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CHRISTMAS IN THE NAVY.

The old yeoman picked up his pipe, and, as he jammed the tobacco in the blackened bowl with his thumb, said:

"Christmas on a man-o'-war, eh? Well that depends a good deal upon what part of the world one happens to be in. Funny thing about Christmas; it is the one holiday that is celebrated the world over, and it is one of the greatest days of the year on board ship. Yes, we celebrate it just the same as you folks on shore, only more so, as it were. I have eaten my Christmas dinner with the thermometer standing at 100 in the shade, and also when it was monkeying down around the zero mark; but, as I said before, Christmas is Christmas—the day we all expect to sit down to roast turkey with fixins. I passed one Christmas, some years ago, down at Magdalena Bay, Mexico. Not much there but fish, sand and a few Mexicans; but we had our turkey and cranberry sauce just the same.

"Christmas trees? Well, I guess yes. Ever see a man-o'-war on Christmas day? No. Well, there will be a Christmas tree at every mast head and one on the end of every boom, and the ship generally decorated with green and holly with perhaps a bunch of mistletoe hanging under the forecastle. All hands turn out in the morning, and it is 'Merry Christmas, Jack! Wonder what the kids at home got in their stockings this morning. If old Santy would visit this ship we would give him an Admiral's salute and pipe him over the side with eight boys. Funny how a man's mind travels back home on Christmas day; kind o' takes a fellow back to the time when he used to go to Sunday school regular just before the 25th of December, and then gradually drop off as swimming time and the 4th of July came along.

"No washing down decks on a battleship on Christmas; just a clean sweep down and get ready for the sports; smoking allowed all day, and it is one event after another. Might start in with a 'tug-of-war', port watch against the starboard, to see which watch goes ashore in the evening. Potato, sack and three-legged races, mast head races, obstacle race. If the water permits, a swimming race, free for all. Boat races, tub and catanaran races with scoop shovels for oars. A race between the cooks and marines, coal passers and ward room boys.

"Speaking of boat races reminds me of one Christmas while I was serving on the old South Pacific Station. We were at the time lying at Callao, Peru. It was a big race between our ship and the flagship, five miles straight away. We made up a purse, all we could rake and scrape, some four thousand dollars. We took it over to the flagship where it was promptly covered. The race was pulled about three o'clock in the afternoon. It was a beautiful race—but—yes, they beat us by half a boat's length and we leaned over the rail that evening watching the crew of the flagship going on twenty-four hours leave to try to spend our money.

"As a rule, the boat races take place after dinner; and, say, what a dinner! The last dinner I had at sea was a hummer, the cooks had been busy for a week getting up that dinner, the Commissary Steward had not slept for days for fear that something would go wrong. Every Commissary exerts himself to make the Christmas dinner the best in the fleet. The tables are decorated in style.

"The dinner itself—what did we have? Well, let's see. Raw oysters, shrimp salad, cream of celery soup, roast turkey, of course, stuffed with oysters, mashed cream potatoes, hot slaw, green peas, cranberry sauce, olives, pickles, oranges, grapes and other fruits, ice cream, cake, mince pie, nuts, crackers and cheese, coffee and cigars, to say nothing of the duff or plumb pudding.

"After dinner, as I said, comes the boat races; after the boat races perhaps a game of base ball. Rooters—say, it would do you good to see a bunch of sailors root for the ship's ball team. If the ships happen to be up north somewhere, it will probably be a game of foot ball instead of base ball. In the evening shore leave for every man that possibly can be spared; on some of the ships perhaps a minstrel show, to which the entire fleet will be invited, as well as friends from shore; and let me tell you these minstrels are well worth seeing. The friends of the Officers and crew are more than pleased to receive an invitation to attend a minstrel show to be given at eight bells Christmas night, on board a U. S. man-o'-war.

"Instead of a minstrel show perhaps the crews of the different ships will get together and give a ball on shore, to which the Officers are invited, and all hands forget the ship for the time being and enjoy themselves as only healthy young Americans can.

"Yes, I have spent a good many Christmas days at sea. I remember on one occasion when we had a monster Christmas tree on the quarter deck we all hung our socks up that night, and every man jack on that ship got a Christmas present. Mine? Mine was a brand new woodstock pipe. Say, I smoked that pipe for twelve years, and one day I had the misfortune to drop it overboard; it was like losing an old friend, and I have never found a pipe since that I could get the comfort from that I did from that old woodstock."

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