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BILLY HANFORD OF THE SAGINAW

AN EXPLOIT of A FIRST CLASS NAVY MAN

A 2,000-mile cruise in a small open boat which resulted in death for four men, and life for ninety-one of their messmates.

By STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

IT'S a little blue booklet of a hundred pages or so issued by the Navy Department of these United States, but it's a remarkable little booklet after all, for it contains the boiled-down official information relating to 653 gallant deeds in times of war and peace—deeds which have won medals of honor for our bluejackets and marines, both ashore and afloat.

The dedication upon its flyleaf rises far above the formal cold-typed introductory matter usually found in our public documents, for it runs:

ROLL OF HONOR.

This record of the enlisted men who have shed luster upon the service by upholding the honor of the flag in storm and battle, by their devotion to the country and to each other, and by their unselfishness in risking their own lives to save others, is especially commended to the rising generation of American seamen, that they may emulate the deeds of their heroic predecessors and maintain that high standard of gallantry which has always characterized the personnel of the United States naval service.

Well said!

And in looking over this blue booklet it occurs to the writer that of these 653 heroes Coxswain William Halford of the illfated U. S. S. Saginaw traveled the farthest and suffered the most in his successful effort to fetch relief for his starving officers and shipmates.

The record in the blue book is brief, reading as it does:

WILLIAM HALFORD.

Coxswain on board of the U. S. S. Saginaw; sole survivor of the boat's crew sent to the Sandwich Islands for assistance after the wreck of the Saginaw, October, 1870. Promoted to acting gunner.

FORTUNATELY for posterity, however, other records more voluminous are at hand, and the sufferings of "Billy" Halford during his 2,000-mile cruise may be told again "lest we forget."

As coxswain of the ship's gig, Halford was serving on board of the Saginaw during the Summer and Fall of 1870, while that vessel was engaged in surveying the lagoon entrance of Midway Island, a United States possession a little to the eastward of where the International Date Line slashes the Pacific. Upon the evening of October 28, the season being late and supplies having run low, Commander Sicard decided to steam for San Francisco.

Barely had the Saginaw gotten up a full head of steam, however, before her commander gave orders to head for Ocean Island, an atoll some eighty miles to the westward.

"It's an out-of-the-way spot," explained Commander Sicard. "We might find a shipwrecked crew there, for all we know."

Fires were banked and sails set. With a fair wind blowing the Saginaw stood off to the westward, fully expecting to "raise" Ocean Island soon after daybreak. But a strong current seized the unfortunate ship, carrying her westward much faster than her navigators reckoned. At least an hour before dawn the lookout espied breakers ahead, and before the crew could put the ship "about" she crashed heavily upon the coral reef encircling Ocean Island.

THE Saginaw's back was broken, her bottom stove in, her boilers shifted. All seemed lost. Raised and lowered alternately by the mighty swells of the Pacific the doomed vessel pounded upon the jagged coral and began to break up. The weather boats having been swept away, the crew gave its undivided attention to the lowering of the lee boats, and after some difficulty succeeded in getting three of them inside the lagoon. A dinghy, a condemned cutter and a stanch gig were thus saved, and after a few trips between the wreck and the beach all hands found themselves safe on shore; that is, safe for the time being.

Ninety-six men eyed each other in dismay, for the island was but a desolate strip of sand, with not even a cocoanut tree to shield or feed them. It was late in the year, and they were out of the track of transpacific bound craft. Their future seemed indeed black.

Fortunately for these castaways some casks of water and provisions were washed ashore from the wreck, but it was calculated that even upon quarter rations the little store of food and water could not possibly last more than two months. With sticks and pieces of coral some of the men managed to knock over sea birds from time to time. From these soup was made and shared around. But few fish were caught, owing to the lack of tackle of any kind. The commander was brought to realize that something must be done, and that at once.

IT was 1,500 miles to the Sandwich Islands—the gig was serviceable—he had brave men a-plenty. "Why not?" Commander Sicard asked himself. He called for volunteers. The entire crew stepped forward as one man!

Finally five men were chosen for the desperate cruise. Lieutenant Talbot, the executive officer, was placed in command.

Jimmy Muir, Jack Andrews, Pete Francis and Coxswain Billy Halford and one other man constituted the crew. They were fully aware of the dangerous nature of the proposed cruise, and knew without being told that in order to cover the 1,500 miles which lay between them and Honolulu they would have to sail, beat and pull fully 2,000 miles in all.

The gig was hauled out of water and looked over, then launched and stored with thirty days' provisions—on the quarter ration plan. Farewells were said, and upon the 18th of November the crew pulled out of the lagoon and hoisted sail.

Although the boat's crew were in no immediate danger of starvation they failed to consider that fully two-thirds of their provisions consisted of a mixture of wheat, rice, beans and peas which had been cooked and put up in tins. Souring and fermenting, it caused sickness, and before a week had expired the mess had to be cast over the side.

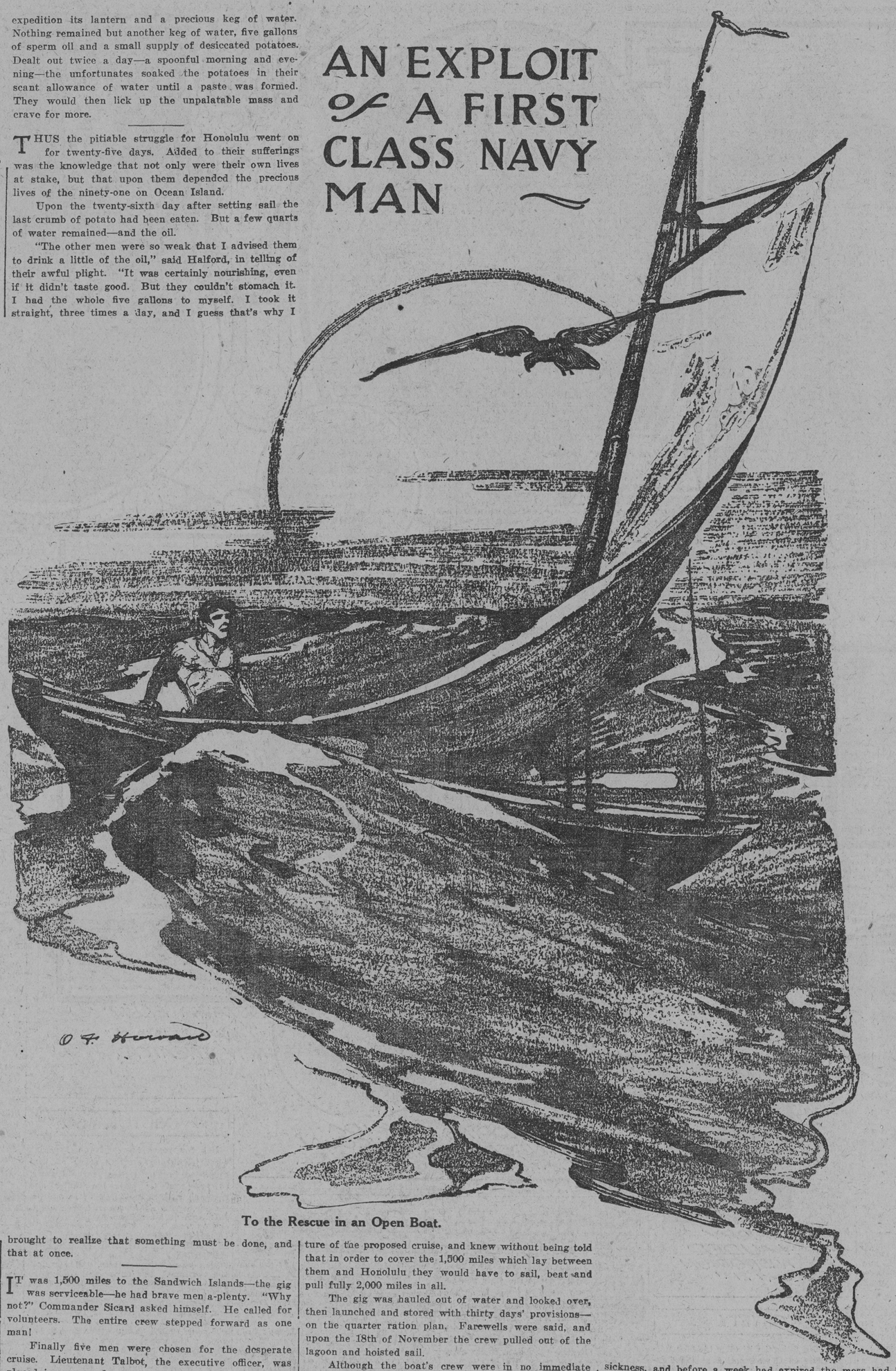
Then followed a three-day storm, which cost the had strength enough left to go through what happened afterward."

expedition its lantern and a precious keg of water. Nothing remained but another keg of water, five gallons of sperm oil and a small supply of desiccated potatoes. Dealt out twice a day—a spoonful morning and evening—the unfortunates soaked the potatoes in their scant allowance of water until a paste was formed. They would then lick up the unpalatable mass and crave for more.

THUS the pitiable struggle for Honolulu went on for twenty-five days. Added to their sufferings was the knowledge that not only were their own lives at stake, but that upon them depended the precious lives of the ninety-one on Ocean Island.

Upon the twenty-sixth day after setting sail the last crumb of potato had been eaten. But a few quarts of water remained—and the oil.

"The other men were so weak that I advised them to drink a little of the oil," said Halford, in telling of their awful plight. "It was certainly nourishing, even if it didn't taste good. But they couldn't stomach it. I had the whole five gallons to myself. I took it straight, three times a day, and I guess that's why I



To the Rescue in an Open Boat.

Upon the morning of the twenty-seventh day while Halford was at the tiller steering while his mates slept a large sea booby fluttered alongside and perched itself upon the gunwale of the gig. Like a flash the arm of the half-starved seaman shot out and grasped the bird. He wrung its neck, stripped it of feathers, cut it up into five pieces and awoke his companions. They ate the warm and bloody flesh just as it was. There were no matches, no flint and steel, no means of making a fire, yet they were indifferent.

The twenty-eighth day passed by—a day of hunger. No birds flew near the gig. No land was in sight. But the following morning at daybreak a school of flying fish flew over the boat. Six of them struck the sail and dropped into the boat. The starving crew ate them—fins, tail and all—but it was the last meal.

WHEN the sun was well up land was seen a long distance off to windward. For two long days and nights the gig's crew tried to beat up to it. They were too weak to lower sail and pull to the windward. Squalls and rough seas added to their discomfort upon the third day of the long beat to windward, but as the wind had hauled around a bit they made fair progress, and nightfall found them close in to the shore.

A mile off shore, however, the gig struck upon a reef and immediately capsized. Four gallant men were flung into the water and drowned. Halford remembers swimming back to the gig and grasping a trailing rope. From that point on his memory fails to serve him. He has a vague recollection that the gig had been driven over the reef into comparatively smooth water, where it had righted itself; that he hung onto the rope for hours, and that he finally struck the beach. He remembers experiencing a sharp pain; and then his senses left him.

When he came to himself the sun was rising. He was lying upon a rocky beach, the lower part of his body still in the water. After several efforts he managed to get upon his feet, but found that he had lost the use of one leg. An ugly cut over his kneecap accounted for that. Using a piece of driftwood for a crutch Halford hobbled over to the gig near by. Still lashed safely beneath one of the thwarts he found the dispatch box containing messages for the admiral of the station and the Secretary of the Navy. Slinging the dispatch box over his shoulder Halford started off for a hut he saw in the distance. Step by step he hobbled along, every exertion a torture.

HALF-WAY to the hut friendly natives ran to his assistance, but none of them spoke English. Later he found an interpreter in the person of a half-breed, and learned that he was on the island of Kahoolawe, ninety miles distant from Honolulu.

An American planter named Bent provided Halford with clothing and engaged a schooner to take him to Honolulu. For two days, while a messenger went for the schooner, the planter nursed his charge and dressed his wound.

A few days later the United States Consul was surprised to see a skeleton of a man limp into his office, bearing a dispatch box. Explanations followed, and the good Consul stirred himself. Upon the same evening a 250-ton schooner loaded with food and medicines set sail for Ocean Island. She was the fastest schooner in the interisland trade, but she wasn't fast enough to suit the resident United States Minister.

"We must send a steamer," said he.

Two days after the schooner sailed a steamer was started. Steam beat sail, as a matter of course, and long before the schooner raised Ocean Island the siren of the steamer was gladdening the ears and hearts of the castaways. They could not have existed another week.

And Billy Halford? He was promoted to a gunnership and given the Congressional Medal of Honor. He had sailed more than 2,000 miles in a small open boat, suffered untold hardships, and had he not survived to bear the message from the castaways ninety-one American sailormen would have perished ere assistance could have possibly reached them.

THE TYPES AS THEY SLIP

"ENGLISH teacher desires to teach Japanese puppies, four or five to form a class."—North China News.

"She was attended by three bridesmaids, who had wreaths of oranges in their hair."—Barnet Press.

"Frenchman or German—A permanent vacancy occurs with good export firm for young foreigner to act as Valentaire; 20s. after a few weeks."—Daily Telegraph.

"French model christening robes, trimmed hand embroidery and real lace. Reduced regardless of cost from 59s. 6d. to 9½ guineas."—From Catalogue.

"2590.—Parcel lady's clothes: coat, skirt, blouses, hats, boots, shoes, trousers fit youth 16-17."—The Lady.

"Blanche drooped her lips over her smooth dark gray eyes."—Daily Record.

"The bride was attended by six bridegrooms."—Yorkshire Evening Post.

"Bell-ringers of the adjoining parishes came to blows over the respective merits of their crimes."—Devon and Exeter Gazette.

"Eleven sheep, destined to be veal this afternoon, were being driven along King Street East."—Toronto Daily Star.

"He sang of the gilded courts of kings, and the tears dripped unheeded from the listeners' ears."—The Story Teller.

"Five beautiful colored plates, from water-colors of 1817; £8 8s.; Turner's lost period."—Evening Standard.

"Solid oak fox-terrier puppies, laying hens and bantams."—Liverpool Echo.

"A LARGE crowd of men gathered round the police station and many threatening epitaphs were hurled at the police."—Dundee Saturday Post.

"Her head was crowned with gold and her small figure draped in a deeper shade of glue—a costume which she is expected to wear at the Coronation ceremony."—Bombay Gazette.

"It is important that children's underclothes should be thoroughly well aired before they are put away, as the danger of wearing linen that is not absolutely dry is well known, leading to rheumatism and electric light."—Devon and Exeter Gazette.

"It was also resolved to urge on the government the necessity for a Pure Peer Bill."—Glasgow Herald.

"Songs sung by the Worcester Glee Club; 'The Wind-deep,' 'God Save the Mill,' 'Rocked in the Cradle of the King.'"—Worcestershire Echo.

"The Clan steamer Clan Sinclair left here to-day before yesterday evening."—Statesman.

"He is reputed to have died of confused kidneys."—Japan Times.

"I hear the pattering feet of the nuns as they fly like a frock of frightened birds."—Daily Mail.

"Another interesting and beautiful hymn from the Greek is 'Hail, Gladstone Light,'"—British News of Canada.

"We prepare the above written cloth good and there different colored as fallow: Suck as, dark-greece, light-greece, fare-blue, light pink, dark-brawn."—Statesman.

"Dredging operations have been temporarily suspended, as the Canton River has gone over to Hong Kong for repairs."—South China Morning Post.

"AFTERWARDS the happy couple left for the moneymoon, which was spent at Brighton."—Croydon Advertiser.

"Cook disengaged; used to about seventy horses."—Liverpool Echo.

"Wardrobe for sale; good position; rent 14s. per week."—Evening News.

"Five hundred Liberals could be easily found who would esteem it an honor to see in the House of Lords for a year for the special purpose of in question, and afterwards, if thought advisable, to pass an act to dispeer themselves."—Daily News.

"Miss Stapleton Cotton was married on Tuesday in the private chapel at Lambeth Palace to Viscount Hood. * * * Viscount Hood was unable to be present through illness."—Church Family Newspaper.

"Newcastle was agitated on Sunday night by the appearance of two harem shirts."—Staffordshire Sentinel.

"Spaniels.—For sale, three healthy dogs, 6ft. high, practically new, including tilt, price £8 10s."—West Sussex Gazette.

"A few crackers should be or a glass of milk should be kept inside the bed."—How to Sleep Well.

"The captain and the boat's crew were picked uoup by the passing veesel."—Birmingham Post.

"K. L. Hutchings and Seymour in splendid foam."—Evening News.

"THE ancient ceremony of taking wroth silver for the Earl of Dalkeith was observed on Saturday. The small sons collected from twenty-seven parishes were placed in a hollow stone."—Evening Standard.

"English tailors, under new management, and with First Class London butter."—Het Vaderland.

"The length of horse used by the brigade was 29,300 yards."—Birmingham Daily Mail.

"Mrs. Hetty Green, the world's wealthiest woman, celebrated her seventh birthday on Tuesday. * * * Reporters went to congratulate her and ask her how she kept so young."—Dublin Evening Mail.

"A Maidenhead fruiterer set a duck on hen eggs, from which eleven ducklings were hatched."—Newbury Evening News.

"Elephant, trimmed black evening wrap day three-quarter new; 12s. 6d."—The Lady.

"The bathrooms marched past in column, and then in review order."—Englishman.

"English boarding and apartments house; dark room convient for bathing."—Daily Malta Chronicle.

"The programme was as follows: Quartet, 'O Hurl Thee My Baby.'"—Natal Witness.

"A delightfully cool breeze was blowing. * * * Several ladies, both Indian and European, were among the gusts."

"Penarth—Charming detached residence, commanding interupted sea view."—House Agent's Announcement.

"Thursday, December 7th.—The State entry at 10 A. M. Deception of the Chiefs, 3 to 5 P. M."—Times of India.

"A beautiful light flooded her face—half-proud, half-tearful—shone in her left hand, closely pressed against her bosom."—Church Family Newspaper.

"Very pretty 9ct. curb bracelet, set round wool; 10s. 6d. to kind home only as pet dog."—The Lady.

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