall be able to take care of myself," smiled Dan. "I want to be sure that I shall not get into disgrace, that's all."

"No danger. But I do not like to see a boy so young pitted against an experienced man like Kester. It isn't fair. However, if you are greatly overmatched, the bout will be promptly stopped. You will have shown your grit."

"Thank you very much. You have relieved my mind."

Dan made his way back to the fore-castle where he found Sam waiting for him.

"Well, how about it?"

"It's all right. I will meet him if the terms are satisfactory. Will you be my second, Sam?"

"Of course. You do not have to ask that. I'll go consult Kester's seconds now."

Later on Sam rejoined his companion.

"How is it going to be carried off?" questioned Dan.

"The men are going to pick out a referee. You and Kester are to box with eight ounce gloves until the referee stops you, or either of you decide you have had enough. You will get a fair show, the boys say. They won't stand for Bill's punishing you brutally. They admire your pluck in meeting him. If you could thrash him, Dan Davis, I'd be willing to go to the brig again, and feed on bread and water for a month."

"I'm lucky if I do not get there myself," grinned Dan. "When is it to take place?"

"At seven bells this evening, half-past seven. There goes the bugle. We must get at our painting again."

CHAPTER XVII--PROVING HIS COURAGE

The day continued rough, and, there being no further hope of planting a mine field, the work of cleaning ship was proceeded with.

All hands forward were discussing the coming battle--the evening's fun. They knew they would have it. None, however, doubted that Kester, in a regular match, would prove too much for his young adversary, Kester being the hero of so many successful battles.

Those who had seen Dan handle the bully on the forecastle, however, predicted that the Battleship Boy would give a good account of himself, though they agreed that Kester was much the stronger man, and the more experienced of the two.

As for Dan Davis, he appeared not to be troubling himself in the least about the coming battle. He went about his work cheerfully, ate his usual supper and, while the smoke lamp was lighted after supper, wandered about the forecastle chatting with his shipmates happily, without once referring to the coming contest.

At a little after seven o'clock three jackies began stretching a rope about a portion of the deck on the starboard side, while two others were rigging some electric lights over the spot.

Dan paused with hands behind his back, watching the work curiously.

"You had better get ready," suggested a tar. "The thing comes off sharp at seven bells."

"I have nothing to get ready."

"You want to put on your fighting togs, don't you?"

"What fighting togs?"

"Your trunks."

"No. I'll box as I am. I don't have to go in like a professional pugilist."

"You'll be at a disadvantage, then."

"That will be my lookout, thank you."

Upon glancing about the lad observed that there were no officers in sight. There was a reason for that, though he did not know it. The officers had been fully informed of what was to take place that evening, and hence discreetly kept away from the forecastle. However, there was, unknown to the others, a commissioned officer standing behind the weather cloth on the navigator's bridge.

The particular officer was an ensign, and when the hour for the boxing match approached he was joined by a brother officer. They peered down on the active scene below with keen interest. Being in a deep shadow they were unobserved by the men on the forward deck.

Kester had not yet made his appearance, and the jackies shook their heads as they saw Dan strolling about, chatting and joking with a shipmate.

"That's the fellow," said one of the ensigns to his companion, at the same time pointing to Dan.

"Seems pretty light to match with a man of Kester's build, doesn't he?"

"Yes, that is what I think. The boy has a steady eye, however. He seems a likely lad, but of course he can't win the match."

"Wasn't he up for something the other day?"

"No, that was his friend, Hickey. The latter got two days in the brig for a row with this same Kester. I heard the captain saying, this evening, that he doubted the boy's being to blame for that after all. He has heard something since about that affair."

"You aren't worrying about it, are you?" laughed his companion.

"Not particularly. I do not like to see injustice done, just the same. I should not be fit to be an officer if I felt otherwise. There comes the other one, now."

"The fellow Kester?"

"Yes."

Bill Kester was clad in a pair of short trunks and canvas shoes, with a red handkerchief about his neck. He hopped into the ring, taking his seat in a corner, having chosen the one that suited him best.

A moment later the referee that the men had chosen entered the ring.

"Davis!" he called sharply.

There was a movement outside the ring.

"Here," answered Dan, pausing in his conversation with a jackie.

"Get into the ring, if you are going to."

Dan climbed through the ropes, smiled and nodded to the referee, then stood awkwardly twirling his white cap.

"Take your corner."

The lad walked over and sat down. For the first time, he observed the scowling Bill Kester in the opposite corner, and Dan's eyes took on a gleam of amusement as he noted the strips of plaster on his opponent's nose, the swollen lips and discolored eyes.

"Are you going to fight in that costume?" demanded the referee of Dan.

"Certainly, unless there is objection."

"I know of none. Kester, do you object to Davis's boxing with his clothes on?"

Kester grinned and shook his head. Two pairs of gloves were passed through the ropes to the referee, who examined them inside and out.

"Want to look at these, Bill?"

Bill did. He scrutinized them even more carefully than had the referee before passing them back.

"Davis, look them over," said the referee, turning to the boy's corner.

"You say they are all right, do you not?"

"Of course."

"Then why should I look at them? I am willing to take your word, I guess."

Nods of approval followed this announcement.

"Put on your gloves."

Dan threw off his jacket, tossing it outside the ropes, turned up his trousers then sat down, extending his hands for the boxing gloves.

"The youngster either doesn't know what he is going up against, or else he has a lot of confidence in himself," muttered one of the officers on the bridge.

Both men tried their gloves by opening and closing their hands, after which they sat up, glancing at the referee expectantly.

"This is to be a fair battle, mates," began the referee. "The one who commits a foul loses the match, and maybe he might get worse if the foul is very foul. The rounds will be three minutes each, with a minute's wait between. No striking in the clinches, but either party is free to hit his opponent in the breakaway. Do you both understand?"

The men nodded.

"I guess that's about all, then. Are you ready?"

"Yes," answered Dan and Kester in chorus.

"Shake hands and begin."

Bill Kester bounded to the center of the ring, but Dan rose methodically. Stepping slowly forward he extended his glove, grasping the hand of his opponent. No sooner had the lad dropped the hand than Kester launched a terrific blow at the Battleship Boy's head. It missed by the narrowest margin. Dan felt the glove brush his cheek ever so lightly, but he had instinctively thrown his head to one side as he realized that it was coming his way, thereby escaping the blow.

He danced awkwardly back out of the way. Kester sprang after him, aiming blow after blow at the head of his slender antagonist. How they missed knocking the boy out the spectators were unable to say, but somehow the lad managed to escape being hit, though his awkwardness made them groan in sheer sympathy for him.

"It's a shame. The boy doesn't know how to fight," cried a voice.

"Let him alone. He's got to learn some time. One punch won't hurt him. It will do him good."

Sam, however, shrewdly suspected the reason for his companion's poor showing. Dan was nervous. Sam knew that it was not because of the boy's fear of the man before him. It was rather the consciousness that so many eyes were fixed upon him. It was a case of real stage fright.

"I hope he gets over it before it is too late. Brace up, Dan! What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Dan heard the voice of his chum, but it sounded far away to him. He would have given almost anything could he, too, have been far away at that moment.

Bang!

The boy's head was suddenly jolted backwards. Dan seemed to have heard his neck crack. He wondered if it were broken. Kester had gotten through his guard, but the blow had landed on Davis's forehead. The boy sprang back, now, stepping about more quickly and skillfully, though his head swam dizzily. Bill made a rush at him. Escape seemed hopeless, for Dan was standing back against the ropes.

Dan suddenly ducked, however, under a powerful right-arm swing, and danced to the center of the ring, at which the crowd yelled and shouted their appreciation.

"That's the way to do it. Now hand him one!"

"Time!" called the referee. The round was ended. The men retired to their corners, where they were fanned and their faces bathed by their seconds.

"Do something this time," begged Sam. "You are not half boxing. What is the matter with you to-night?"

"I don't know. I guess I needed that punch. It made my head swim, but it woke me up. I'll do better this time."

"Give him a punch in the plexus, Bill," advised one of the latter's seconds. "He doesn't guard himself there at all."

"Never mind. I've got the fellow's measure," answered the bully. "It will all be finished up and done to a turn before we end the second round."

"Time!" summoned the referee.

Kester sprang into the ring full of confidence, but Dan, to the surprise of everyone, sat calmly in his chair. Kester hesitated, a triumphant gleam appearing in his eyes. Suddenly he made a rush at his opponent's corner, and all at once the Battleship Boy leaped to his feet. His right fist shot out and then his left. Both blows landed squarely on his adversary's sore nose, bringing two plainly audible grunts from the big man.

Kester threw one hand to his nose. As he did so, Dan planted a swift, powerful blow, this time in his adversary's stomach. The force of it sent Bill staggering half way across the ring.

The spectators fairly yelled themselves hoarse.

"You're all right, Dynamite! You'll be a champion some day, when you wake up."

But Bill was boxing again. The blows on his nose had enraged him beyond endurance. With a yell of rage, he charged his slender opponent, leading out his right for the lad's face. The latter blocked the blow, side-stepping out of harm's way, where he stood awaiting the other man's further efforts.

"Why don't you follow him up?" shouted Sam, who, by this time, was wildly excited. His face was flushed, and his eyes were sparkling with joy over his companion's good showing in this round.

Dan made no effort to follow Kester up. The lad had his own ideas, and now he appeared to be fully aware of what he was doing and what he hoped to do.

Kester came back, sparring cautiously. He landed two light blows on the boy's shoulder, which Dan returned with right and left over the heart. He seemed purposely not to have put much force into the blows. He felt that he had inflicted enough injury on his antagonist, and hoped he should have to do so no more.

The spirit of battle had taken full possession of Kester, however. He was determined to knock his young opponent out. He was exerting every effort to that end.

All at once, in a rapid exchange of blows, the big man clinched, throwing his full weight on Dan's shoulders, with the evident intention of tiring the boy out.

"Break!" cried the referee.

Kester dropped one hand to his side, the other remaining on Dan's shoulder. Like a flash the big man's right came up with a terrific hook on the boy's jaw. It laid Dan flat on the floor some distance away.

"Foul!" roared the crowd. "He struck in the clinch."

"Time!" announced the referee. The three minutes were ended.

"It's a foul. Give the fight to the boy," shouted the jackies, jumping about excitedly, with difficulty restraining themselves from leaping into the ring and inflicting quick punishment on the bully who had committed the foul.

Kester had taken his corner, but when he saw the temper of the spectators he grew ill at ease.

Dan, in the meantime, had been dragged to his own corner by Hickey, who was now using every effort to bring his companion back to consciousness. This he soon succeeded in doing. Though Dan was dizzy and trembling, he smiled bravely.

"You win the fight on a foul," announced the referee.

Davis shook his head.

"You do not wish to claim the foul?"

"No; I could not think of it."

"You wish to go on with the match?"

"Yes, unless Kester is willing to call it a draw."

"Not much," growled the bully. "We'll fight!"

"Good for you, Dan," whispered Sam, while the spectators were shouting their approval. Even if Dan were defeated, now, the Battleship Boy had won the admiration and respect of his shipmates. He had established his reputation on board the "Long Island" for all time for bravery.

"I thought this was to be a boxing match," muttered Dan.

"It is."

"I call it pretty close to a prize fight. That was an awful wallop he gave me. I can feel it yet."

The call of "time" interrupted the conversation. Once more the contestants faced each other in the center of the ring. Dan still was a bit unsteady on his feet as the result of the blow that had knocked him down. He exhibited not the slightest indication of excitement, however, and though suffering great pain, he was cool and calm, presenting a smiling face to his adversary.

Kester suddenly rushed him and Dan rushed Kester. They met with a bang, neither giving ground to the other for several seconds. The big man was the first to back away. Dan's sole object in life now appeared to be to land his eight-ounce gloves on the unfortunate nose of his antagonist. He played for the nose with all the skill and cunning that he possessed. In the meantime Bill was reaching wildly for the younger man's stomach, upon which he seemed unable to land, and getting a bang on the nose nearly every time he attempted it, much to his disgust.



"This for Hickey--and This for Me!"

"We had better call it a draw now, had we not?" begged Davis during a lull. "You've had enough. I don't want to hurt you more."

"No!" bellowed Kester, enraged at the suggestion. "Not till I've put you to sleep for the rest of the night."

"Then we had better end it right here. This for Hickey--and this for me!"

The men said afterwards that they saw no blows struck, but that they heard two distinct impacts. What they did see was Kester hurled clear across the ring, after two eight-ounce gloves had landed on the very point of his jaw, directed by all the strength of Dan Davis's well-trained muscles.

Kester went clear through the ropes.

"Catch him!" shouted Dan.

Others had discovered the defeated bully's danger. Half a dozen tars sprang to his rescue. Already Bill Kester's head and shoulders were through the ship's rope railing, and in another second he would plunge headlong into the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII--THE ORDERLY TAKES A HEADER

"He's going overboard!" roared a chorus of voices. "Nail him!"

They did "nail" him, but not a second too soon, and Kester was hauled back into the ring amid a great uproar. Dan was standing in the center of the roped enclosure, his face a bit more pale than usual, but in no other way did he exhibit emotion. By this time Sam was at his side, rapidly stripping the gloves from the hands of the victor.

"It was great--the greatest fight I ever saw in my life!" cried the red-headed boy excitedly.

"It was not. It was tough, but I had to do it," replied Dan moodily. "I just had to do it to save myself. He would have given me a terrible beating had I not finished him. I saw that early, and tried to get him to call it a draw. He refused, so there was nothing left for me except to finish it right there. I am glad he did not go overboard. That would have been terrible. Is he still unconscious?"

"I have been too busy to look," grinned Sam.

All at once the jackies seemed to have recovered from their surprise.

"Dynamite! Dynamite!" they roared.

Making a concerted rush at the Battleship Boy, they hoisted him to their shoulders and began marching about the deck shouting and singing, though Dan much preferred not to have his victory celebrated in this manner. There was no restraining the jackies, however. From a raw recruit Dan Davis had, in a few moments, won his way into the heart of every jackie, except Kester, on board the "Long Island." Dan had suddenly grown from boyhood to manhood in their estimation.

As soon as he could release himself from their hospitable shoulders the lad made his way to the ring, where Kester's seconds had just succeeded in restoring him to consciousness.

"I'm sorry, Kester. I hope I have not hurt you," said Dan in a tone of deep concern. To this the fellow made no reply.

"Won't you shake hands with me and let us be friends?"

"No!"

"Bill, Bill, don't be a grouch--don't be a sorehead. Dynie licked you fair and square," urged one of the man's companions.

"I'll even up with you for this, you--you cub!"

Dan drew himself up proudly.

"Very well. I have tried to do the manly thing. If you refuse to have it that way, it surely is not my fault. But I give you fair warning. Keep away and let me alone hereafter. Until you are willing to make friends, I want nothing more to do with you. When you are, I shall be glad to meet you half way."

"That's the talk, Dynie," chorused several voices approvingly. "You had better not fool with the fire any more, Bill. It burns. You ain't in the same class with that stick of dynamite. He's got you anchored with both port and starboard anchors and the chains not half out."

"Please do not stir him up," begged Dan. "I am ashamed of myself for what I have done as it is."

"What? Ashamed for licking the ship's bully?"

"Yes."

"Well, ain't that a joke, mates?"

The sailors laughed loudly. In the meantime, Kester's seconds had gotten him up, and were helping him to a sheltered part of the superstructure, where they assisted him to get into his clothes. The big man was still very unsteady on his feet, and his face was streaked with blood from the unfortunate nose.

"You'll have to go to Pills to get fixed up."

"Yes, my nose hurts."

Once more the surgeon was called upon to dress Bill Kester's face and bolster up the flattened nose.

"You've been in a fight again, my man," rebuked the surgeon. "I shall have to make a report of it to the captain. Who hit you!"

"Davis."

"It will go hard with him, then," muttered the surgeon. "That young man must have an awful punch."

The surgeon's report was duly made to the captain. The latter called his executive officer at once.

"See here, Coates, what's this about Kester having been in another fight?" he demanded after the executive officer had responded to his summons.

"It wasn't a fight, sir."

"Not a fight?"

"No, sir. That is, it was a boxing match on the forecastle. One of the regular set-tos. It was all regular and proper, but it was pretty rough, I understand."

"Who did it?"

"Ordinary Seaman Davis."

"The red-headed boy?"

"No, his friend."

"You don't mean to tell me that that slim youngster put a man of Kester's build in such shape that he had to report at sick bay, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, I thought Kester was known as a bully?"

"He was, sir. He will not be any longer, I imagine."

The captain gazed at his executive officer; then, leaning back in his chair, he laughed and chuckled to himself for a full minute.

While fighting and brawling were sternly suppressed on board the "Long Island," the commanding officer believed that fighting men should be allowed to fight under proper conditions. It had become an unwritten law on board, therefore, that the jackies were to be allowed to settle their difficulties with the gloves, sparring under a referee and with no brutality. This enabled the sailor lads to enjoy many a fine sparring match on the forward deck. In fact, bouts were put on regularly every Saturday night. In doing this the men managed occasionally to pit against each other men who had a grudge to settle. This made the sport more real.

Kester had demanded the match with Davis, and the latter had no way to avoid the meeting without laying himself open to a charge of cowardice. Dan Davis was not a coward, neither was he a bully. He wished to be let alone, and he had gone into the fight with reluctance, as the reader already knows. Now that it was over, he was heartily ashamed of himself for his part in the battle.

"Did any of our officers see the fight, Coates?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir. Ensigns Brant and Cockrill watched it from the bridge. They tell me it was perfectly regular. I made inquiry. They say the recruit, Davis, put it over the big fellow like a deck awning, though the young fellow evidently was reluctant to fight."

"I am glad to hear that."

"I think Kester was to blame for the previous trouble with the other boy."

"No doubt. I shall make inquiry into that matter as well. I want to make sure that that fellow is trying to stir up trouble on board. When I am certain we will give him a quick trial and put him ashore one of these days."

"You will take no official action on this last fight, then?"

"Certainly not, since you say it was entirely regular."

"It was, sir."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. Candidly, between ourselves, Coates, I'm more pleased than I know how to express that the young fellow gave Kester a sound thrashing. By the way, I should like to look that young man over."

"Very good, sir. Shall I send him to you?"

"No, not that way. I'll tell you what you had better do. Have both boys assigned as my orderlies in turn. I want these new men to get an early chance at orderly duty. It is a most excellent thing for them. Send Hickey to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

"I would rather have my own boys act as my orderlies than have the marines do it."

The captain's orderly is supposed to stand outside the captain's door at all times while the commanding officer is in his quarters. When the captain moves to any other part of the ship his orderly follows at a respectful distance, so as to be on hand to carry orders and to perform such other small duties as the captain may command. It is considered an honor to be chosen for the duty.

Soon after the finish of the fight Dan and Sam hurried to their quarters to turn in. Sam was chuckling over his companion's great victory. Dan surveyed him with disapproving eyes.

"Dan, I have always looked upon you as a nice, sisterly sort of a chum."

"Well?" questioned Dan, with a smile.

"You're a bloodthirsty wretch, that's what you are. Good night."

Late that night a full gale sprang up. Word of the weather conditions was brought to the captain.

"Heave up the anchors and get under way at once," was the command. "Tell the chief engineer to get ready as soon as possible. How many boilers are fired up?"

"Six, sir."

"Have the fires put under the other two at once. We must put to sea and ride the gale out there."

The captain quickly dressed and hurried up to the bridge. The spray was dashing clear over the bridge, soaking everything and everyone on it. In the meantime a boatswain's mate was bawling out his orders through the ship, hurriedly turning out the various watches.

Dan and Sam were awakened by the heavy rolling of the ship. Both sat up in their hammocks at the same instant.

"What's going on?" asked Dan as he heard men hurrying along the decks to their stations.

"Maybe the ship is sinking," suggested the cheerful Sam.

"Nonsense!"

"I'm going to get up, anyway."

"You have no right to do so until you are piped down. You will be called out if you are wanted."

"You mean to say that I can't get up if I want to?"

"Certainly not. You are supposed to stay in your hammock and get your rest."

"Not if the ship is sinking!"

"Oh, that would be different. I guess we would all be getting out in that event."

"Huh!" muttered Sam, lying back in his swaying hammock, listening to the wind whistling through the cage masts far above them.

In a short time the ship was under way, moving slowly as she headed out to sea. The storm was in no sense dangerous to the ship's welfare, but it was safer to be out in the open until the gale should have blown itself out.

When the men were piped out the next morning the Battleship Boys found it difficult to keep right side up. Dan was unaffected by the rolling and plunging, but Sam had little appetite for his breakfast.

The morning work having been finished Sam was accosted by the master-at-arms.

"You will act as the captain's orderly to-day, Hickey," he said.

"Orderly?"

"Yes."

Sam did not know whether to be glad or sorry.

"Just before eight bells go to your quarters and put on your clean clothes. See that you are ship-shape. I don't know why the commanding officer wants you."

"Thank you, sir. I report at eight bells?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I'll let you know. Wherever the captain chances to be at that moment. Quite likely he will be at his breakfast. He is on the bridge at present."

"What do you think of that, Dan?" demanded Sam slowly, confiding to his companion the order that had just been given to him.

"I think it fine. It looks as if you had gotten into the captain's good graces. I hope so. See that you perform your duties in a ship-shape manner. Keep your head working all the time. I should call it almost a promotion."

"I hope I don't get seasick," muttered Sam doubtfully. "This rolling is awful."

An hour later, Sam Hickey made his way down the after gangway to the captain's quarters, clad in a spotless white uniform, his braided white knife-lanyard drooping gracefully across his chest and disappearing in the pocket of the blouse.

"I've come to relieve you as the captain's orderly," announced Sam to the marine, who was acting in that capacity.

The orderly returned the nod and hurried away, for he had not yet had his breakfast.

Sam braced himself against a wall in the corridor with his eyes fixed on the swaying curtain that shut off the room in which the captain was breakfasting at that moment. The corridor was narrow and close, and Sam soon grew restive. Espying a chair a little way from him, he helped himself to it and sat down, crossing his legs.

Just then an officer came hurrying through the corridor.

"See here, my man, what are you doing there?" he demanded.

"Captain's orderly, sir," answered Sam, saluting.

"Get up! Don't you know an orderly is supposed to remain on his feet? Never sit down when on duty. Stand at attention when the captain comes out and remain that way until he has passed. After that, follow him."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The Battleship Boy peered after the retreating form of the officer.

"Seems to me they are mighty particular. I'd like to be up where I could get some air. I wonder if I dare take a sneak to the deck for a whiff?"

Sam did not get the chance just then. It was well for him that he did not, for he would have been severely punished for deserting his post had he been discovered away from it. He started as a sharp command came, from behind the curtain.

"Ord'ly!"

"Who's calling, I wonder?" muttered the boy.

"Ord'ly!" This time the command was given in a more imperative tone.

"I'll bet that is the captain. He's calling me. Yes, sir! I'll be right there," shouted Sam, with delightful informality.

He started on a run for the curtained doorway. He did not slacken his speed as he stretched out a hand to thrust the curtain aside. Sam was in so great a hurry that he entirely forgot that under each watertight door opening was an iron sill extending upward some eight inches.

Sam's toe caught the projection. Just then the battleship gave a great lurch to port. This being the direction in which the boy was traveling at that moment, it gave him added impetus.

The captain opened his eyes in amazement as Hickey's red-head shot through the curtain.

The Battleship Boy covered about half the width of the cabin, barely touching the floor with his feet, his arms beating the air wildly in his fruitless effort to clutch something that was not moving.

Then the crash came.

Sam landed on his head and shoulders, skated along the slippery floor, headed for the captain's breakfast table. He hit the mark squarely. That is, he slid right underneath the table, at the same time turning over on his back in an effort to stop his rapid flight.

Sam threw up his feet. The move was fatal. The captain's table was lifted right up into the air. A crashing of dishes followed as the table turned turtle. A shower of broken glassware rained down over the head of the Battleship Boy followed quickly by the table itself.

Sam lay buried beneath the wreckage.

He did not move, not because he could not, but because he dared not. He feared any movement on his part would mean the end of the world so far as he was concerned.

CHAPTER XIX--THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

"Get up, lad!" commanded the captain, himself removing the table from his unfortunate orderly.

Sam got himself out from the wreckage, and slowly rose to his feet, ruefully surveying the scene before him. He did not speak. There were no words that would probably express his feelings at that moment.

The captain pressed a button, whereupon his colored steward hurried in. The steward's eyes opened as he caught sight of the ruined china and glassware.

"Steward, clear this rubbish away and be quick about it," the captain directed in a calm voice. "Is this the way you usually respond to an officer's summons?" fixing his eyes upon the culprit. There was a quiver about the lips of the commanding officer of the battleship "Long Island," but Sam was too much upset to observe it.

"N--n--no, sir."

"I approve of your prompt attention to duty, lad, but you will have to learn to control yourself."

"I--I am very sorry, sir."

"Never mind, lad; you will learn. This is the first time you ever acted as orderly, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will instruct you in your duties, for you no doubt will be called upon to perform this duty many times during your service."

The captain's kindly tone went straight to the heart of the Battleship Boy.

"In the first place, when you come to the door bearing a message for me you should halt outside and rap, saying, 'orderly, sir'; then wait for the summons to enter. When I call you to give you some directions, you need not rap. Say nothing, but enter and come to attention. Do you understand!"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sure you will do better next time. You will now go to the officer of the deck, and say that I wish to see Mr. Coates, the executive officer, at his early convenience."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Sam, backing away. He bethought himself of the door sill just in time to prevent another tumble, this time out into the corridor.

Sam delivered his message and returned to his station, where he pondered deeply over what had befallen him.

"I hope the boys don't hear about that," he muttered. "They'd make this ship so warm for me that I should have to jump overboard. I--I couldn't stand it; that's all."

Shortly after that, the captain decided to make an inspection of the ship. It was a long and tiresome journey. For the next two hours Sam Hickey was climbing down and up ladders, crawling through narrow spaces, his head swimming, his face red and perspiring.

"This orderly business isn't all it is supposed to be," he complained to himself, when once more they had emerged upon the quarter-deck, Sam following obediently behind the ship's commander. From there, they went to the bridge.

"How are you headed?" questioned the captain of the man at the wheel.

"South, southeast one half," came the answer.

"Mr. Coates, the storm appears to be abating. I think we may safely turn about and steam slowly back toward our anchorage now."

They were out of sight of land by this time. The big ship was turned about and headed back over the reverse course. At noon, eight bells again, Hickey was relieved from his duty, another man taking his place.

The boy heaved a deep sigh of relief and hurried forward to hunt up Dan, to whom he confided his experiences of the morning. Dan laughed until he could laugh no more.

"Don't--don't tell any of the fellows, please," begged Sam.

"It's too--it's too good to keep," gasped Dan between laughs.

"Dan Davis, if you tell a human being about that I'll thrash you worse than either of us thrashed Bill Kester. Now tell about it, if you want to."

Dan sobered.

"Very well; if you feel that badly about it I won't say a word."

"You had better not," growled Sam.

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to routine duties aboard ship, Sam having gotten into his old clothes for the work before him. Painting ship was continued. Corridors and gun decks showed the result of the work that already had been done, and the smell of fresh paint was everywhere.

Night came on with the ship nearing her former anchorage.

"We shall have good weather to-morrow," announced the ship's navigator.

"I hope so," answered the captain. "We want to lay out that mine field and get to work. We are going to try to beat the record of the 'Georgia' this time, providing we have no accidents. That is the main reason why I am so anxious about the weather."

At last they reached a sheltered spot, anchors were let go and the battleship swung about, facing into the rolling sea.

That night the Battleship Boys lost no time in turning in after taps had been sounded. The ship was rolling more gently now, just enough to lull them into a sound sleep, their hammocks swaying slightly under the battleship's motion.

How long they had been asleep they did not know. All of a sudden Dan uttered a shout and Sam sprang up, as did many others in the corridor.

"Pipe down the racket," growled several voices.

"What's the matter? Is that you, Dan!" called Sam, observing, in the faint light, that his companion was not near him.

"Yes," answered a muffled voice from below.

"What's the trouble, did you fall out of bed?"

"I don't know. I guess I did."

"Hurt you any?"

"Hurt me? Every bone in my body is broken."

"Will you rookies shut up and let the rest of us go to sleep, or must we come down there and thump you?" demanded a shipmate from his hammock.

"We are not rookies," protested Sam indignantly. "We are ordinary seamen."

"My hammock is down," complained Dan.

"Then why don't you use more care in putting it up? Hurry and get it in place before any of the sentries pass here. We, or rather you, will get on the report if they discover you with your hammock down."

"I can't put it up?"

"Why not?"

"I'm hurt."

Sam was down out of his hammock instantly.

"Where are you hurt?"

"My wrist. I think I have broken it. I must have twisted it under me when I fell."

"Then go to the surgeon at once."

"No; not until morning."

The wrist hung limp and Dan seemed unable to use it at all.

"That's too bad," exclaimed Sam, his voice full of concern. "You wait until I fix your hammock; then I will help you up."

"No, I can't do it, Sam. I never could get up there," complained the lad, holding his wrist, which was paining him dreadfully.

Dan dragged himself to where his hammock was hanging by one end, the other end lying on the deck.

"It's curious. I can't understand it at all."

"What is?"

"I know I triced that up properly last night. I cannot understand how it ever came down."

Dan stooped over, picking up the ends of the rope that had secured the hammock to its hooks. He examined the ends as closely as possible with one hand injured.

"Look here, Sam," he said, with a trace of excitement in his tone.

"What is it!"

"Just examine this rope and see what you make of it?"

Sam did so.

"It has been broken, that is all I can discover."

"Then your eyesight must have gone back on you. There is more to it than that. Don't you see anything else wrong with those lashings?"

"I do not."

"Well, I do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that my hammock lashings have been cut. See those strands there? Well, they have been half severed with a knife. It was intended that they should not give way at once, but that they should let me down some time in the night."

"You--you don't mean it? Yes, you are right. They have been cut. Who could have done such a dastardly thing? Why, you might have killed yourself."

Hickey uttered a low growl.

"I don't know who did it," muttered Davis, "but if I do find out there will be a real fight on board this ship, and that without the formality of a referee."

"Dan this must be reported at once to the proper person."

"I shall report to no----"

"You must report to the sentry on duty outside without delay. If you do not, I'll do it myself. There will be an investigation over this, and there ought to be."

"There'll be something more than an investigation, I reckon," muttered Seaman Davis, moving toward the deck, still holding his injured wrist.

CHAPTER XX--OUT ON THE MINE FIELD

An investigation did follow. It began right after reveille the next morning.

As soon as possible, after having gotten up from his uncomfortable bed on the floor, Dan hastened to the sick bay, for his wrist was swelling and demanded immediate attention.

The surgeon examined it carefully.

"You have broken two small bones in the wrist. How did you do it?"

The lad explained.

"Very well, I shall have to put you on the binnacle list to-day. You will not be able to do any heavy work with that hand for some days to come."

"I do not wish to go on the binnacle list," replied the lad promptly.

"You don't wish to?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are different from most sailors. They all pull the list on the slightest pretext, some under no pretext at all. Why are you so particular?" questioned the surgeon, his curiosity aroused by the unusual objection on the boy's part.

"I expect to have duties to perform."

"What are they?"

"Mine work."

"You will not be able to work on mines to-day. I shall not permit it," decided the surgeon firmly.

"I hope to go out as a signal man. I can do that, can I not?"

"You might, but I shall advise against it."

"Please do not tell the officers that," pleaded Dan. "I want to go. It is my first chance to prove that I am good for anything at all. I have made a mess of almost everything I have tried so far."

"I hear differently."

Somehow the earnest young seaman seemed to appeal to the sympathies of the surgeon. He was different from the others; perhaps that was the reason.

"From what I have heard I judge that you already have distinguished yourself," smiled the doctor.

"How so, sir?"

"In the little argument you had with Able Seaman Kester, for instance."

Dan flushed.

"May I go out with the mines, sir?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes; I'll let you go, but I shall have to put you on the report. First, let me bind the wrist up and splint it. Be as careful of the injured member as possible. You are liable to do still further damage if you subject the wrist to any sudden strain."

"I'll be careful, sir."

After bandaging the wrist, the surgeon allowed his patient to go. On his morning report to the captain, giving the list of sick and injured, the surgeon made the following notation:

"Ordinary Seaman Daniel Davis, bones of wrist fractured, said to have been sustained by fall from hammock. Refuses to take sick leave or be placed on binnacle list, saying he has important duties to perform."

A smile of approval appeared on the face of the captain when he read the notation.

"The boy is all right. He will do all right. I must keep my eye on him to see that he does not get sidetracked in the wrong direction."

Calling his orderly the captain said:

"Tell the officer of the deck that Ordinary Seaman Davis is to be excused from heavy duty to-day. He will go out with the mine boats in the capacity of signalman. Tell the officer of the deck to give the proper orders and to have Davis notified."

The orderly saluted and retired to carry out the orders of the commanding officer.

"I wish there were more such in the Navy," mused the captain.

With a great rattle and bang the mines were being hoisted to the deck from somewhere far down in the ship. Neither lad

ever had seen mines before, and both were curious to know all about them.

Many men now being at work on the quarter-deck, Sam among the number, Dan was at liberty to go there and watch the work.

The mines were spherical, made of steel and hollow. They were about two feet in diameter, bolted in the middle. The mine men were now at work taking the mines apart.

Inside the sphere was a can of wet guncotton, with an opening left for a charge of dry guncotton, which is put in place when the mines are being laid for an actual enemy. This was the only part of the operation that was to be omitted in the practice work, there being no necessity for so dangerous an operation.

The quarter-deck of the battleship, with all the apparatus strewn over it, somewhat resembled a wreck. Down by the sides of the ship all the boats had been drawn up ready to receive the heavy mines. In the meantime the navigator had gone out in the motor boat to take bearings and place buoys showing where the mines were to be dropped.

"Stand by to launch mines," came the command at last.

The signal was given by a bugle call. Everyone was on edge, for the time required to put the mines over into the small boats was to be taken and would count on the record.

The Battleship Boys climbed over the side with their signal flags, each dropping into a whale boat, though the operation proved a severe strain on Dan's injured wrist.

"Launch mines!"

The signal was blown loud and clear.

Crash after crash followed the bugle's command, as steel met steel when the mines were clamped together.

"Silence!" roared the executive officer as the men began shouting in their excitement.

As fast as the mines were bolted together they were rolled to the side of the ship. There tackle was quickly hooked to them, then at command the heavy spheres were swung over the side, being carefully lowered to the boats below. There they were hung over the opposite sides of the small boats, one mine balancing the other. This would make placing the mines much easier than if they were to be taken over into the boats, for in that case they would have to be lifted out.

In an incredibly short time every one of the sixteen deadly implements of warfare was on the boats. Each boat held either an ensign or a midshipman, who was in command.

Sam was in one of the large whaleboats, while Dan occupied the wherry with an ensign and an oarsman.

"Three minutes, lads," came the information from the deck.

The jackies sent up a cheer that might have been heard far over the sunlit sea. The morning was a glorious one, the sea having quieted down to a sluggish roll that scarcely disturbed the ship at all, though the small boats bobbed about somewhat, thus giving more zest to the work.

"Lay mines," came the command.

Half a hundred hardy tars bent themselves to the oars and the fleet of boats slipped away from the towering sides of the "Long Island," the men pulling for the mine field off to the southeast.

Each Battleship Boy carried a spy glass under his arm. Now and then he would place it to his eye for a long look at the ship.

"The ship is making signals, sir," Dan informed the ensign in command of his boat.

"What do they want?"

"They are saying that whaleboat number two is off its course, sir. Orders, sir, to bear more to the southwest."

"Wherry, there," spelled Dan. "That's us." He acknowledged the signal.

"Pull up. Wherry lagging behind!"

Dan translated the message to his superior officer. The lad was glad that it was not he who was tugging at the oars, for the perspiration was dripping from the face of the oarsman by this time.

As each boat reached the buoy where it was to locate its mine, the men would toss their oars as a signal that they were ready. Some time was required for all the boats to get in their proper places.

In the meantime Dan Davis was standing up in the wherry with his flag ready for signaling. At last the oars in each boat of the fleet were tossed, which means held upright.

"Ready," wig-wagged the Battleship Boy.

He held his flag high above his head with one hand--the injured one--the other hand holding the spy glass to his eye watching the signal halyards of the battleship.

A flag fluttered to the breeze on the ship. Instantly Dan dipped his own signal flag.

A splash from a cutter, followed by a series of splashes from the other boats of the little fleet, told him that the mines were going overboard.

The second leg of the contest against time was on. Sam Hickey sat in the whaleboat irritated because he had had little or nothing to do. Had he but known it, however, there was plenty of opportunity ahead of him to enable the lad to show the stuff he was made of.

CHAPTER XXI--BREAKING THE RECORD

"There goes the last of them," shouted the officer in Dan's boat.

Dan raised his flag, making the signal 333. This he did three times, indicating that the work was finished.

"What is the time, sir?"

"Three minutes and twenty seconds," replied the officer. "That breaks the record." Picking up his megaphone the officer shouted out the tidings to the men who were out on the mine field. "Three minutes and twenty seconds," he bellowed. "Best previous time beaten by forty seconds."

A great cheer broke from the jackies drifting about in their little boats over the mine field. Batteries had been placed, everything had been done within the time named, and had the mines been charged with dry guncotton any ship running into them would undoubtedly have been blown up.

In the meantime Dan Davis was signaling the news to the battleship.

The "Long Island," expressed her congratulations in three long blasts of her siren, at which the jackies set up another cheer. This time the cheer reached to the ship itself.

"Battleship making signal of general recall, sir," Dan informed his superior.

"Return to ship," shouted the officer through his megaphone.

All boats were now turned back. The mines were to be left as they were until later in the day, or perhaps until the next day, when they would be taken up. As a general rule planted mines are left out for twenty-four hours.

Good time was made on the return, for it was nearly time for the noonday mess, and every man in the outfit had a sharpened appetite after the morning's exertions.

Reaching the ship, the men piled over the side to the quarter-deck, where a number of the officers were gathered. The men were called to attention on the quarter-deck. Stepping out before them, the captain said:

"You have done well, lads. If you do as well in taking up the mines, our record will stand a long time before it is beaten. I congratulate you all, and I have also sent a wireless message to the admiral telling him of your good work."

The bugle blew for dinner and all hands hurried to the mess rooms, where they were left undisturbed for the next hour. This is one of the few hours in the sailor's day when he is never disturbed, except in case of emergency.

The moment the sailors sit down to their meals the little triangular red flag mounts quickly up the signal halyard, where it is left fluttering to the breeze until the meal is finished. That, also, is one hour of the day when visitors are not welcomed aboard ship.

Dinner over, the smoke lamp was lit for half an hour, when all hands lounged about decks, many smoking and telling stories. The jackies were unusually jubilant on this sunny afternoon, for they had set a mark in mine planting that would make their companions on the other ships of the service more than envious.

Suddenly a bugle trilled out the strains of an order.

"Mine crews take to the boats!" bellowed a boatswain's mate.

The jackies uttered a shout. In a moment the scene of quiet on the fore-castle was changed into one of quick action. White-clad figures were running and leaping for the quarter-deck, whence they boarded the small boats. This was the landing place, the quarter-deck being lower than any other part of the ship.

The men who had been tending the small boats trailing out astern of the battleship had quickly propelled their craft alongside and were lying in readiness to take the crews on board.

The jackies piled over the sides of the ship noisily, the officers making no attempt to check their enthusiasm, well realizing that it was because the men were in great haste to get out to the mine field and get the mines up in record-breaking time.

Dan Davis and Sam Hickey were well up with the first to reach the quarter-deck, though Dan was obliged to favor his lame wrist, now paining him severely. This delayed him somewhat in getting down the sea ladder, performing the feat with one free hand being rather awkward.

"Hurry up, elephant feet," shouted a voice from above.

"Come on, don't be all day about it," urged a companion from below. At the same instant some one grabbed Dan's feet, giving him a violent tug, which brought him down in a hurry. Dan landed across one of the seats in the whaleboat with his injured hand doubled under him.

He felt sure he heard the wrist snap. The pain was almost unbearable.

"That's the way to get down when you are in a hurry, and especially when some one else is in more of a hurry than you are."

The boy's face was pale, but despite the pain in his wrist he smiled bravely as he climbed into the wherry moored alongside.

"What's the matter with the hand?"

"I broke my wrist this morning," answered Dan coolly. "That's all. Nothing very much."

"Did you hurt it again just now?" demanded the jackie who had pulled him down.

"I may have broken a few bones more or less, but don't let a little thing like that worry you. 'Pills' can patch it up when we get back. Not a word," warned Dan, with sudden interest as he saw the jackie preparing to speak to the ensign in charge of the boat. Dan did not relish the thought of being ordered back to the ship.

"Just as you say, matey. You've got the grit. I ought not to have yanked you down that way, but I didn't know."

"That's all right," smiled Dan.

"Take up mines," blew the bugle.

"Cast off," commanded the coxswains of the various boats, whereupon all the small boats seemed to leap clear of the ship.

Dan, in his small wherry, was lagging behind as usual. In his case the boat had only one oarsman, while the other boats had several, but the single oarsman did very well. The tide was running in, which helped them all more or less.

The boy was holding his wrist, the pain growing more and more severe as the moments passed. By this time the wrist had begun to swell until the bandage about it fairly cut into the flesh.

"I hope I shall be able to stand it until I get back," he muttered. "I guess I'll have to, unless I jump overboard."

Leaning over the side he trailed the hand in the cool water, which seemed to relieve the pain a little.

Reaching the mine field, the boats quickly took their various stations, and the men, resting on their oars, awaited the command, "Take up mines."

The command came a few minutes later.

How the jackies did work! The great spheres came up dripping from the salt sea, and in much quicker time than they had been planted.

"We have broken all records now for sure. Three minutes flat! Signal the ship," ordered the officer in command.

Dan wig-wagged the time, and the boats started away with the mines hanging over the sides, the jackies singing as they pulled lustily for home.

All at once there was a loud splash from whaleboat number two, the boat lurched heavily, the weight of the mine on the opposite side pulling it over.

Hickey, who was standing up watching the ship for signals, went overboard head first. The mine on the opposite side, slipping its fastenings, had gone to the bottom in three fathoms of water.

But the red head of Sam Hickey appeared above the surface of the water almost at once. He struck out for the boat, blowing the water from mouth and nose, while his companions shouted encouraging words to him.

Several made ready to go overboard to the lad's rescue, but as soon as he was able to free his mouth and nose of water he called to them not to do so. Despite the severe effort of swimming against a strong tide, Hickey finally made the boat, though well-nigh exhausted when at last he stretched up his hands, grasping the gunwale of the whaleboat. The jackies hauled him in, joking over his misfortune.

"Didn't soak the color out of your hair, did it, red-head?"

"No; all fast colors, warranted not to run," retorted Sam quickly.

In the meantime, Dan Davis was standing up in the little wherry making efforts to attract the attention of the battleship. At last he succeeded in doing so.

"Mine number six gone overboard," he wig-wagged.

"How much water?" asked the battleship.

"Three and a half fathoms."

"Ask for orders," commanded the officer in charge.

"Orders?" signaled Dan.

"Wherry lay to, to locate the mine. All other boats come in."

"I understand," answered Dan.

"Signaling again, sir," informed Dan.

"What do they say?"

"They have ordered that the signalman from the whaleboat number two remain here in the wherry, sir."

"Very well, call the signalman from whaleboat number two. We shall have this wherry so heavily loaded that she'll sink if we get in much of a seaway."

Dan wig-wagged with his sound hand to the whaleboat, giving the orders to Hickey to join him in the wherry. The officer in charge of the whaleboat grumbled at being thus obliged to turn back and travel some distance to reach the wherry. The latter had by this time cast out an anchor so as to hold the boat in place near the spot where the mine had gone down.

"What is this for?" demanded Sam, clambering over into the wherry, his clothes still wet and dripping.

"I did not think best to ask the captain for his reasons for giving the orders," answered Dan, with a meaning smile.

"I didn't mean that. Look out, the ship is making signals. Why don't you tend to your business?" demanded Sam.

Dan's spyglass quickly went to his eye. He lowered the glass after a moment, turning to the officer in command of the wherry.

"Diver coming out to go down for the mine, sir."

"Very good. I knew they would send out a diver."

"Is he going to dive for it?" questioned Sam, a new interest showing in his eyes.

"Yes; he will go down in one of those diving suits we saw on deck this morning. Did you never see a diver at work?"

"Never," answered Sam. "I should like to."

"You will have the opportunity very soon."

"I think the boat is coming over there now, sir," added Dan, addressing the ensign.

"Cast the lead line over and see if you can locate the mine, lads."

They could not. In a short time the boat with the diver and diving apparatus pulled up and began getting ready for work.

"Look," whispered Dan.

The diver was none other than Bill Kester, his face swathed in plaster, his eyes scowling menacingly as he recognized the Battleship Boys.

CHAPTER XXII--BURIED THREE FATHOMS DEEP

"Where does she lay, sir?" questioned the assistant who had come with the diver and his apparatus.

"As near as we could determine the mine should be about fifteen yards to the southwest of us. Bring your boat around to leeward and make a sounding. We did not dare move over for fear of losing our location entirely."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" questioned Dan, touching his cap.

"Certainly; what is it?"

"I got a quick bearing when the mine went over."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"Taking the bearing from our present position, a line drawn from the lighthouse to the battleship, crossed by a line from our wherry to that bluff yonder, would mark the location of the mine at the crossing point, sir."

The ensign glanced at the young seaman quizzically.

"Very well done, my lad. You have the making of a first-class navigator in you. Keep on and you will do well. Always use your eyes, and your head as well, as you have done this afternoon and there will be no doubt about it."

"Thank you, sir," answered the boy, his face glowing with pride.

By this time the men were laying out the diving suit for the diver, the hideous-looking helmet having been placed on the stern seat of the cutter that had brought them over.

"Sound for that mine before you put the diver over," commanded the ensign. "No use bottling the man up until you are ready to send him down."

"This helmet is not fit to use, sir," spoke up one of the diver's assistants.

"What is the matter with it?"

"It leaks. See?" He held up the helmet, which he had partially filled with water, for the inspection of the officer.

"It has lain out on deck too long. The sun has checked it," continued the man.

"It should be your business to see that the sun did not check it. I shall have to place you on the report," replied the officer.

"I was ordered to get the apparatus on deck this morning, sir."

"Davis, signal the ship to send out another diving suit. Tell them this one is out of order."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Ask them to send it out in a hurry, for the wind is coming up. I fear we shall have some rough water. Hickey, sit up there. Don't you know it is against the regulations to lounge about in the small boats? I am surprised at you."

Sam's face flushed. He sat up, gripping his signal staff half angrily. He made no complaint, but saluted. Sam was not in the best of humor at this moment. He took an instant and violent dislike for the young officer who had rebuked him.

Dan, in the meanwhile, was wig-wagging to the ship, sending the request for another diving suit.

A few moments later, as he peered through the spy glass, he saw a boat starting off in their direction.

"Motor boat under way. I think she is coming with the diving suit, sir," Davis called.

"Very good. Have you located that mine yet, men?"

"I think we have, sir."

"Then hold it. Do not let it get away from you. We shall remain on the anchorage here until you get your anchor down."

As soon as this had been done the wherry moved up closer, keeping just far enough away to avoid interfering with the diver when he got at his work on the bottom of the sea.

Immediately upon the arrival of the motor boat the men began hurriedly assisting Kester on with his diving suit, for it was getting late, and the wind was freshening considerably.

"All ready to put the diver overboard, sir."

"Very good. Make sure that all is well before doing so."

"All is in proper condition."

The diver, as he stood waiting for the order to descend, appeared in his diving suit like some strange and hideous monster from the deep. Sam gazed at him in wide-eyed wonder.

"Then put him over."

A splash followed, the diver disappearing beneath the water, while the diver's assistants rapidly paid out the rubber tubing and the ropes attached to the diver's costume.

"Bottom, sir," announced the man at the ropes.

"Watch his signals."

"Aye, aye, sir."

There followed several minutes of tense waiting, the rhythmic "clank!" "clank!" of the apparatus that supplied the diver with fresh air being the only sound save the lapping of the water to break the stillness.

"He's found the mine, sir," called the diver's assistant.

"Very good. Davis, signal the ship that we have located the mine."

Dan stood up, flashing the message through with a few swift dips of the signal flag. Sam wondered how they knew the man, Kester, had found what he was in search of. What he did not know was that the men in the other boat were able to hold a limited conversation with the diver by means of a signal rope, certain jerks meaning certain words or questions.

"The mine is secured, sir," called the assistant.

This meant that the diver had succeeded in making fast to the lost mine one of the ropes that he had taken down with him.

"Shall we raise the mine first before getting Kester up, sir?"

"By all means. He has not asked to be brought up, has he?"

"No, sir."

"Haul away, then, lads."

A warning signal was sent to the man below, after which the assistants in the boat began pulling and tugging at the rope attached to the mine.

Evidently the mine was imbedded in the sandy bottom, for it refused to move, the men jerking this way and that to free it from its resting place.

All at once it did come away, and with a suddenness that caused the men to sit down in the bottom of the boat, losing control of the line.

"Clumsy! Look out or you will lose it again," cautioned the ensign.

Quickly pulling themselves up, they began hauling in on the line. Very slowly the sphere moved upward, at last appearing above the surface of the water, shining and almost menacing Dan thought as he gazed at the object.

"Now be careful in getting it over the side," warned the officer.

The diver had put what he considered to be a strong hitch on the mine with the end of the hauling rope. On account of the depth at which he was working, however, the darkness compelled him to operate solely by the sense of feeling.

The mine was now swaying on the gunwale of the rolling small boat, the waves from the rising sea breaking over into the cutter as well as into the other boat, until the men were standing in the salt brine.

"Look out! There she goes!"

With a great splash the mine struck the water, having slipped its lashings, and quickly sank out of sight.

"Warn the diver!" shouted the ensign.

A jerk on the signal cord conveyed the message that the mine was falling toward him.

"Does he answer?"

"No, sir."

"Quick! Give him another warning!"

"He does not answer, sir."

"There goes the signal line! It's fouled, sir!"

A violent wrench on the supporting line with which the diver was to be hoisted to the surface tore it loose from its fastening on board the diver's boat.

"The line's gone, sir!"

All hands were standing up in the rocking boats. The sky had suddenly become overcast and spray was dashing over them in blinding sheets.

Sam stood as if dazed. He did not catch the full significance of the scene, but his mind was working. Like a flash it dawned upon him.

"There goes the air tube. That settles him, sir!"

"What does it mean?" stammered Sam.

"The diver is drowning three fathoms under the sea. Nothing can save him," groaned some one.

An instant of silence followed.

Dan threw up his flag signaling, "accident."

Then a body flashed through the air. The dazed spectators caught sight of a white service uniform, as the intrepid Dan Davis plunged into the sea, disappearing beneath the waves.

Sam's flagstaff struck the gunwale with a bang an instant later, toppled over and was quickly carried away. Ere it had reached the water, however, the second Battleship Boy had leaped to the bow of the boat and before they could utter a word of warning, he had followed his chum Davis with a long, clean dive into the ocean.

CHAPTER XXIII--HEROES TO THE RESCUE

"Men overboard from the wherry!" bellowed a voice in the motor boat that had brought out the second diving suit.

"Stand by to pick them up!" roared the ensign.

"They'll never make it. Shall we go over, sir, and help them out when they come up?" asked a seaman.

"Stand by! Not a man of you goes over. You couldn't live in this sea. The fools--to do a thing like that!"

The wind had increased to a gale, great walls of water hurling themselves against the frail craft and breaking over them in quick succession.

"Bail boat," commanded the ensign.

"Aye, aye, sir."

It seemed as if every moment would be the last for the small boats, but not a man showed the least trace of excitement, either in face or voice.

"Anchor's giving way, sir."

"Stand by the oars. Hold your bow to the wind. Keep them up, lads. And not a signalman on board to tell the ship we are in trouble!" the officer muttered to himself.

Off on the battleship, however, a dozen glasses were leveled in their direction and as many keen eyes were gazing toward them over the troubled sea.

"Small boat appears to be in trouble, sir," called the quartermaster, who, standing on the quarter-deck of the battleship, was bracing his glass against a stanchion. The ship's lookouts had failed to catch Dan Davis's quick signal of "accident."

"Have they asked for assistance?" questioned the executive officer.

"No, sir. I have seen no signals in some time."

"Not since the diver went overboard?"

"Not since they made signal that the mine had been located."

"What do you think about it, Coates?" asked the captain, peering through his own glasses, now and then catching a glimpse of the boats through the mist of white spray that enveloped them.

"Two men missing from the wherry, sir," called the quartermaster, with no trace of excitement.

"Steamer number one!" roared Lieutenant Commander Coates, the executive officer.

"Aye, aye, sir," came the answer, borne faintly on the gale.

"Cast off and proceed full speed to the assistance of boats on the mine field."

The steamer's crew needed no urging to leap to their work. Some of their comrades were in distress. Lines were cast off, boat hooks were quickly thrust against the side of the ship to prevent the little steamer from being dashed to pieces against it.

"All clear!"

With a shrill blast of her whistle steamer number one rounded the ship's bow in a cloud of blinding spray and headed for the mine field. The officer in charge had been given the number of the mine, and the bearings, as he started away, so that by the aid of the compass he was enabled to direct a straight course to the scene of the trouble.

It seemed as if the staunch little steamer must turn over as she plunged along through the seas that were smiting her with increased force every moment.

In the meantime the men in the little boats on the mine field, were fighting desperately to keep their craft near the spot where two men had gone down to battle for the life of a third down under the sea.

The Battleship Boys were splendid swimmers else they never would have been able to wriggle their way through the water to the bottom. Dan was somewhat hampered too, by the coil of line that he had instinctively gathered in his hand as he prepared to leap from the boat.

By rare good luck, his hands gripped the helmet of Kester, who lay on his back drifting slowly along, the weight at his feet holding him down not far from the sea bottom.

Dan made a desperate effort to pass the line about the drowning man. By this time, however, it seemed as if the boy's breath would burst from him. He could hold it only a second or so longer.

At that instant a new form hovered close to him. It was the red-haired Sam. With quick instinct Dan thrust the rope into

the hands of his companion, and struck out for the surface.

Those in the boats made him out the instant his head was poked above the water. The boats were close by.

"There he is!" yelled a voice. "Wait; we'll cast a rope."

Dan shook his head, once more plunging under, swimming for the bottom with long, powerful strokes.

He had great difficulty this time in finding the spot he was in search of, for in his rise to the surface he had been carried some twenty feet from the place where Kester lay.

He reached it at last. Sam had gotten the rope about the neck of the diver but was too much exhausted to make a hitch.

Dan pushed him toward the surface. Working desperately Davis at last succeeded in completing the work that Sam had well-nigh finished.

The boy's mind was working with lightning-like rapidity. He knew that he could not hope to get the drowning man to the surface by his own efforts. There was only one way that this could possibly be accomplished. That was to get to the surface himself and try to draw Kester up. Dan did not know whether the rope would reach that distance or not.

"I must do it!" he thought.

Grasping the end of the rope he dashed upward for the surface. On the way he met a figure coming down. It was Sam. Dan grabbed him and by a series of quick pinches managed to convey the word that the red-headed boy was to return to the surface.

Sam wriggled about and struck out for the upper air.

Hickey's red head appeared in a swirl of water and spray. He shook his head, gasping for breath, nearly drowning himself in the effort to get even a little fresh air into his lungs.

An instant later Dan leaped to the surface.

Dan gave a wig-wag signal with one hand, meaning "help."

By this time the small boats had drifted too far away to be able to reach them quickly.

But steamer number one had reached the scene. She gave a short, sharp blast of her whistle to show that those aboard had seen and understood the situation.

"Is he lost?" gasped Sam.

"N-n-no. I've got him at the end of the rope. Help me quick. He must be dead by this time. There comes the steamer. Oh, why don't they hurry?"

"Where is the rope?"

"Here! Help me with it. I'm getting tired."

Dan was holding to the rope with all his strength, trying to retain his hold of it and at the same time keep himself from sinking. Some invisible power seemed to be pulling him downward.

The ensign and his oarsman had gotten aboard the steamer, trailing their wherry behind it. The ensign was standing in the bow with a rope in his hand.

As the steamer, lifting on a great swell, dropped down within reaching distance he made a cast. Dan reached for the rope and missed it.

"Lay alongside, sir," commanded Dan, with a feeble effort at saluting with his injured hand.

"Can't do it. We will run you down in this sea. Look out for the next cast."

"You'll have to hurry, sir. We've got a drowning man under the water here, sir. Lay over, no matter if you do run us down. Quick!"

A sudden, but quickly suppressed exclamation escaped the ensign.

"Take hold; I'm going to let go," gasped Dan.

Sam grabbed the rope from the hands of his companion, but Dan suddenly snatched it away again, observing that his companion was getting weak.

"Can you take care of yourself?"

"Yes," replied Sam faintly.

The next time the line was cast from the steamer, Davis grabbed it, and with his burden was quickly hauled alongside the plunging steamer. Willing hands grabbed the lad, dragging him aboard and then began a frantic effort to pull up the drowning diver. Kester was hauled over the steamer's side a few seconds later.

The helmet was jerked from the head of the diver in wonderfully quick time, and then began a hurried effort to restore him to consciousness.

"Sam! Sam! Where is Sam?" cried Dan wildly.

For the first time they noticed that the red-headed boy was not on board.

"There! There! He's sinking!"

Dan made a rush to leap overboard.

"Hold him!" cried the ensign.

Two sailors fastened upon the Battleship Boy at the instant he was about to take the plunge.

"Keep working on Kester, and don't let the boy get away. I hold you responsible for him."

The ensign cleared the rail with a bound, leaping far out into the boiling sea, but Dan had not observed it. Giving a sudden tug, the boy freed himself from his companions. He was overboard in a twinkling. A boathook hauled him back, protesting and fighting to get away.

"The ensign is over. No need for you to go."

It was the same ensign who had rebuked Sam earlier in the day, and against whom the lad had taken a sudden and violent dislike on that account.

"Full speed ahead," commanded the coxswain of the little steamer.

"Steady there, helmsman; don't run them down."

A desperate struggle followed amid the smashing seas. By this time the steamer was hard by.

"Cast a rope," commanded the coxswain. A coil shot through the air, landing over the ensign's shoulder. He fastened upon it instantly, and a few moments later was drawn slowly to the steamer, one hand clinging to Hickey's red hair. The two men were hauled aboard in a half-drowned condition. Dan was the worst off of the three, however. He was not only suffering from broken bones but he had been under water for a long time. He was barely able to speak now. His face was pale and drawn and his legs seemed unable to support him.

The first act of the ensign upon getting aboard, was to spring over to where Kester lay stretched out in the bottom of the steamer, the men still working over him, applying the methods that they had learned at the training station. Some of the men had been through the experience before and knew what to do.

"Is he dead?" questioned the officer.

"No, sir, I think not. See, the color is coming into his cheeks."

The ensign drew a deep breath of relief.

"Gangway! Let me have a hand, lads," he cried.

But the men stood fast.

"You are not fit for it, sir," answered Dan Davis, barring the way. "Please, sir, sit down and rest yourself. We are fresh and you are not."

"You are----"

The words seemed to stick in the ensign's mouth.

"My lad, I think you have quite as much right to rest as have I. Stand aside," he added in a stern tone.

Dan fell back. The officer began working over the body of the diver, bringing his longer experience into play. In a very short time Kester was coughing and choking. It appeared almost as if he were strangling.

"Shall we get under way, sir?" questioned the coxswain.

"Are we all here?"

"Yes, sir. The other boats are tied astern, their crews on board."

"Get under way as quickly as possible. Run as fast as you dare. These men need the attention of the surgeon."

"Aye, aye, sir. Full speed ahead!"

The steamer plunged away headed for the battleship. But still the ensign and his men worked over the diver. Little by little he regained consciousness. He was too weak to do more than glance about at them slowly, then his eyes closed wearily.

"We'll save him," muttered the officer. "We must save him."

"Catch Davis," shouted a voice.

A Jackie caught the boy just in time to prevent Dan from going overboard. They hauled him back with a laughing remark. Dan wavered on his feet for a few seconds then plunged heavily forward on his face.

"He's fainted, sir."

"Let him alone. We shall be aboard ship in a few moments. He will recover by that time."

Soon after that the little steamer ran in under the lee of the battleship. The rail was lined with officers and men.

"Anyone lost?" called the executive officer.

"No, sir; got them all. Two men in bad shape. Pass over a sling."

Sam was kneeling beside his unconscious companion a troubled look on his face.

Almost at once a rope sling was passed over the side. The men reached for the unconscious boy. Sam motioned to the diver.

"Take him first," directed the lad. "He is the worst off."

Bill Kester, therefore, was hoisted to the deck; then came Dan Davis. Tenderly they laid him on the deck. Stretchers were brought and the patients were started quickly for the sick bay.

"Ensign, what happened?" demanded the captain.

"Briefly, sir, those two lads made the most heroic rescue that I ever either saw or heard of. Especial credit is due to Ordinary Seaman Davis for his wonderful and heroic efforts."

The young officer related all that had occurred out on the mine field, to which the commanding officer together with a group of other ship officers listened with grave faces.

"Orderly."

The captain's voice was full of decision.

"Go to the sick bay. Run! Tell the surgeon to send the boy to my cabin."

"Davis, sir?"

"Yes, and, Ord'ly."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the surgeon I wish the boy to be put in my bed. Tell the surgeon to report to me as soon as he has examined the boy."

CHAPTER XXIV--CONCLUSION

"You say the boy is out of his head?"

"Yes, sir; he is in a high fever," answered the surgeon.

"Nothing more than exposure is it?" questioned the captain.

"He had a broken wrist when he went out this morning. I understand he broke it again in getting into the whale boat this morning. I advised that he go on binnacle list for the day, but Davis refused. He said he had duties to perform, that he must go."

"You should have declined to permit it."

"I could not well do so, sir. I admired the boy's spirit too much to order him on the list."

The captain nodded reflectively.

"The Secretary of the Navy shall be informed of this at once. Mr. Coates!"

The executive officer approached.

"Never in my experience have I known of such unselfish heroism as those two lads have shown to-day. Kester is the man with whom young Davis and Hickey had difficulties, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to-day the boys save his life. By the way, surgeon, how did the lad break his wrist in the first place?"

"I believe it was through a fall from his hammock."

"I looked into that matter, sir," spoke up the executive officer. "I learn that Davis's hammock lashings had been cut during the night, or some time earlier. At least he did not observe the fact and got his tumble after he had been asleep several hours."

"Find the man who did that. He shall be dismissed from the service instantly."

"Yes, sir."

"What is the boy's temperature?"

"One hundred and four," answered the surgeon.

"You have a nurse with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"See that nothing is omitted that will make for his comfort. Mr. Coates, you see to it that the affidavits of the witnesses to that heroic rescue, are taken at once. Have them ready for my signature at the earliest possible moment as I wish to forward them to Washington no later than to-morrow morning, with especial recommendation for Ordinary Seaman Davis."

"Ordinary Seaman Hickey requests permission to sit with the man Davis, sir," announced a messenger.

"Permit Ordinary Seaman Hickey to do whatever he wishes on this ship so long as his requests are not in violation of regulations," replied the captain, with emphasis. "There is a divan in my bedroom that he can sleep on. Keep me informed, doctor, on the lad's condition."

"Very good, sir."

"Is Kester in a serious condition?"

"I think not. He should be around in a few days at the most. He is too tough to be downed thus easily."

"Davis downed him the other night," laughed the executive officer.

For two days Dan Davis raged in delirium; then on the morning of the third day, as the ship was riding easily at anchor, the sun peeping through the portholes of the cabin, the Battleship Boy opened his eyes. He gazed about him wonderingly.

"What place is this?" he asked.

"This is the captain's cabin."

"Am I the captain?"

"No, but you have been very ill," the nurse informed him. "Lie still and keep quiet."

Dan closed his eyes blissfully. Such luxury as that with which he was surrounded exceeded his fondest dreams.

From that moment, Dan improved rapidly. He was able to be up and dressed on the fourth day, and in another twenty-

four hours he was on deck, where he was provided with a chair near the stern of the quarter-deck. Sam took great pleasure in winking at his shipmates when they passed him, he having remained with Dan constantly. Sam was enjoying himself hugely.

One morning, soon after, Dan reported that he felt fit for duty, and asked to be permitted to return to his post. Sam advised him not to do so, but in this Dan persisted. However, he did not return to his post that day, nor for several days thereafter.

That afternoon a muster was called on the quarter-deck. The Battleship Boys were surprised when informed that their presence was required on deck. Upon arriving there, they were lined up in front of the captain and executive officer, as if they were to be sentenced after a court-martial. On each side of them stood their shipmates, erect, shoulders thrown well back, each brown face reflecting a poorly-disguised smile.

"Daniel Davis and Samuel Hickey step three paces to the front," commanded the executive officer.

They did so, wonderingly.

The ship's commander stepped out before them.

"I have here," he began, "a communication from the Secretary of the Navy, which I will read. It is as follows:

"It is hereby ordered that Ordinary Seaman Daniel Davis and Ordinary Seaman Samuel Hickey, at present assigned to the battleship 'Long Island,' do present themselves at the executive mansion in Washington, on the morning of July twenty-ninth, at eleven o'clock. It is desired to show proper recognition for their joint deed of heroism in rescuing, from three fathoms of water, the ship's diver, William Kester. The President is desirous of seeing these young men in person. It will be his pleasure to express to them the gratitude of the government for their splendid achievement. The men will report in blue dress."

The Battleship Boys, even now, did not fully understand what was expected of them, but they were proud in the thought that they had done something to merit the praise of their superior officers.



Dan and Sam are Commended for Their Bravery.

"You will be put ashore at three o'clock this afternoon, men. You will take a night train to Washington and report in accordance with the instructions as contained in the order just read. Your shipmates should be proud of you. You have given all of us a lesson in self-sacrificing patriotism that we shall do well to bear in mind. Beside your undaunted bravery, you showed rare judgment and coolness. These are more valuable than bravery alone because they direct bravery. Especially do I wish to commend you, Davis, for your splendid heroism in rescuing your shipmate."

The captain came to attention, saluted the two boys before him, then to the measured beat of the drum, sailors and marines marched from the quarter-deck, leaving the two lads standing before their officers. The jackies looked as if they would like to cheer the boys, but discipline would not permit.

"My lads, you had better go to your quarters and prepare for your journey. Ord'ly, tell the master-at-arms to see that these lads have a warm meal before they leave the ship this afternoon. Davis and Hickey, no duties will be required of you to-day, save to prepare for your journey. Carry on."

Saluting their commander, the Battleship Boys executed a right about face and marched from the deck.

"It begins to look as if we were the people," Sam confided to his companion, with a wink after they had left the quarter-deck behind them.

"Two of the people, that's all, Sam," corrected Dan. "You and I are just two boys who are serving the people under the Stars and Stripes. Let's not forget that."

Reaching their quarters they were met by a shipmate with a message.

"Bill Kester wants to see you and the red-head," he said.

"Is he in the sick bay?" asked Dan

"Yes."

"I wonder what he wants," mused Dan, as they started away.

"Maybe he wants to fight us both, now, because we pulled him out of the brine," laughed Sam Hickey.

Kester had not improved as rapidly as had been expected. They found him on a cot in the sick bay, pale and weak from his terrible experience.

"Hello, Bill," greeted Sam, with a grin. "How are you feeling to-day?"

"Tolerable, shipmates. Dynie, you licked me didn't you?" he demanded after a pause, using the nickname that the men had bestowed upon Dan.

"I'm sorry," muttered Dan.

"I got what I deserved, I did. But I didn't know I had. I swore I'd get even with you. I said you and me couldn't stay on the same ship."

"Never mind, that's all right," murmured Dan, at a loss what to say.

"It ain't all right. I've got something I want to say to you. Dynamite, I cut them hammock lashings."

Kester waited to let his words sink in, but neither boy made any reply. So the man went on:

"I was mad, crazy mad. I'd have laughed for joy if I could have seen you both sewn up in rolls of canvas and dumped overboard with a flag draped over the sacks. You'll report me, I know. They are trying to find out who did it. Report me. I deserve all I'll get."

"You are mistaken, Bill, we are not going to report you," answered Dan firmly.

"You ain't going to report me?"

"Certainly not."

"Then maybe red-head here would like to give me a wallop on the jaw to even things up."

"No."

"No? What then?"

"We are going to shake hands with you, Bill," replied Dan. Each boy extended an impulsive hand. Bill took the hands, gazing keenly into the bronzed faces as he did so.

"I've heard all about it," he muttered. "Yes, I've heard all about it. They told me to-day, and--and----"

Bill Kester, once the bully of the "Long Island" buried his face in the pillow. There was a convulsive upheaval of his shoulders, and the lads caught what sounded to them like a sob.

"Forget it, Bill," said Sam awkwardly.

"Yes," added Dan; "we didn't do a thing for you that you would not have done for either or both of us, old shipmate. Good-bye, until we see you a few days from now."

They stole from the room, leaving Bill Kester to a refreshing sleep, which his relieved conscience permitted him to take.

"I'd have blubbered if I had stayed there another minute," muttered Sam Hickey.

On the following morning two brown-faced boys, clad in the blue service uniform of the United States Navy--one with a bandaged hand--made their way up Pennsylvania Avenue and were promptly admitted to the White House. They were conducted to the East Room, where were assembled a number of Navy and Army officers, together with a few other invited guests.

The President entered soon after. He made straight for the lads with a quick, nervous walk, grasping the hands of the Battleship Boys impulsively. The others in the room now ranged themselves behind the President.

"My lads," began the Chief Executive, without loss of time, "I am proud to take you by the hand. The country too, has reason to be proud of young men like you. You have shown the true American spirit. Your signal bravery and heroic acts should, and will, challenge the admiration of every one of your countrymen. The testimony of your officers and of your associates, who saw your battle for life in your efforts to rescue a shipmate, leave no question as to your right to be rewarded by the government. A special mention is made of you, Davis, to which I add another of my own. You, though suffering from broken bones, ill enough to occupy a place in the sick bay of your ship, went to the rescue of a drowning comrade. My lads, it gives me more pleasure than I can express, to have the privilege of presenting to each of you a medal of honor, the most highly prized decoration at the disposal of a grateful republic. That you will wear these medals with credit there can be no doubt."

Stepping forward, the President pinned, on the breast of each lad, the badge that would for all time mark them out from most of their fellows.

"The government," continued the President, resuming his former position, "has provided a further reward in cases such as yours. To each of you I present on behalf of the government, a purse containing one hundred dollars in gold."

The eyes of the Battleship Boys were swimming, and Sam Hickey's red hair appeared to stand up straighter than ever. A

warm, cordial pressure of the hands of the lads by the President completed the ceremony, after which, each of the guests stepped forward for a hand shake and a word of congratulation for the brave boys.

Fairly dazed because of these wonderful things that had come to them, the boys muttered their thanks and made their way from the White House as quickly thereafter as was possible. They were unusually silent as they hurried from the grounds, wearing their shining gold badges. Their hearts were too full for words, and each made a mental resolve that he would serve his country and his Flag from that moment on with a devotion which should never fade.

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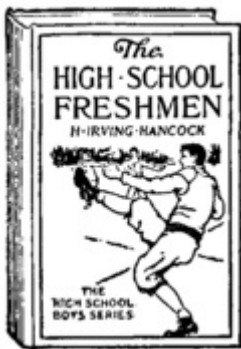
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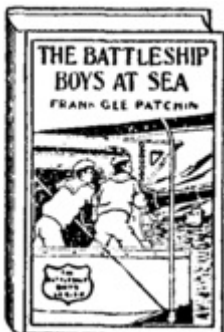
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