

# Sailor Husband of Plymouth Girl Is Hero of Transport Sinking In Southern Pacific

## Swam All Night to Haul 28 Victims of Submarine to Rafts

### Antonio Fernandez Gambled His Life Against Sharks and Drowning

(Note: The article which follows recently appeared in the Times-Herald, Washington, D. C., and will be of interest to Washington County people since it concerns Antonio Fernandez, husband of a former Plymouth resident, Mrs. Fernandez is the former Mrs. Doris Overton Mette, sister of Mrs. J. B. Jordan, of Plymouth, and daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Overton, also of Plymouth.)

**By JACK TURCOTT**  
Somewhere in the Southwest Pacific, (N. Y. News)—This is the story of a hero, a shy man who lay in an American Army Hospital tonight wondering where he had got the courage to gamble his life against bloodthirsty sharks in storm-churned South Pacific waters to save a score of soldiers from the death of a Jap torpedo had decreed for them.

Antonio Fernandez had never dreamed of himself as a hero. All his 38 years he had toiled first to keep himself alive, and later to maintain a tiny home in Washington, D. C., for his wife and daughter.

**Always a Meek Man**  
He had no influential friends. His was the meekness that comes from speaking English with difficulty in an English-speaking land. His was the shyness of the plain fellow, of an alien in the country of his birth, of a man always bossed by others.

But Fernandez had two important assets to aid him in his hour of trial: a good swimmer's powerful arms, and an innate conviction born of toil and poverty and heartaches, that man should help his fellow men.

**Submarine Warning**  
It all happened recently in a lonely stretch of the South Pacific, many miles from the nearest land. Carrying a sizeable detachment of white and Negro troops, the ship on which Fernandez found himself was on its way to a war front. The troops had been on the water for nearly a fortnight, and were anxious to reach their destination.

At 4 a.m. Fernandez, a corporal attached to an ordnance outfit, took over the watch at the forward gun position, a few minutes later it began to rain and the seas roughened. Fernandez wondered if his wife, Doris and daughter, Alicia, were asleep in

TO SHOW HERE MONDAY AND TUESDAY



A scene from "Someone to Remember," featuring Mabel Paige, John Craven, Dorothy Morris and Charles Dingle, which comes to the Plymouth Theatre here next Monday and Tuesday.

their home on the other side of the world.

At 5:30, just before dawn, the lookout screamed the dread words, "Submarine on the port bow!" warning gongs clanged and sleepy men, suddenly alert, poured out on deck. Gun crews rushed to their positions and began firing at the spot where the submarine had been reported.

Fifteen minutes later a torpedo struck the transport's oil supply tanks. A sudden explosion rocked the vessel and fires flared fiercely. A moment later the ship listed sharply and blazing oil pools lit the blackness of the tossing waters.

**"Abandon Ship" Ordered**  
Panic and confusion were everywhere, made more intense by the moans of the wounded and the screaming winds of the equatorial squall. The decks were an unbelievable bedlam. Admit all this came the order to abandon ship, just as a second torpedo struck the vessel's stern.

Donning his lifebelt, Fernandez slid down a rope to a raft bobbing in the heavy seas below him, then pulled his raft along the ship's side until he had 38 men aboard.

Recalling that a couple of his friends still remained below decks, Fernandez clambered aboard again, carefully stepping over the bodies of several men killed by the explosion. On his way below he stopped for a few minutes to save a groaning Negro lying in a corridor with a huge steel column across his chest. Unable

to lift the column, Fernandez shouted for help, then worked on alone when no one came. He gave up his efforts only after discovering that the Negro had died.

**Gets Wounded on Raft**  
Below, Fernandez located his friends, who had been wounded wrapped them in lifebelts and led them onto the deck, where he pushed them, as gently as possible, over the side toward the raft.

He returned below once more and picked up eight lifebelts, because he had noticed that several wounded on deck had none. After assisting the wounded into a lifeboat and helping to lower it, Fernandez dived into the water himself—just as the lifeboat capsized, dumping all hands into the sea.

Fernandez' original raft, meanwhile, had also capsized, but nearby was another which was unoccupied. Fernandez swam back and forth, pulling wounded men to the new raft. When he had 15 aboard he climbed aboard himself and tied all the wounded men on with ropes to keep them from falling off as the raft leaped and tossed on the heavy seas.

**Shark Gets Officer**  
Just as a third torpedo struck the transport, Fernandez saw an officer floundering in the water 50 yards away. Promptly he dived off the raft and swam over to help him, but when he was less than 10 yards away a shark suddenly grabbed the officer's leg and pulled him under. From near-by rafts and lifeboats

## Methodist Church Has Good Report

The Plymouth Methodist Church, at the quarterly conference held here last week, made the best financial report the church has ever made at this time of year.

Nineteen members have been added to the church and six children christened; the budget is half paid for the year and some of the items, such as orphanage and world service, are paid in full for the year. It will be with pride that this report will be made at the district conference this week.

Great progress is being made in the canvass for funds to erect a new parsonage here. A roster of the church membership is in the vestibule of the church, with the amount each has contributed or pledged beside his name. A thermometer is placed beside this roster which will denote the progress of the campaign. Interest in this project is growing.

Church attendance is steadily increasing. Pastor T. R. Jenkins is a splendid leader.

came shouts from dozens of frightened men who suddenly saw schools of sharks, attracted by the blood, racing through the waters under the light of the blazing ship.

More than an hour after the first torpedo struck, Fernandez, lying on the raft seeking to regain his strength, heard screams again. Again the corporal dived in and helped them aboard his raft, where he tied them.

During the night seven or eight men were picked up, until there were a total of 28 aboard. Then the bottom of the craft came off under the pounding waves, leaving only a flimsy top a few inches above the waves.

All through the night, the next day and the next night, the men clung to the raft, often surrounded by circling sharks. Occasionally someone, crazed by the apparent hopelessness of it, would cry out, "I'm getting off!" but his mates overpowered him and held him aboard.

When the second day's dawn broke, only eight men remained aboard the raft. The other 20 had either rolled off while asleep or had leaped off while temporarily crazed. A few minutes after the sun came up, Fernandez saw two Negroes clinging to a log. Both were too exhausted to make an outcry or swim, so he plunged into the water once more and brought them to his raft.

"The best part came at mid-morning," Fernandez said, "when planes appeared overhead. We were too tired to cheer but I thanked God for deliverance." The planes circled overhead until a destroyer appeared about 7 p.m. to rescue the weary survivors.

and pulled him under, and when he finally freed himself, the soldier had disappeared. Helped back on board the destroyer, Fernandez had more coffee and a cigarette, then slept, exhausted, until the vessel docked.

Fernandez, who was born at Del Rio, Tex., to a Mexican father and a Spanish mother, moved with his family to Mexico when he was 3. There he had no schooling, being kept busy

on his father's small ranch. He returned to the U. S. when he was 17 to work as a track-walker in Chicago, later moving to Washington.

He is now ready to be returned to the U. S. for hospitalization. His former 178 pounds has dropped to about 140, and long overexposure in the water has apparently injured his back. He finds the hospital floor rolls sickeningly as he lies in his cot, and he

still suffers nightmares from reliving those grueling 36 hours when he became a hero.

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# Notice To Voters OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

## Registration Books

Will Be Open in Each Precinct of the County for Two Weeks, Beginning:

# Saturday, April 29th

For the purpose of registering all qualified persons who do not have their names on the books now, including all who have been living in the county long enough to vote and those who have recently become of age to vote.

See One of the Following Precinct Registrars:

- Mrs. HERMINE RAMSEY ..... Plymouth
- H. J. FURBEE ..... Wenona
- J. E. PHELPS ..... Lees Mill
- Mrs. MYRTLE A. WHITE ..... Skinnersville
- J. A. COMBS ..... Scuppernong

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