

THE BATTLE OF SANTIAGO

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The fight of the day was on at 10:36 AM. We were side by side with the *VISCAYA*. The range was not over 1,800 yards, the closest fighting of the day so far, and the nearest ship to us of our own squadron was the *OREGON*, about a mile and a half astern. The *COLON* was between the *VISCAYA* and the shore, but clear enough of her so that she could use her guns on us. It was a critical moment for the *BROOKLYN*. The *VISCAYA* had larger guns and thicker armor than the *BROOKLYN*, and she was known to be commanded by Eulate, one of the most accomplished and bravest men in Spain's Navy. This was the ship that had been brought to New York by the Spanish government for exhibition purposes, and the public press had declared that she was far superior to our cruisers, the *NEW YORK* and the *BROOKLYN*.

There was no hesitancy, however, in the way we were fighting her. Lieutenant-Commander Mason was rushing from turret to turret and from gun sponson to gun sponson, giving the ranges, and the gunners were pouring into the Spanish ships, every few seconds, tons of explosive ammunition.

It was a fight that was to set the naval world thinking and discredit the predictions of the prophets. The *VISCAYA*, with armor double the thickness of the *BROOKLYN* and guns of larger calibre, had often been placed by critics as the superior of the *BROOKLYN*; and there was a low murmur of approval on the latter ship as the word was passed to concentrate fire on the former. Commodore Schley said to Captain Cook, "Get in close, Cook, and we'll fix her." A little turn of the helm sent the *BROOKLYN* in to within a thousand yards of the enemy, and there they were broadside to broadside. "Nine hundred and fifty yards," called the messengers in to the turret decks, and the answer was the terrible boom of the big eight-inch guns, followed by the tenor of the five-inch and the shrill treble of the six and the one-pounders. The smoke was so dense that it was hard to see the target, but up forward we could see the *COLON* spitting out smokeless fire from her side. When five minutes had passed and we had not felt the ship tremble with the concussion of Spanish shells, we looked at one another in amazement. The water about us and between the *BROOKLYN* and the *VIXEN*, which had kept near us, absolutely boiled, while the song of the shells over us and a few muffled explosions on deck told that the Spanish aim was not so bad. Suddenly a marine in the foretop at a one-pounder gun shrieked down, "Every shot is telling," and as the word passed aft to the gun crews, the shooting became more vigorous, and 2,000 pounds of explosive metal went banging against the *VISCAYA* every three minutes. The secondary battery fire, of one and six-pounders, was unusually deadly, the Spanish gunners in the *VISCAYA*'s superstructure being driven from the guns. At 10:50, after twenty minutes of this close engagement, the *OREGON* got near enough to land several six-inch projectiles in the *VISCAYA* and to drop a few thirteen-inch shells about the *COLON*, which was rapidly drawing away to the westward.

Twenty-four minutes of this close action passed, and Commodore Schley, watching the *VISCAYA*, which was just a little forward of our beam, had twice remarked that she was getting the worst of it, and once, as a shell struck her superstructure and apparently cleaned out a couple of gun crews, he said in an undertone, "My God, but she is getting a terrible baptism of fire," and then almost in the same breath his enthusiasm about the intended result bubbling over, he called to Captain Cook, "Tell your bullies they're doing great work." Putting his glasses up to his eyes a minute later, Commodore Schley said to Lieutenant Sears, "Sears, it looks as if she were coming out toward us." It certainly did look so, for the *VISCAYA* was sheering out to the south as if intending to again try and ram us. Just at that moment, an eight-inch shell from Lieutenant Doyle's starboard turret struck her a slanting blow on the bow, and there was a terrific explosion. Every one of us who were watching her knew it was more of an explosion than an eight-inch shell would make and we held our glasses on her to discover her injury. It became apparent, as the smoke cleared, that the shell had undoubtedly exploded a torpedo placed in her tube to fire at us, and that it had blown out a large section of her bow. While we were watching her the *OREGON* fired a shell, I think an eight-inch one, which struck almost on her quarter-deck rail, and which seemingly raked her fore and aft. We could see men's bodies hurled into the air, and see others dropping over the sides. One end of her bridge tumbled down as though the underpinning was driven out, and then at 11:06 o'clock she turned and ran for shore, hauling down her flag, her deck one mass of flames, and the ammunition, which had been brought up to supply her deck guns, exploding in every direction.

It was during the fight with the *VISCAYA* that we received most of our damage from Spanish gunners, two or three shells crashing through our superstructure, and one large one entering our gun deck. The concussion of this as it exploded below attracted Schley's attention, and he said to Captain Cook, "Captain, send below and see how many men are wounded." A messenger was dispatched and he came back with the information that only two men were slightly wounded, and that none were killed. Both the Commodore and the Captain stood for a moment, silent and amazed, and then the Captain, believing thoroughly that there had been a mistake made, said to the messenger sharply, "Go down to the hospital and tell Dr. FitzSimons to report to me the number of dead and wounded."

The messenger went, and came hurrying back with the same information, and a radiant smile overspread Schley's face as he received this confirmation of a statement he had hardly dared to believe.

But while the messenger was gone there had occurred the one death that marked the naval battle off Santiago as one of the most remarkable fights in regard to fatalities on the conqueror's side, ever witnessed. George Ellis, a young man of about twenty-five years of age, was the captain's clerk on the *BROOKLYN*. He was a clean-cut young fellow, and he had impressed me very much because he had what so few of us have, the courage to acknowledge in the presence of a conglomerate lot of men, such as you find on the warships, his belief in God, and his love for his religion and his church. Only the day before the battle we had received the mail, and in it was a great bunch of religious tracts, shipped to him by the Sunday school in *BROOKLYN* which he and his wife attended. He had promptly distributed these around among the crew. He had frequently spoken to me with regret of the fact that there was no chaplain aboard the *BROOKLYN* and that we could not have Sunday services; and on that very Sunday morning he had taken me into the captain's office, where he made his headquarters, to show me a picture, which had come by the mail of the day before, of his wife and baby. Ellis had served his time as a naval apprentice, and had received an honorable discharge. He re-enlisted after a while spent on shore, and had advanced to chief yeoman on account of his superior qualifications as a writer. His station in battle was to assist the navigator in getting ranges, and he had become very proficient in the use of the stadimeter, the little instrument used in taking the distance to objects at which the ship is to fire.

Ellis stood with several of us at Schley's feet just in front of the conning tower, the Commodore being on the little platform and we standing on the deck proper. He was taking the range, in the absence at some other part of the ship of Navigator Hodgson, and, in order to find the distance to the *VISCAYA* he was compelled to go out in front of the forward eight-inch turret in the open where it was dangerous because the Spanish ship was using her secondary battery. It was just a few minutes before the *VISCAYA* turned into shore that Schley suddenly said, "I think the range to the *VISCAYA* is changing, Ellis. Try her again." Ellis stepped out, raised his stadimeter, took the range, and coolly turning around called back, "1,200 yards, sir." "1,200 yards," repeated Mr. Mason to the messengers, and "1,200 yards" seemed to say the booming powder which sent out the tons of steel that crashed into the side of the *VISCAYA*.

Plainly distinguishable from the hum and buzz of the Spanish shells which were flying over us, there came a dull, sickening thud, and the warm blood and brains spattering in our faces and on our clothes gave warning of a fatality even before the smoke cleared. When we could see, there lay Ellis' body curled in an inanimate heap on the deck, the head having gone overboard, carried away by the impact of a large shell. Luckily for us, the shell had not exploded, or else very many more of us might have been injured or killed.

Dr. DeValin, who stood near him, stepped forward and gave one look at the body, only to see that life was extinct, and then he and Ensign Edward McCauley, who was close at hand, picked it up to throw it overboard, it being the rule in battle to dispose of mutilated bodies, the presence of which might disturb the equanimity of the men. Commodore Schley saw them, and in the midst of all this hot action, with all this tremendous responsibility upon his shoulders, with the shells bursting over his head and the small projectiles rattling against the turret, from the heat of battle this commander found time to turn and say, "Don't throw that body overboard. Take it below, and we'll give it Christian burial."

Boatswain Hill was called, a blanket was obtained, the body was wrapped in it, and taken to the lee of the forward turret, where it remained until the battle was over. Schley took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the blood from his face and coat, where it had spattered, while the rest of us near by did the same. Lieutenant Ryan, who had charge of the deck engines, was so badly cut by some flying pieces of the skull and jawbone that for

safety's sake he had to go to the hospital and have the wounds cauterized. Almost the same instant that Ellis was killed a shell from the *VISCAYA*, fully five times as big as that which had killed the boy, entered between decks on the *BROOKLYN*, striking in a compartment where eight men were working at a gun. It did not hurt any of the men standing near the gun where it came in, but after cutting away a four-inch thick steel stanchion, demolishing an iron staircase, and smashing things generally, it exploded. The results, one might anticipate, should have been very serious; but of the twelve men in the compartment, but one, a coal passer named J. Burns, was hurt—a piece of the exploding shell going between his legs and slightly wounding him.

In the meantime, while we were fighting the *VISCAYA* and the *COLON*, the little *GLOUCESTER*, assisted in some measure by the secondary batteries of the *IOWA* and *INDIANA*, had succeeded in absolutely destroying the two torpedo boats. It must be remembered in speaking of these that either of them, properly handled, was more than a match for the *GLOUCESTER*. They were very fast and very much better armed, having twelve-pounder guns upon them, while Lieutenant-Commander Richard Wainwright, who handled the *GLOUCESTER*, had only six-pounders as his largest armament.

To Wainwright belongs the great credit of having kept his head to such an extent as to remember during that first part of the conflict with the Spanish cruisers, that the torpedo boats were in the harbor and that if he left the entrance they might get away to the eastward and cause havoc among our transports.

Firing a few shots at the cruisers, the *GLOUCESTER* lay waiting for the torpedo boats to come out, and while she was waiting, obtained a range on the harbor entrance. The moment the first destroyer showed its nose the *GLOUCESTER* opened a fusillade upon it, and undoubtedly made the better armed boat think that she had a Tartar with which to deal. At the same time Wainwright closed in upon her, and by the time the two destroyers had turned to the west to follow their fleet, the six-pounders, three-pounders and Colt automatics on the *GLOUCESTER* were pumping shot into them with terrific effect. For a short time the torpedo boats answered the fire very briskly, but the *INDIANA* and the *IOWA* from their upper tops were firing at them, and there was hardly a chance for them to gain shelter in the lee of their own ships. Shortly the *PLUTON*, which had been the first to venture out, began to slow down, and it was perfectly apparent that she had been disabled. From the way she moved it was noticeable that her steering gear was somewhat out of order, and it was not improbable that a shot had entered her engine as well. At any rate, she turned for shore and running in on a coral reef struck it and broke in two, her boilers exploding, and completely wrecking her.

By this time the *IOWA* and the *INDIANA* had gotten around the point just to the west of Santiago, and the commander of the *FUROR*, evidently seeing that the *GLOUCESTER* was alone, turned as if to attack her. The terrible fire from the *GLOUCESTER*, however, never slackened, and one of the larger shells piercing the *FUROR*'s boilers they exploded and she began to sink at the stern, her bow twisting up in the air. Steam and smoke were rising from her, and the *GLOUCESTER*, which a minute before had been fighting her to the death, now began the work of rescuing her crew. Lieutenant Thomas Wood took a boat from the *GLOUCESTER* and went alongside of the *FUROR* at a tremendous risk, because she was in great danger of sinking at any moment and swamping everything that came near her. He managed to get off some ten or twelve of her crew, or pick them up out of the water. Lieutenant Wood's own description of the scene aboard of her, just before she sank, will best describe her condition. He said:

“On reaching the *FUROR*, a scene of horror and wreck confronted us. The ship was riddled by three and six-pound shells, though I observed no damage by larger projectiles. She was on fire below from stem to stern, and on her spar deck were the dead and horribly mangled bodies of some twenty of the officers and crew. One of her boats was at the davits, smashed to atoms. I afterward found another a short distance away, bottom up and stove, but sustaining two survivors, whom I rescued. In the meantime another of the *GLOUCESTER*'s boats arrived, and boarded the wreck, in charge of Lieutenant Norman, and between us we saved some ten or twelve of the crew who remained on board. Finding it impossible to save the ship, and fearing damage to our own crew from explosion, I directed our two crews, with the survivors of the *FUROR*, to abandon the ship and return to the *GLOUCESTER*. This was done, and I was so fortunate as to find and take with me the *FUROR*'s ensign.”

The *PLUTON*'s crew, in the meantime, were jumping overboard and struggling through the surf to get ashore and avoid a capture, but a large percentage of those who tried to escape in this way were drowned, or crushed by dashing against the coral reef. Lieutenant Proctor, of the *GLOUCESTER*, went over in a boat toward the *PLUTON* and

tried to rescue some of her crew. He picked up one boat load, most of them swimming about the wreck, but could not do very much because of the heavy surf that was rolling. He said himself:

“I made for the *PLUTON*, gathered in a boat load of people, and returned. I then went back to the *PLUTON*, and attempted to board her; but the surf was too heavy, breaking over her deck. I picked up another boat load, and then landed in a cove near the wreck. In the meanwhile the other boats were taken aboard, and the *GLOUCESTER* steamed out of sight. I tried, and finally succeeded with difficulty in boarding one-half of the *PLUTON*, but the surf was so heavy and she was bouncing about at such a rate that I could not do much. The mortality was not great from our fire, but large numbers were drowned or mutilated on the coral reefs.”

The press boat *WANDA* had in the meantime come along. She was a yacht used by the Associated Press and was in the command of Mr. John P. Dunning. He managed to rescue some of the men from the water, and threw overboard a wicker chair from the deck, which was floated ashore by the surf so that the Spaniards could put a badly wounded officer in it and carry him into the Spanish lines. It turned out afterward that this officer was Admiral Villamel, commander of the torpedo fleet. He was desperately wounded, and after his men had fastened him into the chair he died and the body was left concealed among the rocks. Long after the war was over, it was found and buried in Santiago, and has lately been taken to his native land.

George Edward Graham. *Schley and Santiago*. (Chicago: 1902), pp. 306–321.