

New York World
May 15, 1898

Sayings of the Turret Jacks in Our Blockading Fleets

“WE’VE got a hot ship—hot ship. Yes, sir; lay her up against the *Pelayo* any old time. Well, I guess! We wouldn’t do a thing to that there *Pelayo*!”

“Why, what ship are you on? The *Iowa*?”

“No; the *Vicksburg*.”

“Sail on the port bow, sir. A six-oared gallows with a man on it.”

‘We was going to take some people from our packet to the Red Cross ship in the la’nch, an’ then we was goin’ to go to the dock for a couple of our officers. We took the people to the Red Cross all right, an’ we was a-headin’ for the dock when one of the men says, ‘There’s the recall a-flyin’ of the la’nch, Joe.’ I looked, and, sure enough, our ship was a-flyin’ the recall for the la’nch. So I took an’ drove her back. As we came alongside I see ol’ Sandwiches, the officer of the deck, a-scowlin’ over at me. He was mad as blazes. I didn’t know what kind of a break I’d made, but I knew it was something serious, and Sandwiches is a bad man to run against. As soon as he could he began to yell: What the hell are you doin’ here? Think that la’nch is an excursion boat? What are you doin’ here, anyhow?’

‘Well, I was rattled, but I says,--‘Thought I saw the recall, sir, a-flyin’ for the la’nch.’

“‘Recall be –the,’ says the old boy; but just then he cocks his eye aloft, and there, sure enough, was the recall. ‘Ahem,’ he says. It turned out that there recall flag had been a-flyin’ for three hours. It had been run up to bring back the la’nch from some other trip, an’ old Sandwiches had forgot to order it down.

“‘Ain’t that the recall for the la’nch, sir?’ I says up to him from the boat.

“‘Go on about your business!’ he yells over the side.”

“Oh, how sad I feel to be absent from those from whom I am absent!”

“Oh, yes, there was a woman aboard the prize. She was just coming out of the cabin as we came over the side. Was she scared? Well, I guess not. That girl was mad. She was mad as blazes. And she gave me a look that singed my hair. The lootenant he took off his cap and said ‘Good morning!’ to her, and maybe she didn’t throw a knife glance clean through him. I had to laugh.”

“That packet of yours—she ought to be fitted out as a Chinese laundry. That’s all she’s good for.”

“That’s all, is it? Just let us get astern of you some day, and if we don’t overhaul that scrap-iron heap of yours in less’n no time, my name ain’t what it is.”

“That’s right. Be proud of your ship. She’s what’s carryin’ you through. But I’ll just tell you—our captain says he wouldn’t use her for no bathtub.”

“Your captain? What the hell does he know about a ship? He ought to be on the board of directors of a milk route!”

“He had, had he? Well, for real sailorin’ I’d like to see that ex-faro-dealer of yours get up against him once!”

“Yes? Maybe you think he could learn him something, hey? Why, our old man used to carry ships like yours around in his pockets when he was a kid!”

“Oh, say, when our captain ain’t been shaved for two or three days he can take and shove his whiskers clean through that muslin packet of yours!”

“Sail on the starboard quarter, sir. Looks like a giraffe.”

“Oh, that’s the *Wilmington*.”

“I’m on the flagship. What ship are you on?”

“I’m on one of the tugs.” “Oh, Gawd!”

“Where’s the *Vizcaya*? That’s what I want to know. She came over here feelin’ so brash, and had all them people in Havana cheerin’ themselves to death. But where is she now? That’s what I want to know.”

(Source: *The Collected Works of Stephen Crane*, University of Virginia Press, 1973)