

# SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES



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## CONTENTS

### *Novelettes and Short Stories*

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>COCONUT CARGO</b> .....                        | <b>4</b>  |
| Clive Trent                                       |           |
| <b>NEVER THUMB YOUR NOSE AT THE FOREMAN</b> ..... | <b>12</b> |
| Camford Sheaveley                                 |           |
| <b>THE DAWN TIDE</b> .....                        | <b>20</b> |
| Lew Merrill                                       |           |
| <b>SO LONG, SISTER</b> .....                      | <b>30</b> |
| Justin Case                                       |           |
| <b>PEACE COMES TO BONGO</b> .....                 | <b>38</b> |
| Hugh Speer  |           |
| <b>OUT OF THE DEEP</b> .....                      | <b>48</b> |
| Felix Webb  |           |
| <b>FOOL OF FLORENCE</b> .....                     | <b>58</b> |
| Arthur Cutler                                     |           |

### *Special Articles*

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>SEA-GOING SMOKE-EATERS</b> ..... | <b>94</b> |
| <b>TO DIE IS DIVINE</b> .....       | <b>96</b> |

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# Sea-Going Smoke-Eaters

**W**ITH every improvement in torpedo and shell adding to its capacity to cause damage and destruction, the United States Navy has now in operation a series of fire-fighting schools whose purpose is to train officers and sailors in the principles and technique of combatting blazes in Navy vessels.

The move, designed to prevent a repetition of such disastrous fires as those aboard the *Normandie*, the ill-starred *Lexington*, and other vessels, followed reports from the fleets emphasizing the immediate need for coping with flame hazards.

While each vessel customarily carries fire-fighters aboard, it is felt that the new plan, based upon day by day experiences will enable trainees to fight fires faster and more efficiently. When struck by a shell, bomb, or torpedo, a warship is almost certain to fall prey to fire that usually causes damage in inverse ratio to the speed and efficiency with which the ship's fire-fighters go to work. These officers and sailors usually have the fate of their ship and shipmates in their hands, and sometimes the fate of a fleet.

Two of the fire-fighters' schools are on the Atlantic Coast at Norfolk and Boston, and two on the Pacific Coast, at Mare Island, California, and Bremerton, Washington, and one is at Pearl Harbor. When a Navy vessel drops anchor in the vicinity of one of these schools, arrangements are made for the fire-fighters aboard to attend classes for from one to ten days.

There, under the guidance of officers who have served as high-ranking fire officials in big city fire departments, the Navy fire-fighter is shown every new wrinkle. The schools are the proving grounds. After practical experiments in the schools, and official tests, the Navy accepts, and sends out to the fleet, improved equipment, discarding old equipment as rapidly as possible. In consequence, there is an ever-increasing demand for men trained in the new fire-fighting techniques.

Actual conditions of fires are simulated in a land-based "mock-up" of three compartments of a Navy vessel. Models of forecandle, boiler room, and engine room of a destroyer, in actual size, except for the machinery, are used. In addition to the simulated destroyer compartments, the schools have inclosures for practice in extinguishing oil fires, and one for putting out gasoline fires. A water tank is used for practice with equipment for shallow diving. The tank also serves as a source of water supply when a portable pump, the hand-billy, is demonstrated.

**T**HEORY is secondary to actual practice. Although students see motion pictures of fires and fire-fighting, attend lectures, they get opportunities to watch and to extinguish real fires, manning hoses, and all-purpose fog nozzles, utilizing low-velocity fog streams to put out burning oil, and spreading foam on oil fires. They are taught to release carbon dioxide on electric switchboard fires, and to turn steam in compartments. Asbestos-suited and using breathing apparatus, the pupils climb down hatches to apply water on fires in waste materials.

Shipboard fires fall into three classes, namely:

**A.** The forecandle. Here, for demonstration purposes, waste material such as old mattresses and bags are piled in one end of the forecandle compartment. Saturated with oil, the pile is set off. The students detailed to quell the blaze, know, from their instruction, that water is the indicated agent, that they must carry a hose line right into the compartment, and must wear asbestos suits and breathing apparatus. They must be prepared, if necessary, to remain below for an hour.

**B.** A boiler room compartment flooded with ignited fuel oil. One of the most difficult of fires, and one of the most likely to be encountered at sea, this type of fire ordinarily is not to be attacked with water, because of the likelihood of flames spreading. The students cannot descend

into the compartment because the entire floor space is ablaze. One student applies fog through the hatch with an applicator to put a cover over the fire and keep down the heat so that another student can work at the hatch applying a smothering blanket of foam. In a few seconds a sufficient depth of foam has been spread and the burning oil is extinguished.

C. To demonstrate this type of fire, gasoline is ignited in a trough below an electric switchboard in the engine room compartment. Using an extinguishing agent that is a non-conductor of electricity—carbon dioxide from fifteen-pound containers—the fighters extinguish the blaze. Low velocity fog is usually a second choice for this type of blaze. Water is never poured on fires in electrical equipment unless it can be used in some way that will remove the danger of electrical shock.

These measures to combat fires at sea are but part of the work performed by the damage control division of the Navy's Bureau of Ships. Damage such as once would have forced a warship out of action, or sent it home for repairs, is now brought under control at sea. Gargantuan feats are performed under the battle conditions—gaping holes in hulls closed, weakened bulkheads shored, decks repaired, trim and list corrected, stability restored, and fires extinguished.

Damage control is only twenty-five years old, yet so thorough has been the training of men taught it that the Navy now has a higher recovery rate in battle than anyone could have dreamed possible. Uncle Sam's officers and gobs, trained in fire-fighting technique, are out to rout the mariner's or the warrior's formerly invincible foe, "Fire at Sea." And they're doing a good job now!

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