

From the Journal of Charles E. Wood by Katherine Chiles

December 19, 1907

I am a sailor, seaman rate E-1, aboard the battleship, the U.S.S. *Louisiana*. This is my first time aboard a ship, and I haven't quite got my sea legs. Our sixteen battleships set off from Hampton Roads, Virginia, three days ago. We are on a cruise around the world, a show of force by President Teddy Roosevelt.

All I've done so far is load the ship full of coal. I sure hope I did not come all the way from Washington State just to get covered in nasty dust. The 'Great White Fleet', as it is called, is practically black.

Earlier today, while we were in New York, I was interviewed by a reporter for the *SUN*, a New York newspaper. He asked me just about every question possible about how I felt about working for the Navy. When I told him that it was my first voyage, he laughed evilly and said, "You are going to be seasick soon my boy." I told him I already had been seasick, since we were three days out.

I have found a friend to teach me about ships. His name is Edward. He has been in the navy for two years, but is the same age as myself. I met him while I was loading coal. He was raising an enormous amount of dust and covering all of us twice as deep in the choking stuff as we otherwise would have been. I was already grouchy from having shoveled coal for two days straight, and this was too much. I grabbed a big chunk of coal and threw it at him. It hit him in the nose. I now have a black eye, but after that he didn't kick up so much dust.

December 25, 1907

We have reached Trinidad, in the British West Indies. It is still early in the morning, and I would like to go ashore soon. I hope to write more after touring the area.

It is now 7:00 p.m. I have been ashore for several hours. We sailors were supposed to receive a warm welcome but it is closer to an ice cube. We did not get the grand reception and parties that we were told to expect. I guess the people here are afraid that they might anger Japan by catering to Americans.

Edward and I ate dinner at a little restaurant. We then went hiking through a wild tropical forest. For as long as we could keep up, we followed a trolley that was giving tours. Then we ate a light snack of a coconut we found by the road. Unfortunately we didn't get the 'milk', which I have been told is delicious, because when Edward tried to open the coconut he banged it too hard and it shattered for five feet in all directions.

Yesterday, Christmas Eve, we had a nice time dancing and singing at the shipboard party. During the competitions and games, I, sadly, did not make it to the top of the greased pole. I only got six feet up before I fell off onto the steel deck. If I had made it I would have won a parrot. Later that evening, I went to a special church service.

January 5, 1908

We left Trinidad on December 29th. We are on our way to Rio de Janeiro. The waves are huge and I am seasick again.

Yesterday was Neptune Day, a ceremony for sailors crossing the equator for the first time. 'King Neptune' warned us of his coming by telephone. When he got here, I was told to write my name. I had barely finished, when someone forced me to swallow a pill made of red pepper. Then some of King Neptune's minions threw me into a water-filled canvas hanging over the deck. When I was allowed out I was given a certificate saying that I was a trusty shellback. I am glad I will only ever have to go through that ordeal once.

The U.S.S. *Maine* is using extra coal, and our signalmen are having a ball sending jokes to her like, "We are making a collection of spare coal. Send over for it."

On New Year's Day I woke up at midnight to drums and whistles. I covered my ears with my blanket and tried to sleep. I eventually gave it up and joined the fun. It is hard to sleep when you can hear six hundred men singing and banging and blowing above your head.

Getting woken up early is pretty common around here. At about 2:30 a.m., last night we were awakened to look for a man who had fallen overboard from the *Missouri*. I'm afraid no one found him. You can't find someone who isn't there. One of the sailors had called the warning 'man overboard' out loud during a nightmare.