

DECISION IN DETAIL.

I have received the appeal of Admiral Schley and the answer thereto from the Navy Department. I have examined both with the utmost care, as well as the preceding appeal to the Secretary of the Navy. I have read through all the testimony taken before the court, and the statements of the counsel for Admirals Sampson and Schley; have examined all the official reports of every kind in reference to the Santiago naval campaign, copies of the logbooks and signal books, and the testimony before the Court of Claims, and have also personally had before me the four surviving Captains of the five ships, aside from those of the two Admirals, which were actively engaged at Santiago.

It appears that the Court of Inquiry was unanimous in its findings of fact, and unanimous in its expressions of opinion on most of its findings of fact. No appeal is made to me from the verdict of the court on these points where it was unanimous. I have, however, gone carefully over the evidence on these points also. I am satisfied that, on the whole, the court did substantial justice. It should have specifically condemned the failure to enforce an efficient night blockade at Santiago while Admiral Schley was in command. On the other hand, I feel that there is a reasonable doubt whether he did not move his squadron with sufficient expedition from port to port.

The court is a unit in condemning Admiral Schley's action on the point where it seems to me he most gravely erred; his "retrograde movement" when he abandoned the blockade, and his disobedience of orders and misstatement of facts in relation thereto. It should be remembered, however, that the majority of these actions which the court censures occurred five weeks or more before the fight itself; and it certainly seems that if Admiral Schley's actions were censurable, he should not have been left as second in command under Admiral Sampson. His offenses were in effect condoned when he was not called to account for them.

Admiral Sampson, after the fight, in an official letter to the department alluded for the first time to Admiral Schley's "reprehensible conduct" six weeks previously. If Admiral Schley was guilty of reprehensible conduct of a kind which called for such notice from Admiral Sampson, then Admiral Sampson ought not to have left him as senior officer of the blockading squadron on the 3d of July, when he (Sampson) steamed away on his proper errand of communication with Gen. Shafter.

WHO WAS IN COMMAND.

We can therefore for our present purposes dismiss consideration of so much of the appeal as relates to anything except the battle. As regards this, the point raised in the appeal is between Admiral Sampson and Admiral Schley, as to which

was in command, and as to which was entitled to the credit, if either of them was really entitled to any unusual and pre-eminent credit by any special exhibition of genius, skill, and courage. The court could have considered both of these questions, but as a matter of fact it unambiguously excluded evidence offered upon them, and through its President announced its refusal to hear Admiral Sampson's side at all, and in view of such exclusion the majority of the court acted with entire propriety in not expressing any opinion on these points. The matter has, however, been raised by the President of the court. Moreover, it is the point upon which Admiral Schley in his appeal lays most stress, and which he especially asks me to consider. I have therefore carefully investigated this matter also, and have informed myself upon it from the best sources of information at my command.

The appeal of Admiral Schley to me is not, as to this, the chief point he raises, really an appeal from the decision of the Court of Inquiry. Five-sixths of the appeal is devoted to this question of command and credit; that is, to matter which the Court of Inquiry did not consider. It is in effect an appeal from the action of President McKinley three years ago when he sent in the recommendations for promotion for the various officers connected with the Santiago squadron, basing these recommendations upon his estimate of the credit to which the officers were respectively entitled. What I have to decide, therefore, is whether or not President McKinley did injustice in the matter. This necessarily involves a comparison of the actions of the different commanders engaged.

The exhaustive official reports of the action leave little to be brought out anew; but as the question of Admiral Sampson's right to be considered in chief command, which was determined in his favor by President McKinley, and later by the Court of Claims, has never hitherto been officially raised, I deemed it best to secure statements of the commanders of the five ships (other than the Brooklyn and New York, the flagships of the two Admirals) which were actively engaged in the fight. Admiral Philip is dead, and I quote extracts from his magazine article on the fight, written immediately after it occurred, closing with an extract from his letter to the Secretary of the Navy of Feb. 27, 1899:

THE CAPTAINS' STATEMENTS.

It was the blockade that made the battle possible. The battle was a direct consequence of the blockade, and upon the method and effectiveness of the blockade was very largely dependent the issue of the battle. . . . Under the orders of Admiral Sampson the blockade was conducted with a success exemplified by the result. . . . When the Spanish Admiral at last made his dash to escape, we were ready—ready with our men, with our guns, and with our engines. . . . It was only a few minutes after we had seen the leader of the squadron that it became apparent that Cervera's plan was to run his ships in column westward in an effort to escape. . . . Before he had fairly found himself outside the Morro the entire blockading squadron—Indiana, Oregon, Iowa, Brooklyn, and Texas—was bumping shell into him at such a rate as virtually to decide the issue of the battle in the first few moments. . . . All our ships had closed in simultaneously. . . .

Then occurred the incident which caused me for a moment more alarm than anything Cervera did that day. . . . Suddenly a whiff of breeze and a lull in the firing lifted the pall, and there bearing toward us and across our bows, turning on her port helm, with big waves curling over her bows and great clouds of black smoke pouring from her funnels, was the Brooklyn. She looked as big as half a dozen Great Easterns, and seemed so near that it took our breath away. "Back both engines hard!" went down the tube to the astonished engineers, and in a twinkling the old ship was racing against herself. The collision which seemed imminent, even if it was not, was averted, and as the big cruiser glided past, all of us on the bridge gave a sigh of relief. Had the Brooklyn struck us then it would probably have been the end of the Texas and her half thousand men. . . . At ten minutes to five the Spanish ships had appeared at about 9:30. . . . The Iowa, Oregon, and Texas were pretty well bunched, holding a parallel course westward with the Spaniards. The Indiana was also coming up, well inside of all the others of our squadron, but a little in the rear, owing to her far eastward position at starting. . . . About a quarter past in the Teresa, which had been in difficulties from the moment she left the shore, the Morro, turned to seek a beaching place. She was on fire, and we knew that she was no longer a quantity to be reckoned with. Five minutes later our special enemy, the Oquendo, also turned in shore. . . . The Viscaya kept blazing away viciously, but the pounding she got from our four ships, more particularly the Oregon, was too much for her, and in half an hour she too headed for the beach. . . . I desire the pleasure to be able to write that, old ship as she is and not built for speed, the Texas held her own and even gained on the Colon in that chase. . . . Admiral Sampson was Commander in Chief before, during, and after the action.

Capt. Clark's statement is as follows:

The credit for the blockade which led up to the fight is, of course, Admiral Sampson's. The position of the ships on the morning of the fight in a semicircle head-on to the harbor, in consequence of which we were able to close in at once, was his. In closing in, that is, in making the first movements, we were obeying his instructions in a matter of fact we would all have closed in any way, instructions or no instructions. When the Spanish ships came out of the harbor the navigator of my ship saw the New York to the eastward, but I received no signal of any kind from the New York during the action, nor was she near enough to signal directly to me until after the Colon surrendered.

The engagement may be said to have been divided into three parts: First, the fight proper, while the Spanish squadron was coming out of the harbor and until it was clear of the Diamond Shoals and definitely headed westward; second, the running fight with the already damaged vessels as they fled westward, until the Teresa, Oquendo, and Viscaya ran ashore; and, third, the chase of the Colon, during which there was practically no fighting. During the first stage I did not see the Brooklyn or receive any signals from her. At the close of this stage the Oregon had passed the Iowa and Texas, and when we burst out of the smoke I saw the four Spanish ships going west apparently uninjured, and followed hard after, at the same time observing the Brooklyn a little ahead and offshore. She was broadside to the Spanish vessels and was receiving the weight of their fire, and was returning it. The Brooklyn and the Oregon thereafter occupied substantially these positions as regards each other, being about equidistant from the Spanish ships as we successively overtook them, except when the Oregon attempted to close with the Oquendo.

The heaviest fighting was at the harbor mouth and while the enemy was breaking through or passing our line. Not long after the running fight began the Teresa and then the Oquendo turned and went ashore, the Viscaya continuing for some distance further before she also was beached. Throughout this running fight the Brooklyn and Oregon were both hotly engaged, being ahead of our other ships; and we then constituted the western division of our fleet as the then fighting division of our fleet. I considered Commodore Schley in responsible command during this running fight and chase so far as I was concerned, and acknowledged and repeated a signal he had flying, for close action or something of the kind. As, however, the problem was perfectly simple, namely, to pursue the Spanish ships as I had been doing before I saw the Brooklyn, he did not, as a matter of fact, exercise any control over any movement or action of the Oregon, nor did I perform any action of any kind whatever in obedience to any order from the Brooklyn, neither as to my course nor as to my speed, nor as to my gun fire, during the fight or chase.

The Oregon always had fires under all boilers. In spite of this, during the chase in this fight she had not been and is not created as the fastest ship, but during all her service, in order that no scale should form in them, not one of our boilers was used for condensing, though the resulting discomfort for all hands was an additional hardship for her commanding officer.

The following is Admiral Evans's statement:

The credit for the blockade, for the arrangement of the ships at the opening of the fight, and for the first movements forward into the fight must of course belong to Admiral Sampson, whose orders we were putting into effect. When the fight began Admiral Sampson's ship, the New York, was in plain sight. I saw her turning to overtake us. Throughout the fight I considered myself as under his command, but I received no orders from him until the Viscaya was aground. Nor did I receive any orders whatever from the Brooklyn, nor should I have heeded them if I had received them, inasmuch as I considered Admiral Sampson to be present and in command.

The heavy fighting was during the time when the Spanish vessels were coming out of the harbor and before they had stretched fairly to the westward. When they thus stretched to the westward we all went after them without orders—of course we could do nothing else. Until the Teresa and Oquendo ran ashore the Iowa was close behind the Oregon and ahead of the Texas, and all of us were firing steadily at the Spanish ships. The Texas then recovered her speed—for she was dead in the water after having backed to avoid the Brooklyn when the Brooklyn turned—and she went ahead of the Iowa. Both of us continued to fire at the Viscaya until she went ashore. Then I stopped, but the Texas followed the Brooklyn and the Oregon after the Colon.

WHERE THE NEW YORK WAS.

When the battle began the New York was not much further to the eastward of me than the Brooklyn was to the westward. After the Viscaya had grounded the New York overtook me and signaled me to return to the mouth of the harbor to prevent any other Spanish ship from coming out and attacking the transports. I received no signals of any kind from the Brooklyn. All we had to do was to close in on the Spanish squadron as it came out of the harbor, in obedience to the orders of Admiral Sampson, and then, when the heaviest fighting was over and the Spanish ships were trying to escape to the west, to turn and—of course there was no signal necessary to tell us to follow a fleeing enemy.

The machinery of the Iowa was not in condition to get the best speed, though every effort had been made to make it so. Her cylinder heads had not been off for more than six months, owing to the service she was performing. Her bottom was very foul, as she had not been docked for a seven or eight months. The Indiana was unavoidably in even worse shape. The New York had left the blockading line flying the signal "Disregard the movements of the Commander in Chief," a signal frequently made, and well understood by the entire fleet. It did not transfer the command, no signal was made for the second in command to assume

command of the fleet, which was usually done by the Commander in Chief before reaching the limit of signal distance when he proposed for any reason temporarily to relinquish his command to the next ranking officer.

The following is Admiral Taylor's statement:

At the beginning of the fight the New York was about as far to the eastward of me as the Brooklyn was to the westward. The only signal I received from the New York was at the very close of the fight, when she signaled to me to return and guard the mouth of the harbor so that nothing should come out to attack our transports. I received that signal whatever from the Brooklyn and should not have heeded any if one had been made, as I considered Admiral Sampson present and in command. From her position the Indiana took full part in the actual fight as the Spanish ships came out of the harbor. When they ran to the westward the Indiana fell behind, but continued firing at them and at the torpedo boats until all but the Colon were sunk or beached. I saw the Brooklyn turn and run out seaward, seemingly over a mile, about the time the rear one of the Spanish ships turned to the west; if instead of making this loop the Brooklyn had stood straight in toward the Spaniards, as the other American ships did, it seemed to me that the fight would have been settled then, without need of the long chase.

The following is Commander Wainwright's statement:

At the outset of the fight the New York was not much further away from me in one direction than the Brooklyn was in the other and was in plain sight. A signal from Admiral Taylor in connection with my moving forward to attack the torpedo boats was the only signal I received. I made one to the New York just before the last torpedo boat sank. The New York at that time was coming up under the fire of the batteries and herself fired a couple of shots at the torpedo boat. Of course, Admiral Sampson was present and in command. I received no signals from the Brooklyn and would not have noticed her at all had it not been for the fact that when the other vessels closed in she made what has been since called "the loop," that my attention was attracted by not seeing the Texas because she stopped, and by not seeing the Brooklyn because she went to seaward, away from the Spanish vessels. In other words, the left or westward part of our line was refused, and this attracted my attention, because it seemed to me from where I was that this permitted the Spanish vessels to try to escape to westward.

WHO FIRED THE SHOTS.

The survey of the damages of the four Spanish war vessels shows that in addition to several score hits by the six-pounder and one-pounder guns of the American fleet, they were struck forty-three times by the larger guns of four inches calibre and over. The Colon, which came out inside the others and did comparatively little fighting, received but three of these hits. The other three ships, which bore the brunt of the action, received forty among them. Of these forty, eleven, according to the report of the board which examined into them, were by four-inch guns, ten by five-inch guns, four by either four or five inch, (the board could not determine which,) while one was by either a five or six inch, twelve were by eight-inch, and two by twelve-inch guns. All of our big ships except the Texas had eight-inch guns. Only the Texas and Oregon had twelve-inch guns. The Oregon and Indiana had thirteen-inch guns, and they and the Texas had six-inch guns. The only four-inch guns were on the Iowa; the only five-inch guns on the Brooklyn.

Therefore on the three Spanish ships which did the bulk of the fighting, out of the forty large-calibre shots that struck them eleven certainly came from the Iowa, ten certainly came from the Brooklyn, four from either the Iowa or the Brooklyn, and two from either the Iowa or the Texas. Of the three which struck the Colon two were five-inch and must have come from the Brooklyn; one was either a five-inch or a six-inch. It must be remembered that the four and five inch guns were the only quick firers above six-pounders in our fleet, and that they were not only much more rapidly but much more surely handled than were the larger and slower-firing guns. The damage and loss of the American vessels were trivial. The only loss suffered was aboard the Brooklyn, where one man was killed and one wounded. In damage, the cost of the repairs shows that the Iowa suffered most and the Oregon least.

The American ships engaged possessed a more than twofold material superiority over the Spanish ships, and the difference in the handling of their guns and their engines was even greater. We have just cause to be proud of the vigilance and instant readiness our ships displayed, and the workmanlike efficiency with which they were handled. The most striking act was that of the Gloucester, a converted yacht, which her commander, Wainwright, pushed into the fight through a hail of projectiles, any one of which would have sunk her, in order that he might do his part in destroying the two torpedo boats, each possessing far more than his own offensive power.

From the statements of the Captains above, from the official reports, and from the testimony before the court of inquiry, the fight can be plotted with absolute certainty in its important outlines, though there is conflict as to minor points. When the four Spanish cruisers came out of the harbor the New York had left her position in the blockading line forty or forty-five minutes before. She had hoisted the signal "Disregard the movements of the Commander in Chief," but had not hoisted the signal to the second in command to take charge, which, as appears by the signal book, was sometimes but not always used when the command was transferred. As soon as the engagement began the New York turned and steamed back, hoisting a signal to close in, which, however, none of the squadron saw. She was in plain sight, and not very much further from the easternmost blockading ships than the latter were from the Brooklyn, which was the westernmost of the line.

As soon as the Spanish ships appeared, the five big American blockaders started toward them in accordance with the standing orders of Admiral Sampson. After this first move each acted purely on his own initiative. For some minutes the Spanish and American vessels steadily approached one another, and the fighting was at its hottest. Then the already damaged Spanish ships turned to the westward, while at the same time the westernmost American vessel, the Brooklyn, which was nearest the Spanish line, turned to the eastward, making a loop or three-quarter circle, at the end of which she again headed westward, further off from and further behind the Spanish vessels than before the loop had begun, but still ahead of any of the American vessels, although further outside. The Texas, the next ship to the Brooklyn, either was or conceived herself to be put in such jeopardy by the Brooklyn's turn toward her that she backed her engines, coming almost or quite to a standstill, so that both the Oregon and the Iowa, which were originally to the eastward of her, passed her, and it was some time after she again started before she regained her former position relatively to the Spanish vessels. The Spanish vessels had straightened out in column for the west, the Colon going inside of the others and gradually forging ahead of them, without suffering much damage. The two torpedo boats, which had followed them out of the harbor, were now destroyed by the fire of the rear most of the American big vessels and of the Gloucester, which headed straight in for them, paying no more heed to their quick-fire guns than to the heavy artillery of the forts, to which she was also exposed.

In the running fight which followed, until the Teresa, Oquendo, and Viscaya were destroyed, the Indiana gradually dropped behind, although she continued to fire until the last of the three vessels went ashore. The Brooklyn was ahead of any of the other American vessels on a course outside theirs; she was nearly broadside on to the Spaniards. The Oregon, Iowa, and Texas were all close together and actively engaged throughout this running fight. The Brooklyn and Oregon, followed at some distance by the Texas, then continued in chase of the Colon, which went nearly thirty miles further before she also went ashore. During this chase of the Colon there was practically no fighting.

These are the facts as set forth above in the statements of the Captains, and elsewhere in their official reports and testimony. They leave no room for doubt on any important point.

WAS A CAPTAIN'S FIGHT.

The question of command is in this case nominal and technical. Admiral Sampson's ship, the New York, was seen at the outset of the fight from all the other ships except the Brooklyn. Four of these five ship Captains have testified that they regarded him as present and in command. He signaled "Close in" to the fleet as soon as the first Spanish ship appeared, but his signal was not seen by any American vessel. He was actually under fire from the forts, and himself fired a couple of shots, at the close of the action with the torpedo boats, in addition to signaling the Indiana just at the close of the action. But during the action not a single order from him was received by any of the ships that were actively engaged.

Admiral Schley at the outset of the action hoisted the two signals of "Clear ship" and "Close in," which was simply carrying out the standing orders of Admiral Sampson as to what should be done if the enemy's ships attempted to break out of the harbor. Until after the close of the first portion of the fight at the mouth of the harbor, and until after he had made his loop, and the Spanish ships were fleeing to the westward, not another American ship noticed a signal from him. When the western pursuit had begun the Oregon, and the Oregon only, noticed and repeated one of his signals of command. The Captain of the Oregon then regarded him as in command, but did not in any shape or way execute any movement or any action of any kind whatsoever in accordance with any order from him.

In short, the question as to which of the two men, Admiral Sampson or Admiral Schley, was at the time in command, is of

merely nominal character. Technically Sampson commanded the fleet, and Schley as usual, the western division. The actual fact, the important fact, is that after the battle was joined not a helm was shifted, not a gun was fired, not a pound of steam was put on in the engine room aboard any ship actively engaged, in obedience to the order of either Sampson or Schley, save on their own two vessels. It was a Captain's fight.

Therefore, the credit to which each of the two is entitled rests on matters apart from the claim of nominal command over the squadron; for so far as the actual fight was concerned, neither one nor the other, in fact, exercised any command. Sampson was hardly more than technically in the fight. His real claim for credit rests upon his work as Commander in Chief, upon the excellence of the blockade, upon the preparedness of the squadron, upon the arrangement of the ships head-on in a semicircle around the harbor, and the standing orders in accordance with which they instantly moved to the attack of the Spaniards when the latter appeared. For all these things the credit is his.

THE LOOP A MISTAKE.

Admiral Schley is rightly entitled—as is Capt. Cook—to the credit of what the Brooklyn did in the fight. On the whole, she did well; but I agree with the unanimous finding of the three Admirals who composed the court of inquiry as to the "loop." It seriously marred the Brooklyn's otherwise excellent record, being in fact the one grave mistake made by any American ship that day. Had the Brooklyn turned to the westward—that is, in the same direction that the Spanish ships were going—instead of in the contrary direction she would undoubtedly have been in more "dangerous proximity" to them. But it would have been more dangerous for them as well as for her! This kind of danger must not be too nicely weighed by those whose trade it is to dare greatly for the honor of the flag. Moreover, the danger was certainly not as great as that which in the selfsame moment menaced Wainwright's fragile craft as he drove forward against the foe. It was not, in my judgment, as great as the danger to which the Texas was exposed by the turn as actually made.

It certainly caused both the Brooklyn and the Texas materially to lose position compared to the fleeing Spanish vessels. But after the loop had once been taken, Admiral Schley handled the Brooklyn manfully and well. She and the Oregon were thenceforth the headmost of the American vessels, though the Iowa certainly, and seemingly the Texas also, did as much in hammering to a standstill the Viscaya, Oquendo, and Teresa, while the Indiana did all her eastward position and crippled machinery permitted. In the chase of the Colon the Brooklyn and Oregon share the credit between them.

Under such circumstances it seems to me that the recommendations of President McKinley were eminently proper, and that so far as Admirals Sampson and Schley were concerned it would have been unjust for him to have made other recommendations. Personally, I feel that in view of Capt. Clark's long voyage in the Oregon and the condition in which he brought her to the scene of service, as well as the way in which he actually managed her before and during the fight, it would have been well to have given him the same advancement that was given Wainwright. But waiving this, it is evident that Wainwright was entitled to receive more than any of the other commanders, and that it was just to Admiral Sampson that he should receive a greater advance in numbers than Admiral Schley—there was nothing done in the battle that warranted any unusual reward for either.

In short, as regards Admirals Sampson and Schley, I find that President McKinley did substantial justice, and that there would be no warrant for reversing his action. Both Admiral Sampson and Admiral Schley are now on the retired list. In concluding their report the members of the court of inquiry—Admirals Dewey, Benham, and Ramsay—unite in stating that they recommend that no further action be had in the matter. With this recommendation I most heartily concur. There is no excuse whatever from either side for any further agitation of this unhappy controversy. To keep it alive would merely do damage to the navy and to the country.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

White House, Feb. 18, 1902.