

# Where Hazard is the Price of Safety

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"**S**AY, Eddie, give that explosion on the Alaska half a column and head it 'Big Naval Disaster Due to Carelessness,' or 'There's a couple destroyers just in to the Navy Yard that bumped each other. Write it up under 'Error in Maneuvering Causes Crash in Fog.'"

Why not? News is news, and a hard-driven editor must think of the many to whom it makes good reading matter rather than the few who may be concerned over the light in which it puts their particular profession or organization.

Now this is neither a defense of the Navy nor a complaint against the press. The defense is not needed, and the press, except when policy happens to dictate a fulmination against militarism in general, may be convicted of a sneaking fondness for the Navy, that is rather kindly and disinterested when we consider that the Navy buys no advertising space and represents neither political power nor numerous subscriptions.

But accidents happening to or on board of naval vessels do seem to be featured in the papers with what may well seem a disturbing frequency. How is the citizen reader to know just what they indicate in regard to the efficiency of his Navy?

As a matter of fact, he cannot know exactly, but in weighing such news items he can at least make full allowance for certain conditions, which we will try to outline.

First, there is the mental reaction of the reader himself.

The public at large absorbs impressions more readily than it analyzes facts. Your citizen can read the harrowing details of the latest smash-up on a suburban railroad without turning a hair, for the railroads are so much part of his daily life that he senses how small the percentage of accident really is despite what he may read.

But when the bold headlines announce disaster in some service or profession which otherwise seldom comes to his notice at all, he is bound by the simplest laws of mental suggestion to regard that service as being either extra-hazardous or woefully inefficient.

Second, there is the special stress given to Naval casualties over and above the actual importance of the occurrence itself. This is through no spirit of discrimination, but because the Navy, being a public and National affair, with a touch of the romantic and picturesque about it, has a high news value. And who can blame the write-up man if he flavors

the actual facts with a little dressing of sensationalism for good measure?

Similar casualties occur in other professions without attracting the same degree of publicity.

A construction gang in the back districts may act too familiarly towards a stick of dynamite and hoist themselves into a better world without attracting more than passing notice.

A five-thousand-ton freighter may go ashore on Fire Island as a total loss, and, unless there is loss of life or an exceptionally good story in it, get not more than fifteen lines buried in the shipping news; whereas a battleship, merely stirring up the mud and getting off unharmed at next high tide, gets a full column on the front page, and possibly a cut of the ship and her billy-goat mascot in next Sunday's illustrated section.

Third, it is true that accidents do happen in the Navy from time to time, but it should be realized that they represent the price paid in constant striving after higher efficiency and accepting the hazards incident thereto.

In the practice of gunnery and torpedo giant forces must be handled with the same second-splitting rapidity that a team handles a baseball, and with destruction sometimes the penalty to be paid for an error.

In strategic and tactical exercises men-of-war must cruise and maneuver together in close formations, at high speeds, often in fog or bad weather, sometimes at night without lights, and under such conditions that the slightest failure of any human or mechanical element may render destruction inevitable.

They must constantly navigate through waters and into ports which are unfamiliar to them and are frequently poorly lighted and charted, since they run on no port-to-port schedule, but must go where they are needed.

They must place heavy responsibilities on young and comparatively inexperienced men, since, with the vast and increasing number of branches and sciences to the naval profession, there is a constant turnover in personnel between one duty and another. All these exigencies are peculiar to the naval service, and would raise the toll of life and material to even greater proportions were not skill and caution the general rule.

Now the average taxpayer may say: "This is all very well; but even one human life lost in time of peace is one too many, and when forty or fifty are snuffed out in one puff of flame or when valuable ships that we have paid for are

lost or damaged something ought to be done about it. Why can't they slow down and go easy so that there won't be any danger?"

The reason lies right here—in the responsibility of the Navy men towards the taxpayer, who is their ultimate employer.

Heaven knows they like to stay alive no less than do other men, nor is it for personal pleasure or profit that they set themselves difficult and sometimes hazardous tasks.

But they know that a navy anything less than 100 per cent efficient is worse than none at all, since, while giving a sense of security and confidence, it would fail under the ultimate test of war. This readiness and efficiency can be assured only by constant exercise in time of peace, simulating as closely as possible actual war conditions, and eternally striving after improvement in mechanism and method. This in turn involves a certain element of hazard, for, after taking every known precaution and eliminating every conceivable source of danger, there always remains the unforeseen combination of circumstances, the one chance in a thousand, which by malignant fate may spell disaster.

On the other hand, few things would be easier than for them to lower their standards of efficiency to a secure, comfortable level, and at the same time to cajole the public into believing that everything was of the best.

Nothing more simple than to stay in port most of the time, giving parades and entertainments, taking part in all the flower festivals and old home weeks, staging a few spectacular (and wholly useless) drills and exercises, keeping on the right side of the local politicians, paying more attention to the press agent and the photographer than to the gunner and the engineer, assuring the public that our Navy is the best in the world, and, in general, finding ease and safety in a policy of "polishing up the handle of the big front door," with the taxpayer firmly believing that he was getting his money's worth and more liberally inclined towards the service than he is now.

Give the Navy credit for this, then that its men choose the sterner alternative of their own volition, and not through necessity; through sense of duty rather than through self-interest.

And if what they do involves a certain element of danger, may it not be that to do anything less would amount to a betrayal of the Nation that employs them.

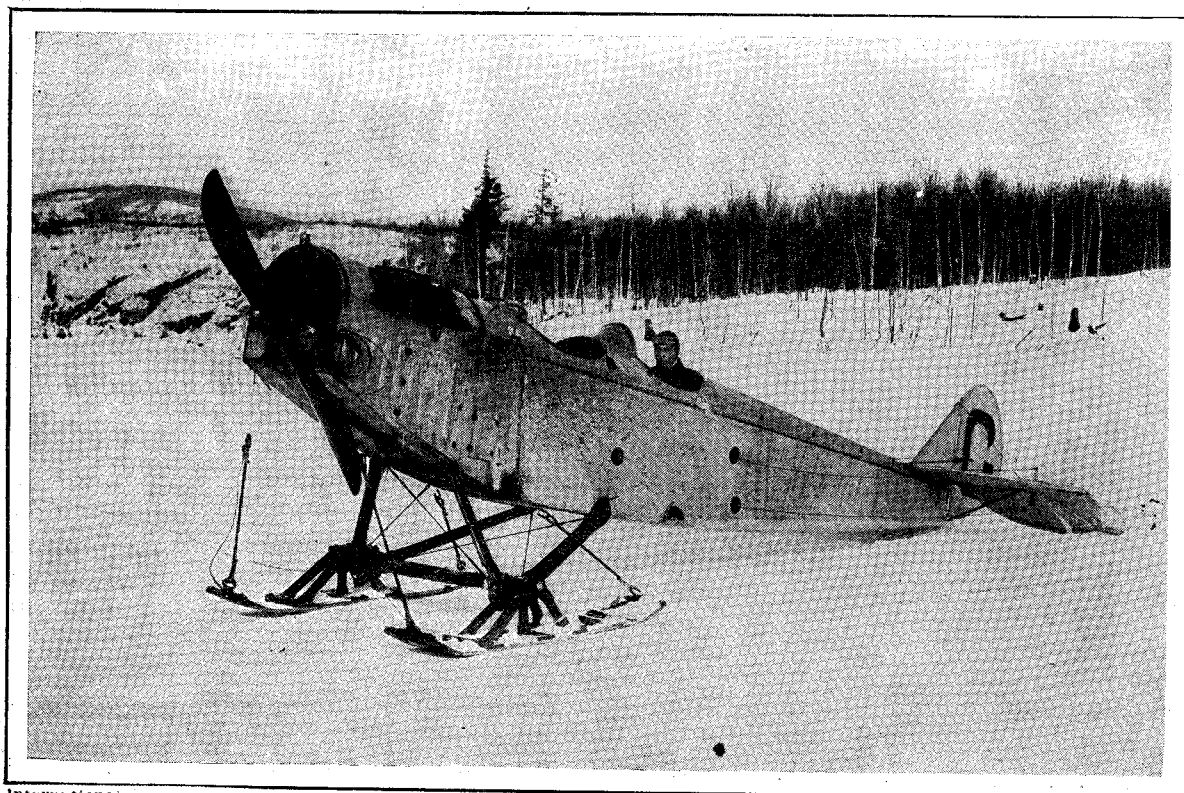


# Winter Flights



International

The latest thing in Ski Jumping—Two men taking off simultaneously at Dufferin Terrace, Quebec ; the lower town and the St. Lawrence River in the background



International

Aero Ski-ing, a novel winter sport, as seen on Lac Ouimet, in the Laurentian Mountains, Quebec—an airplane minus wheels and wings but with skis attached, and capable of making ninety miles an hour