

Collier's
May 21, 1904

Marking Time in Tokyo: The Forty-Eighth Ronin

The Japanese War Office has issued a war correspondent's pass to Mr. Davis, and has assigned him to the Second Column.

TODAY a small piece of flesh, which was once a portion of the body of a young naval officer, was buried here with such honors from the Mikado and Government and, on the part of the people, with such demonstrations of reverence, that, as half saint, half hero, the memory of Commander Hirose now ranks in Japan near to that of the Forty-seven Ronins.

Hirose attempted what Hobson attempted, and in the venture lost his life. That he died in an effort to save the life of one of his crew, as well as in an effort to serve his country, has not lessened the value of his sacrifice. The sentiment of the Japanese toward him is that same sentiment which Kipling declares considers less the commissary-general than the Tommy who steps outside the square to drag a comrade to safety.

On the night of the second attempt to block the entrance to Port Arthur, Hirose commanded one of the four steamers marked out for self-destruction. They were picked up by two the Russian searchlights, and the remainder of the run was made under a terrific fire from both the guardships and the forts. Hirose's steamer, the *Fukuz Illaru*, had reached the harbor mouth and was about to anchor in the entrance when she was struck by a torpedo. At the moment, Sugino, a gunner, was below lighting the magazine which was to blow up the vessel and let in the water.

But the torpedo had let in the water, and Hirose and his crew were escaping from the sinking steamer in the shore boat before they discovered that Sugino was not with them. Hirose instantly climbed again on board and ran below, searching for the missing man. He failed to find him, and on returning to the deck and learning he had not yet reached the shore boat, twice again went below, the last time remaining there until the rush of the rising water drove him on deck. He had but just dropped in safety into the shore boat when a shell struck him and tore him into small pieces.

One of these pieces fell in the boat. It was buried today. But before it was buried it was treated with the honors paid to a reigning monarch. As it passed in the transport that conveyed it to Japan it received the salutes of the entire Japanese fleet. The guns were fired, the yards were manned, the flags lowered to half staff. Later a detail of officers escorted it to Tokyo where it was met by a great concourse of people, and today as it was borne on a gun-carriage to the grave. The people turned out to do it reverence, and in thousands and thousands lined the streets. Before the procession moved the Mikado sent to Hirose's family a roll of silk, a compliment the importance of which can be understood only here, and raised Hirose and his family to the senior grade at court. And at once his statue is to be erected in one of the public parks. This in a city where the only statues I have seen are those of imperial princes. Already the true story of Hirose

is being hung with legends. As the transport carrying the piece of flesh passed the battleship on which Hirose had served, the engines refused to work, and for a few minutes the transport lay motionless.

“This, which happened before the eyes of the whole squadron,” says a Japanese paper published last week in Yokohama, “made a great impression upon all who witnessed it. It was as though the brave Hirose even in death refused to be separated from the ship in which he had held command.”