

# THE SCHLEY CONTROVERSY

## Facts Which Led to the Appointment of the Court of Inquiry—The Hunt For Cervera's Fleet and the Famous "Loop" In the Sea Fight Off Santiago.

**T**HE greatest naval dispute in the history of this country is just now occupying the boards of public attention. After two years of somewhat undignified bickering our naval officers are about to settle several vexed questions, among them the truth or falsity of a charge imputing cowardice to a rear admiral.

All good Americans regret, of course, that any such controversy should have arisen. Most of us will be glad to see it wiped off the slate for good and all. Meantime, however, we would like to know exactly what the row is all about. Here are the facts in the case so far as they have been disclosed, set down as impartially as may be.

Now let us begin in the early days of the Spanish-American war. In accordance with the plans of the navy

Spanish squadron through the channel in that direction. On the 26th he received a letter from Schley, dated May 23, stating that he was by no means satisfied the Spanish squadron was not at Cienfuegos. A dispatch boat was sent on the 27th with urgent orders for Schley to proceed at once to Santiago, but meanwhile cable dispatches were received from him stating that he had ascertained the Spanish fleet was not in that port, and that on account of short coal supply he could not blockade the Spanish ships in Santiago, but would proceed to Nicolas mole, Haiti, from which point he would communicate.

Sampson then cabled Schley from Key West that the New Orleans would meet him off Santiago and to make every effort to ascertain the location of Cervera's squadron. Leaving Cienfuegos May 24, Schley steamed to a

man-of-war, the Cristobal Colon, was seen lying at anchor just inside the harbor entrance, and later other ships which were identified as belonging to Cervera's squadron, so at 10 a. m. Schley cabled to Washington that the Spaniards were undoubtedly there. The Colon continuing to occupy its position within view of the American ships, on the morning of the 31st Schley, on board the Massachusetts, with the Iowa and the New Orleans, exchanged shots with her and the forts at a range of about 7,000 yards.

The next day, June 1, Sampson arrived and took command, finding Schley's squadron to the westward of the harbor mouth. Immediately upon the union of these two forces a close



CAPTAIN LEMLY, JUDGE ADVOCATE.

blockade was established, and a cordon was drawn about the harbor entrance with cruisers and battleships in a semicircle in front of it and a double line of smaller vessels and boats inside these. Thus the harbor of Santiago, in which Cervera had been definitely located, was watched constantly, powerful searchlights being turned upon it at night. No effort was relaxed during the weary month that followed to prevent the escape of the enemy, and Sampson promulgated in standing orders a plan of attack by which our vessels were to close in upon any of the Spaniards coming out.

On June 3 occurred the sinking of the Merrimac at the harbor entrance of Santiago in order to prevent if possible the escape of Cervera's fleet. On June 7 the Marblehead and the Yankee took possession of the lower bay of Guantanamo as a harbor of refuge for the fleet in coaling, etc., and the marines were the first to land as invaders on the soil of Cuba. On the 15th Sampson was advised that 39 transports with troops would be sent from Tampa, Fla., and a convoy was provided for them through the Bahama channel. The disembarkation of troops was commenced on the morning of the 22d of June at Baiquiri, to the eastward of Morro Castle. Sampson had sent his chief of staff to communicate with General Shafter, but as the latter was insistent that the navy should more actively co-operate by shelling the

of the Brooklyn. Captain F. A. Cook of the Brooklyn says in his official report: "We opened fire on the leading ship in five minutes from the discovery. The port battery was first engaged as we stood with port helm to head off the leading ship and gave them a raking fire at about 1,500 yards range. The enemy turned to the westward to close into the land. We then wore around to starboard, bringing the starboard battery into action. The enemy hinged the shore to the westward."

This was the since famous "loop" which now plays so conspicuous a part in the controversy, since different motives for this maneuver are ascribed to Schley.

Schley explained this maneuver by stating that he wished to avoid being rammed by the approaching Maria Teresa, and also that he did not wish to "blanket" the fire of his other ships.

A prominent officer, Lieutenant Commander Hodgson, who was on the bridge at the time, is accredited with having asked Schley when the order to port the helm was given, "You mean starboard?" "No, I mean port," Schley is said to have replied. "But we will run down the Texas," the officer is alleged to have remonstrated. "Let the Texas look out for herself" is the rejoinder said to have been made by Schley. In a recent interview Lieutenant Commander Hodgson is alleged to have remarked: "To my personal knowledge the helm was kept hard apart during the whole time of turning the loop until eased up to parallel the course of the Vizcaya, then about 2,800 yards away on the starboard bow. As the Brooklyn's tactical diameter is only about 600 yards, she therefore could not have run farther than 600 yards to the southward."

In his annual report for 1898 the secretary of the navy says: "Since my last annual report the navy has for the first time since its rehabilitation been put to the supreme test of war. Years of patient, persistent training and development had brought it to a point of high efficiency which resulted in the unparalleled victories at Manila and Santiago—victories which have given the names of our naval commanders worldwide fame and added an additional page to the glorious naval history of our country." There was "no blot on the record," the secretary observed, and in concluding his report he said: "The department feels, in contemplating the vast amount of work necessary to the successful operations of the navy during the last year (1898), that the country as well as the service has cause for congratulations in the results which have followed and which have been so generally approved, and in the further fact that no personal feeling has arisen to mar the glorious victories and magnificent work of the service."

In the concluding clause, unfortunately, the secretary was, to state it mildly, rather premature in alluding to the good feeling which was supposed to prevail among those most prominently engaged in the naval service off the coast of Cuba. It is not necessary to go back to the beginning of the con-

of the country of a book entitled "The History of the Navy," written by one Edgar Stanton Maclay. From these reviews it appears that this edition is a third volume of the said history, extended to include the war with Spain, which the first two volumes did not contain, and were in use as textbooks at the Naval academy. From excerpts quoted in some reviews, in which the page and paragraph are given, there is such perversion of facts, misconstruction of intention, such intemperate abuse and defamation of myself, which subjects Mr. Maclay to action in civil law. While I admit the right of fair criticism of every public officer, I must protest against the low flings and abusive language of this violent, partisan opponent, who has infused into the pages of his book so much of the malice of unfairness as to make it unworthy the name of history or of use in any reputable institution of the country. I have retained heretofore from all comment upon the intemperance of enemies muttered or murmured in secret and therefore with safety to themselves. I think the time has now come to take such action as may bring this entire matter under discussion under the clearer and calmer review of my brothers in arms, and to this end I ask such action at the hands of the department as it may deem best to accomplish this purpose.

But I would express the request in this connection that whatever the action may be it occur in Washington, where most of my papers and data are stored. Very respectfully,  
W. S. SCHLEY, Rear Admiral, U. S. N.

His request was promptly granted, as appears by Secretary Long's reply:

NAVY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, July 24, 1901.  
Sir—I am in receipt of yours of the 23d inst. with reference to the criticisms upon you in connection with the Spanish-American war and heartily approve of your action under the circum-

examination is summed up in Secretary Long's "precept" issued to the court of inquiry, which contains ten counts that will clearly explain the case in controversy, particularly if read in connection with the resume of operations leading up to and before Santiago given in the opening portion of this article.

These are the lines of investigation which Secretary Long has designated for the official inquiry to follow:

1. His conduct in connection with the events of the Santiago campaign.
2. The circumstances attending, the reasons controlling and the propriety of the movements of the flying squadron off Cienfuegos in May, 1898.
3. The circumstances attending, the reasons controlling and the propriety of the movements of the said squadron in proceeding from Cienfuegos to Santiago.
4. The circumstances attending the arrival of the flying squadron off Santiago, the reasons for its retrograde turn westward and departure from off Santiago and the propriety thereof.
5. The circumstances attending and the reasons for the disobedience by Commodore Schley of the orders of the department contained in its dispatch



REAR ADMIRAL SCHLEY.

department a flying squadron was organized, with base of operations at Fort Monroe, for the protection of any point on the Atlantic coast that might be menaced by the hostile Spanish fleet. This squadron was placed under command of Commodore W. S. Schley.

Meanwhile the Spanish fleet, which had been fitted and sent out under command of Admiral Cervera, was approaching the United States.

This fleet, which was reported as leaving Cape de Verde on April 20, was composed of the armored cruisers Cristobal Colon, Vizcaya, Almirante Oquendo and Infanta Maria Teresa, besides the torpedo gunboats Furor, Terror and Pluton. It was supposed, of course, that it would sail for Cuba as its ultimate destination. On news of Cervera leaving Cape de Verde, Sampson sailed eastwardly with a portion of his fleet for the purpose of observation. It was on this cruise that he bombarded San Juan, Porto Rico, having had information that the Spaniards were to call at that port, but meanwhile Cervera had touched at Martinique, then at Curacao, near the coast of Venezuela, and by making a clever flank movement had come up to the south coast of Cuba and entered the harbor of Santiago wholly unobserved by the Americans.

Through its secret agents in Havana and elsewhere the navy department had been informed that Cervera was under instructions to reach Havana, or some port connected by rail with the capital, as he carried munitions of war for its defense. Instructions were accordingly forwarded to observe and, if necessary, blockade Cienfuegos, on the south coast of Cuba, as the only port affording the conditions favorable for reaching Havana. Accordingly the flying squadron, under Schley, sailed from Key West for Cienfuegos, with instructions to establish a blockade at that port with all dispatch. It arrived off Cienfuegos May 20, where the original fleet, composed of the Brooklyn, Texas, Massachusetts and Scorpion, was later augmented by the Iowa, Castine and the collier Merrimac. The same day the navy department received information that Cervera was reported at Santiago de Cuba and so informed Sampson, who at once dispatched the Marblehead with advices to Schley ordering him, if Cervera was not at Cienfuegos, to proceed with all haste to Santiago. On the 22d Sampson, then off Havana, received a dispatch from Key West stating that Cervera's squadron undoubtedly had been in the harbor of Santiago on the morning of the previous day, but that it was expected it might sail for San Juan, Porto Rico, and if Schley had found that it had left Santiago he should promptly order him to follow in pursuit. Sampson was then blockading Havana and the north coast, but he at once sailed eastward to prevent the possible approach of the

point about 20 miles southward and eastward of Santiago, where he signaled his squadron that the destination was Key West for coal. On the morning of the 27th the Harvard brought him this dispatch:

WASHINGTON, via Mole St. Nicolas, May 25, 1898.  
All department's information indicates Spanish divisions is still at Santiago. The department looks to you to ascertain facts and that the enemy, if therein, does not leave without a decisive action. Cubans familiar with Santiago say that there are landing places five or six nautical miles west from the mouth of harbor and that there insurgents will be found and not the Spanish. From the surrounding heights can see every vessel in port. As soon as ascertained notify the department whether enemy is there. Could not squadron and also the Harvard coal from Merrimac leeward of Cape Cruz, Gonaves channel, or Mole Haiti? The department will send coal immediately to mole. Report without delay situation at Santiago de Cuba.  
LONG.

Schley's answer was as follows:  
KINOSTON, May 28, 1898.

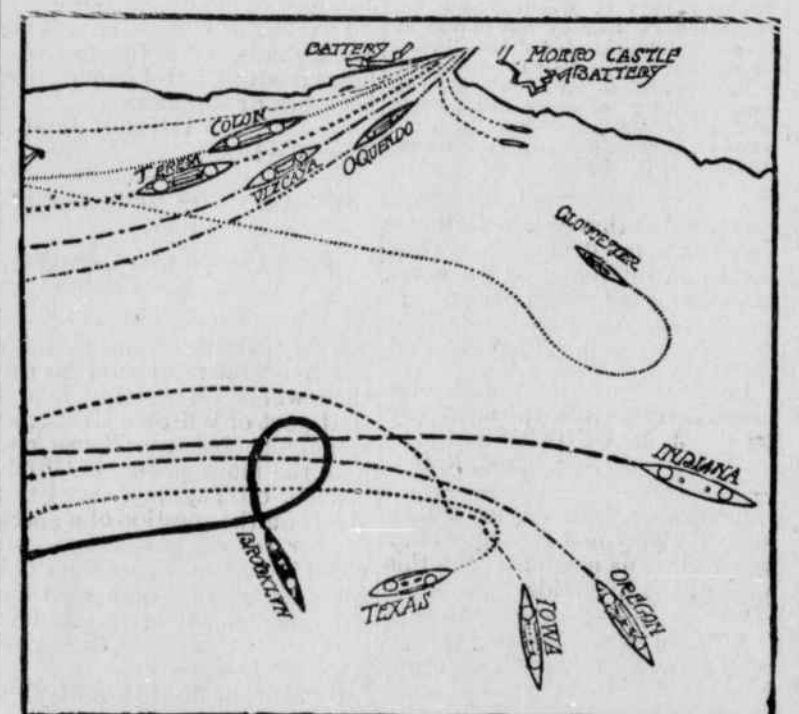
Secretary Navy, Washington:  
Sir—Merrimac engines disabled; is heavy; am obliged to have towed to Key West. Have been unable absolutely to coal the Texas, Marblehead, the Vixen, the Brooklyn from collier, all owing to very rough sea. Bad weather since leaving Key West. The Brooklyn alone has more than sufficient coal to proceed to Key West. Cannot remain off Santiago present state squadron coal account. Impossible to coal leeward Cape Cruz in the summer, all owing to westerly winds. Much to be regretted cannot obey orders of department. Have striven earnestly; forced to proceed for coal to Key West by way of Yucatan passage. Cannot ascertain anything respecting enemy positive. Very difficult to tow collier to get cable to hold.  
SCHLEY.

Later in the day on which this dispatch was sent the Texas and the



REAR ADMIRAL HOWISON (RETIRED). [Member board of inquiry.]

Marblehead went alongside the collier Merrimac and coaled, the squadron at that time being about 40 miles to the southward and westward of Santiago. That afternoon the squadron sailed in the direction of Santiago, stopping for the night about ten miles distant from that port, with the Marblehead scouting about two miles inside the line. Early next morning, May 20, a Spanish



THE FAMOUS "LOOP" OF THE BROOKLYN.

forts, Morro Castle, and, if possible, the city of Santiago, an interview was arranged between the two commanders to take place on the 3d of July.

It was while Sampson, in the New York, was hastening toward Siboney that Cervera made his attempt to escape. The New York had reached a point about four miles east of her blockading station and about seven miles from Morro Castle when the Spanish squadron was espied steering out of the narrow channel leading from Santiago's harbor to the open sea. The flagship immediately reversed her course and steamed in the direction of the escaping fleet, flying the signal to close in and attack the enemy. This, however, the ships on blockade had already done.

When the Spanish ships were first sighted, all the blockading vessels were in a semicircle in the following order, reckoning from the eastward: The Indiana, the Oregon, the Iowa, the Texas and the Brooklyn, the last named being farther to the westward than any of the other great ships. The Massachusetts had gone to Guantanamo for coal, the torpedo boat Ericson was in company with the flagship and the Gloucester and Vixen lay close to land, to the eastward and westward, respectively, of the channel.

One of the most important of the precepts in the court of inquiry investigation deals with the so called "loop"

trovsky recently precipitated by the publication of a book reflecting upon the conduct of Rear Admiral Schley in the movements off Santiago, and particularly of his action in the battle in which Cervera's squadron was destroyed. The naval court of inquiry will determine those matters and will doubtless settle the discussion as to all points at issue.

It will be recalled that soon after naval operations were over friends of the present rear admirals, Sampson and Schley, urged their respective claims to promotion with a great deal of warmth, and that action upon the advancement not only of the parties most prominent, but of their brother officers entitled to promotion for bravery and excellent service was delayed in consequence. It is not necessary to more than allude to the deep feeling which has since developed, the events are so recent and so well known. Neither Sampson nor Schley had taken official cognizance of reports and even charges against their characters, and nearly three years elapsed before such action was taken. When, however, in the third volume of Maclay's "History of the Navy" passages occurred reflecting severely upon Rear Admiral Schley's conduct, he felt impelled to seek a vindication in the following letter to the secretary of the navy:

GREAT NECK, N. Y., July 22, 1901.  
Sir—Within the last few days a series of press comments have been sent to me from various parts

stances in asking at the hands of this department such action as may bring this entire matter under discussion "under the clearer and calmer review of my brothers in arms."

The department will at once proceed in accordance with your request. Very respectfully,  
JONS D. LONG.

The objectionable paragraphs in Maclay's "History of the Navy" are as follows:

Schley, on May 23, 1898, sullied this brightest of American motives by penning, "Much to be regretted cannot obey orders" and turned in caustic light from the danger spot toward which duty, honor and the whole American people were most earnestly urging him.

Viewed in whatever light it may be, the foregoing dispatch cannot be characterized otherwise than as being, without exception, the most humiliating, cowardly and lamentable report ever penned by an American naval officer.

And further:

In his report about the coal supply of the vessels under his command Schley exhibited a timidity either amounting to absolute cowardice or a perversion of facts that were intrinsically falsehoods.

The coal supply of his squadron, so far from being meager, as Schley reported, is shown by the respective logs of those ships, as indicated at noon May 27, to have been most satisfactory. Here, then, we have the humiliating spectacle of an American naval officer of high rank, having each and every one of his fighting ships with more than three days' coal supply aboard, with a collier laden with 4,000 tons of coal, reporting, at a moment when the greatest crisis of the war was at hand, that "as the prospect did not seem favorable for replenishing the meager coal supply of the larger vessels, the squadron stood to the westward," or away from the point the whole United States was most fervently praying and urging him to reach.

Soon after the fiasco with the Eagle Schley found another pretext for delay in the collier Merrimac, which embarrassed the movements of the squadron by breaking her intermediate pressure valve stem and cracking her stuffing box. "This," reported the commodore, "was a source of considerable anxiety, as, with the weather conditions that prevailed since leaving Cienfuegos, it appeared absolutely necessary to abandon the position off Santiago and seek a place where the vessel could be coaled and the collier's machinery repaired."

This excuse, like the surf off Cienfuegos, which Schley deemed too strong for American naval valor to surmount, and the "rain and rough weather" which delayed the run to Santiago, was soon shown to be groundless, for the energetic engineers of the Merrimac soon repaired the damage.

Again the author says:

The one great lesson that Nelson gave in naval strategy was that a captain is never out of position when alongside an enemy. Farragut's great axiom, 60 years later, was that "the nearer you get to your enemy the harder you can strike."

Schley's contribution to naval strategy, as too plainly shown by his conduct throughout this campaign, was, "Avoid your enemy as long as possible, and if he makes for you, run."

The reader has doubtless already formed his own opinion regarding Rear



REAR ADMIRAL BENHAM (RETIRED). [Member board of inquiry.]

Admiral Schley's conduct in the war and, what is made the most of by Schley's critics, the famous "loop" of the Brooklyn in entering the race against the Spanish warships—which is explained by his friends as a technical maneuver warranted by the exigencies of the moment. The whole matter for

dated May 25, 1898, and the propriety of his conduct in the premises.

6. The condition of the coal supply of the flying squadron on and about May 27, 1898; its coaling facilities; the necessity, if any, for, or advisability of, the return of the squadron to Key West to coal, and the accuracy and propriety of the official reports made by Commodore Schley with respect to this matter.

7. Whether or not every effort incumbent upon the commanding officer of a fleet under such circumstances was made to capture or destroy the Spanish cruiser Colon as she lay at anchor in the entrance to Santiago harbor May 27 to 31 inclusive, and the necessity for or advisability of engag-



ADMIRAL DEWEY. [President board of inquiry.]

ing the batteries at the entrance to Santiago harbor and the Spanish vessels at anchor within the entrance to said harbor at the ranges used, and the propriety of Commodore Schley's conduct in the premises.

8. The necessity, if any, for or advisability of withdrawing at night the flying squadron from the entrance to Santiago harbor to a distance at sea, if such shall be found to have been the case; the extent and character of such withdrawal and whether or not a close or adequate blockade of said harbor to prevent the escape of the enemy's vessels therefrom was established, and the propriety of Commodore Schley's conduct in the premises.

9. The position of the Brooklyn on the morning of July 3, 1898, at the time of the exit of the Spanish vessels from the harbor of Santiago, the circumstances attending, the reasons for and the incidents resulting from the turning of the Brooklyn in the direction which she turned at or about the beginning of the action with said Spanish vessels, and the possibility of thereby colliding with or endangering any other of the vessels of the United States fleet, and the propriety of Commodore Schley's conduct in the premises.

10. The circumstances leading to and the incidents and results of a controversy with Lieutenant Alton C. Hodgson, U. S. N., who, on July 3, 1898, during the battle of Santiago, was navigator of the Brooklyn, in relation to the colloquy at that time between Commodore Schley and Lieutenant Hodgson and the ensuing correspondence between them on the subject thereof, and the propriety of the conduct of Admiral Schley in the premises.