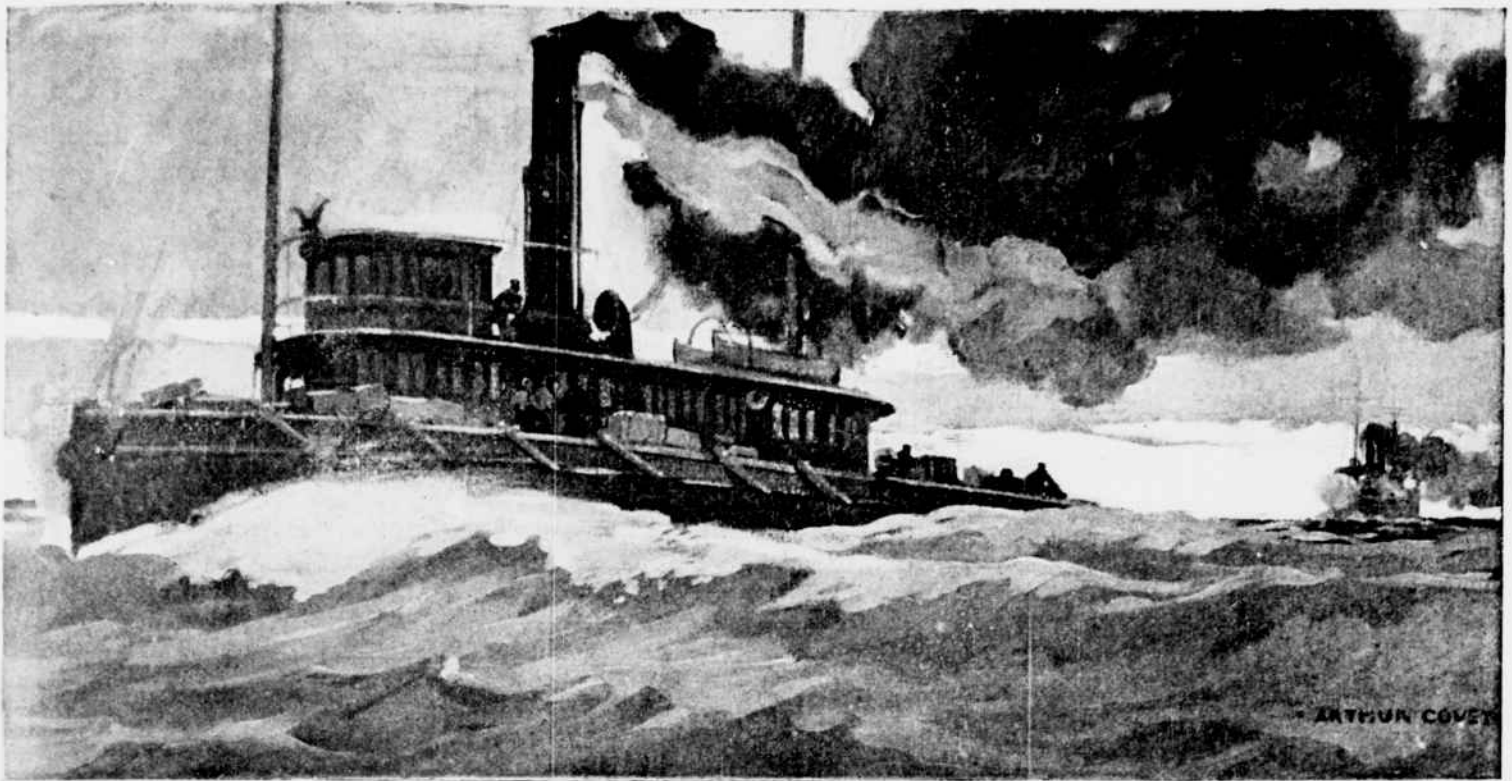


A CAPTAIN UNAFRAID

PART VIII.

Narrated by CAPTAIN JOHN O'BRIEN to HORACE SMITH



The Cruiser Fired Signals for Us to Heave to; but We Paid No Attention.

ONE of the most interesting expeditions of the war, filled with comedy and tragedy, high lights and shadows, in sharp contrast, quickly followed the landing of a cargo of contraband in General Weyler's front yard. The aggressive Fritot had everything ready to move by the time we returned to Jacksonville, and we were off to sea again with hardly a breathing spell.

Two carloads of arms and ammunition were secretly shipped three hundred miles down the coast to Fort Lauderdale, an old trading station twenty-five miles above Miami, where they were placed aboard the

Biscayne, a stern-wheel coaster, along with thirty Cubans, in command of Colonel Mendez. They were to be transferred to the Dauntless off New River Inlet, just above Fort Lauderdale, on Saturday, May 29. As evidence that luck was not always with us, it happened that a special Treasury agent named Hambleton, who had been faithfully on our trail for months, was enjoying a short vacation with a couple of English friends who were living aboard a sloop that was lying at that place at night. They suspected that something was up when the Biscayne slipped into the inlet and anchored on Tuesday night, so they cunningly remained in the water out of sight, to watch developments.

At first the British had no idea that the Dauntless would show up on another expedition without taking on all hands. They were not followed when we put to sea on Tuesday night. By the time we arrived off New River on Monday morning a southeaster was piling up such a high sea that the shallow draft and heavily laden Biscayne dared not venture outside. The Dauntless drew too much water to go into the inlet, so we were forced to stay there until Monday before the weather mended enough so the stern-wheeler could come out to us. As she left the inlet she sailed close to the sloop. Hambleton looked her over carefully, but saw no sign of life

When we had taken on coal and provisions from the Biscayne, which was lashed alongside, and were just getting ready to transfer the arms and ammunition, when a small boat put out from the sloop and headed for us. Hambleton was seated in the bow with a double-barreled shotgun across his knees, and his friends were at the stern. Tom Davis, our mate, tried to shove them off with a boat-hook, but Hambleton threw his gun in Davis' face and climbed over the rail. Pointing his finger in the general direction of the crew and the

Captain, he yelled: "In the name of the law I command you to stop putting those arms on this vessel! You are all under arrest!"

"None stepped forward; but only for a moment. Then Hambleton stepped up to Hambleton and thrust against his ribs the muzzle of a revolver that he carried in his coat pocket."

"I won't pay any attention to this person," said Fritot. "He is not going to shoot anyone. Go ahead and load the guns!"

The men knew Fritot, and they turned to on the cargo without a second glance at the threatening shotgun. "Where's the Captain?" Hambleton angrily inquired. "On the bridge," curtly replied Fritot.

Hambleton started up the gangway leading to the pilothouse. I met him at the door.

"Who the devil are you?" I asked.

"I am a special agent of the Treasury Department and a deputy United States Marshal."

"Well, no matter who you are, don't point that gun at anyone on this ship, or you will be shot before you can fire it!"

He accommodately lowered his weapon and pointed it at his feet; but before we could continue our conversation Tom Davis and Charlie slipped up behind and threw him down on the deck. Someone tossed his gun overboard, and half a dozen men jumped on him; but before they had done him any serious injury Fritot interfered, and the bruised and bewildered sleuth was hustled into his rowboat. His excited companions pulled back to their ship, which soon sailed off up New River.

TWO hours or more after Hambleton left us, by which time we had about half the arms and ammunition on board. Cartaya reported the smoke of a ship coming up from the south. She was too close inshore to be anything but a prying warship. I took her to be the revenue cutter Winona, which could do no more than seven or eight knots an hour, only two-thirds the speed of the Dauntless; so I thought we had time to take on the rest of our cargo before she got close enough to prove dangerous.

It was soon apparent, however, that the stranger was a much faster ship than the old Winona; so we cut loose from the Biscayne and put to sea on the jump. In the last minute rush bundles of rifles and boxes of cartridges were thrown indiscriminately on the deck of the Dauntless, without any pretense of stowing them.

We were obliged to run northeast, to get out of the sight in which we had been lying, before we could haul around to the southeast and head for the Bahama Bank. This right-angled course enabled the warship to pull up on us rapidly, and I soon made her out to be the cruiser Marblehead, then one of the fastest ships in her class. Smoke was coming from only one of her two stacks; so I knew she had steam up in but two of her four boilers. Under these conditions the Dauntless was her match in speed, and I fervently hoped her other boilers were out of commission. The Bahama Bank was seventy-five miles away, and our only chance of escape was to get there first. In its shallow waters were uncharted channels known to but few people, and I knew the cruiser would not dare follow us beyond the edge of the bank.

For an hour it was a beautiful race, with the Marblehead eight miles astern and both ships speeding up to the last notch. We were busily engaged in littering up our wake with empty boxes and coal sacks, to make it appear that we were dumping our cargo overboard, and in stowing arms and ammunition away in the run under the floor and in an empty watertank. Seeing that we were holding our own with him, Captain Elmer fired up his other boilers. After that the cruiser gained on us rapidly. When she got up to within two miles of us she fired a couple of blank cartridges, as signals to heave

to; but we paid no attention to them. Then she sent a solid shot away over our heads. The instant it struck the water, two miles ahead of us, General Nuñez ordered me to stop.

"Let's give him a race for it, anyhow," I urged. "He is not going to fire on his own flag."

"No, no!" shouted Nuñez. "We will take no more chances. The next time he will hit us. Stop, stop!"

His order had to be obeyed; so we lowered our flag, for the first and only time, put the helm hard over, and stopped.

THE cruiser hove to a short distance away and sent a Lieutenant aboard. As he was being rowed to the Dauntless, I found myself wondering what his attitude would be. While we never had been shown any favors by the warships assigned to watch us, I had gained the idea that sentiment in the navy was strongly opposed to the Spaniards. Men who love the sea, more than any other class love a fight against odds, and from this I argued that the American naval officers must sympathize with the Cubans; though how far they would dare to go in showing their real feeling was another question.

Unless the officers of the Marblehead put their blind eyes to the telescope, we were in for serious trouble; for incriminating evidence was piled up all around us. Though as much of our cargo as could be concealed had been hidden away, the deck was still so cluttered with boxes of cartridges and bundles of rifles that one could not walk about without stumbling over them. The rifles were strapped together in bundles of five, and wrapped with burlap. Many of the covers had been torn in the hurry of getting them aboard, and the butts and muzzles of guns could be seen through the rents. The boxes of cartridges were stamped in large letters "43 CALIBER," and several of them had been broken open, revealing their contents.

When the Lieutenant boarded us he was so gruff and apparently so unfriendly that one might have imagined him a Spanish officer; but the manner in which he conducted himself made me proud of my country and its navy. He sternly called for the Captain, and Jim Floyd, the negro pilot, who was titular commander of the tug, stepped forward. In reply to questions that were fired at him like shots from a Gatling gun, Floyd said he had heard of a wreck on the westerly side of the Bahama Bank and was in search of it. According to the reports it was a large wreck, which accounted for his big crew. He innocently declared he had no idea that the cruiser was pursuing us until she dropped the shell ahead of us. The Lieutenant accepted these statements without comment.

"What are these?" he asked, indicating a box of cartridges on which he was standing, and others lying alongside it. "Sardines, I suppose?"

"Yes," assented the amazed Floyd.

"I should think you would need them. With such a large crew you ought to carry plenty of food."

After looking the ship over, taking care to avoid an intimate acquaintance with our cargo, the young officer returned to the Marblehead to report. He took Floyd along, and Captain Elmer put him through another examination.

"Isn't Captain John O'Brien with you?" inquired the