

Vhdufk#e kkrqv#r iihfrugv#r q#Dqfhwu| ifrp

First Name

Last Name

Search

ACR-6 USS California / USS San Diego



Photo of the *California* with her original fore mast in Bellingham, Washington, 9 April 1908.

Length: 503 feet 11 inches. **Breadth:** 69 feet 7 inches. **Mean Draft:** 24 feet 1 inch. **Displacement:** 13,680 tons. **Machinery:** 29,381 IHP; Babcock boilers, 2 Vertical, Inverted, Triple Expansion Engines, 2 screws. **Speed:** 22.20 knots. Coal Bunker Capacity: 900 tons normal, 1,929 tons maximum. **Batteries:** **Main Battery:** four 8 inch, 45 cal. breech-loading rifles, fourteen 6-inch, 50 cal. rapid-fire guns. **Secondary Battery:** eighteen 3-inch, 50 cal. rapid fire guns, twelve 3-pounder semi-automatic guns, two 1-pounder rapid fire guns, two 3-inch field pieces, six automatic guns, caliber .30, two 18-inch submerged torpedo tubes. **Armor:** Belt, 6 inches; turrets, 6 1/2 inches; barbettes, 6 inches; deck, 4 inches; Conning Tower, 9 inches. **Complement:** 41 officers, 829 men (921 as flagship). Built by: Union Iron Works, San Francisco, CA Launched: April 28, 1904. **Class:** [PENNSYLVANIA](#)

The second *California* (Armored Cruiser 6) was launched 28 April 1904 by Union Iron Works, San Francisco, *California* and was sponsored by Miss F. Pardee. On May 7, 1902 her keel was laid at the Union Iron Works shipyards. The hull of the *California* was launched April 28, 1904 almost two years after the keel was laid. On January 20, 1906 her dock trials began and on October 4, 1906 her sea trials began in the Santa Barbara Channel. The ship weighed about 15,000 tons fully outfitted and loaded for duty. Two steam-powered engines drove two eighteen-foot diameter propellers. These four cylinder engines were supplied steam by sixteen boilers and could produce 25,000-horse power. She was commissioned 1 August 1907, with [Captain V. L. Cottman](#) in command. Assigned to the Armored Cruiser Squadron, Pacific Fleet, *California* cruised off the west coast of the United States through August 1908. This Squadron consisted of the *USS Washington* under the command of Captain Theodoric Porter, the *USS Tennessee* under the command of Captain Albert G. Berry, the *USS California* under command of Captain V. L. Cottman and the [USS South Dakota](#) under command of Captain James T. Smith which, was almost completed with officers yet to be assigned. Rear Admiral Charles H. Stockton was in command of the Squadron and used the *USS Tennessee* as his flagship.

It was reported that on 5 January 1908 *California* sailed from Magdalena Bay, Mexico for San Diego. *California* joined the 2d Division, Pacific Fleet, and she took part with her sister ship [Maryland](#) in the naval review of 42 warships at anchor in San Francisco Bay, by Navy Secretary Metcalf on 8 May 1908. Aside from a cruise to Hawaii and Samoa in the fall of 1908, the cruiser operated along the west coast, sharpening her readiness through training exercises and drills. In the autumn of 1909, she deployed westward with the Armored Cruiser Squadron and on 5 September 1909 the *West Virginia*, *California*, *South Dakota*, *Pennsylvania*, *Colorado* and possibly the *Maryland* departed San Francisco, *California* and arrived on 11 September in Honolulu, Hawaii steaming 2,100 miles. The force called on ports in the Admiralty Islands, Pago Pago on Tutuila Island on American Samoa, the Philippines, Japan, and China, before returning to Honolulu on 31 January 1910. The Thirteenth Census of the United States was taken aboard the *USS California* on 4 May 1910 as she was moored in the Navy Yard at Mare Island, Vallejo, *California*. Captain Henry J. Mayo was in command and Flag Officer Admiral Giles B. Harber with his wife Jeannette was also listed aboard.

According to a post card written on the 8th of February 1911 by a crewman of the *California*, the *California* was anchored in San Diego. The *California*, *South Dakota*, [West Virginia](#) and [Colorado](#) arrived at Santa Monica on 7 October 1911 and then sailed for San Pedro. In early September 1911 she was dry-docked for routine maintenance and she exited the dry-dock on 11 September.

During December of 1911 she sailed for Honolulu, Hawaii for the opening ceremonies of the completion of the Pearl Harbor entrance channel. The Pearl Harbor Naval Station, across Quarry Loch, was authorized in 1908. Dredging of the Pearl Harbor channel entrance began in 1910 and, on December 14, 1911, *USS California* became the first warship to pass through the new channel into Pearl Harbor. As she entered the harbor the *California* and her crew were the gracious hosts to Queen Liliuokalani.

USS California leaving the Dry-Dock on 11 September 1911.



Later in March of 1912 *California* continued westward for duty on the Asiatic Station. From the ships log of the *California* during mid April at Sea, en route to Olongapo, Philippines:

7 April 1912 – Fair and pleasant. Steaming through San Bernadino Straights, speed 11 knots. Entire day continued in trip through straights and evening finds us with a few hours to go before striking the China Sea. Set clocks back 32 minutes.

8 April 1912 - Partly cloudy and pleasant. At 1:30 steamed into Olongapo Harbor and at 2:37 anchored off the town of Olongapo. Naval Station fired a salute of thirteen guns, which was returned by this ship (*California*) with seven guns. Official calls were exchanged.

9 April 1912 – Fair and pleasant. Received in Pay Department 166 crates of potatoes and 11 crates of onions. Got underway at 12:11 and stood out of Subic Bay, en route to Cavite, P.I. Rigged ship for coaling. At 6:10 pm anchored off Cavite. Frank, C. E., this day reenlisted on board. Received two coal lighters alongside. Commenced coaling at 7:42 and finished at 11:10 pm. Total coal taken onboard 296.2 tons. Water barge *Santolan* came alongside.

10 April 1912 – Partly cloudy and pleasant. *USS Monadnock* and Naval Station fired salutes, which were returned by this ship. Got underway at 12:57, anchored at target practice rendezvous at 3:35 and sent out sailing launches with targets mounted for night practice.

11 April 1912 – Clear and calm. Got underway at 7:30 and stood out of bay for day practice runs. Manned the battery. Came inside again and anchored at 12:58. Sent out sailing launches and held night practice.

12 April 1912 – Clear and pleasant. Got underway in company with *USS Colorado* at 7:52 for Olongapo. Pay Day, but our Manila Liberty is knocked in the head. Held man battery drills. Anchored in Olongapo Harbor at 12:12 pm.

13 April 1912 – Fair and Pleasant. Commanding Officer inspected the crew. Commander-in-Chief called officially on Commanding Officer *USS Monadnock*. Liberty was granted for a few hours this evening.

On April 18 while at sea, Captain Charles H. Harlowe, a veteran of more than 30 years at sea, receives notice that he has been placed on the retired list. Captain Harlowe did this on his own request, and likely the old salt would think back fondly on his days of being a captain of the flagship of the Pacific Fleet. Captain Alexander S. Halstead would succeed Captain Harlowe as the next Commanding Officer of the *California*.

The *California's* former Pay Clerk Charles A. Gibbons was arrested by Federal authorities in early April in Kentucky charged with the embezzlement of some \$3,000 from the *USS California*, which had occurred sometime in the late fall of 1911. Gibbons had embezzled this money and then jumped ship while the *California* was in Santa Monica, California on October 7, 1911 and headed back east to his home area in the Eastern Kentucky area. After his arrest in Kentucky Gibbons was brought back to San Francisco and placed in the brig at the Mare Island Navy Yard on April 19, 1912 where he was ordered held until his court-martial, which likely would be conducted aboard the *California* in the Philippine Islands. Gibbons, on April 22 was then ordered held on the *Independence*, which was the receiving ship at Mare Island until transportation to Olongapo could be arranged. The *Independence* was a wooded hulled frigate built in Boston in 1812 and was at the time the oldest serving ship in the navy. The *Independence* by this time had her masts taken down and she was housed over to provide more room for new sailors yet to be assigned to a ship and also house naval prisoners. Then on April 24 the Navy Yard decided that Gibbons would be kept at Mare Island until the *California* arrived back to Mare Island in place of sending him out to the Philippines to meet the *California*.

Gibbons was born about 1883 in the state of North Carolina and had been in the navy for several years prior to his embezzlement and going AWOL from the *California*. Gibbons had been a Yeoman serving aboard the *USS Vicksburg*, as his name appears on the 1910 Federal Census and he was married about 1908. The *Vicksburg* was a 1,010-ton *Annapolis* class gunboat built at the Bath Iron Works in 1897. It is not known how much prison time he may have served but it is known that by January of 1920 Gibbons was living in Lexington, Kentucky on East Maxwell Street working as a traveling auditor. He was married, his wife's name being Edith who was 3 years older than Charles. Edith and Charles had one son named Clyde R. Gibbons who was 20-years old at the time. Clyde was born in California and so was Edith, but Charles and Edith would not have been married at the time Clyde was born but it is still likely that Edith gave birth to Clyde, likely out of wedlock.

Summer of 1912 found the *California* in Chinese waters, and she spent the 4th of July at Shanghai, China and then cruised to Japan later in July. After this service representing American power and prestige in the Far East, she returned home in August 1912, and was ordered to Corinto, Nicaragua, then embroiled in internal political disturbance. Here she protected American lives and property, by placing naval and marine forces ashore. On August 28, 1912 a force of 16 officers, 270 bluejackets from the ships company along with a marine detachment of 1 officer and 62 enlisted men were put ashore in Corinto, Nicaragua. This force was under the command of Lt. Commander George W. Steele, USN. A second force was sent ashore on September 20 under the command of Lt. (jg) R. T. Kieran, USN that consisted of 32 men sent ashore in Corinto for duty at Chinandega, Nicaragua.

On September 1 the *California* was at Balboa in the Canal Zone where she embarked Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton, USMC and his brigade consisting of 29 officers and 752 enlisted men and steamed for Corinto, Nicaragua, where they arrived on September 4, 1912. While the *California* was at Balboa one of the *California's* sailors writes a post card home to a Miss Grace Monroe in Massachusetts. In fact as the post card stated *California* was ordered to Balboa, Panama to pickup 750 Marines that had been brought from the Philadelphia Navy Yard aboard the *USS Prairie* to Cristobal, Panama and then sent across the canal on a train. The marines were under orders to be taken to Nicaragua. The *USS Denver* had previously left a small marine detachment at a cable station located at San Juan del Sur, and some of the Marines being transported now aboard the *California* were to be landed there in order that the defenses of this important cable station be strengthened so as not to fall into the hands of the rebels. The *California* would have to sail 650 miles at top speed to land the force and San Juan del Sur and then to her final destination of Corinto, Nicaragua in 4 days time. She would land 500 Marines at Corinto with orders for them to patrol the 72 miles of railroad from Managua to the sea. With the addition of the *California's* 500 marines, this brought the total US Military force to a

strength of over 2,000 men on the ground in Nicaragua with an additional 2,000 Navy Bluejackets on ships off the coast if needed all under the command of Admiral Southerland.

On three separate dates between September 6 and November 3, 1912 *California* sent detachments consisting of 1 officer and 25 men ashore for duty in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. These landing forces were returned to the *California* by November 12, 1912. Once released from Nicaraguan duties *California* resumed her operations along the west coast of the United States. *California*, and kept a watchful eye on Mexico, at that time also suffering political disturbances that had troubled Nicaragua.

By the middle of November things had calmed down enough that on November 12 the last of the fleets forces in Nicaragua had returned to their respective ships. On November 14 at 4:15 in the afternoon the fleet consisting of the *California*, *Colorado* and *Maryland* sailed from Nicaraguan waters for San Diego. Rear Admiral William Southerland's force along with Colonel Pendleton's Marines consisted of 89 Marine Corps and Naval Officers and 2,282 Navy Bluejackets and Marines ashore in Nicaragua. During these actions in Nicaragua the Marines suffered 5 killed and 7 wounded. The Navy Bluejackets had 2 killed and 4 wounded. Among the officers 2 were wounded.

When released from duty in Nicaragua *California* then made a cruise to Honolulu meeting up with the *South Dakota* there. Fall battle practice for the armored cruisers of the Pacific Fleet was scheduled off San Diego to begin on September 9, 1912 and together the *California* and *South Dakota* steamed to San Diego to assemble with her fleet mates.

During the early months of 1913 disturbances along the western coast of Mexico warranted a show of force by the United States Navy in case they were needed to protect any Americans ashore that might be threatened by these rebels. Rear Admiral Sutherland aboard the *California*, his flagship, was first to arrive off the coast. Sutherland asked for the *South Dakota* and *Colorado* to also be sent to the area. By February 16, 1913 all 3 ships were in the area, but the situation ashore was calm and no action was needed by Sutherland's force. The force patrolled off the western Mexican coast for several months to insure nothing would happen. By March 31 they were still on station and Admiral Sutherland's term of service was up. He was replaced while on station off Guaymas, Mexico in early April by Admiral W. C. Cowles where he hoisted his Admirals flag on the *California* as Sutherland had did before him.

By early summer 1913 *California* had returned back to the waters off the American west coast. In mid-July she participated in Seattle's Potlatch celebration held each year in mid-July to celebrate the cities booming prosperity. After the Potlatch Celebration *California* sailed southward to San Francisco on orders to enter dry-dock at Mare Island. On August 5 in mid-afternoon she was steaming into the channel at Mare Island and was then towed into the dry-dock. Her routine repairs were to be completed quickly as Captain Alexander S. Halstead had orders in hand to meet the *Pittsburgh* then coming from Guaymas, Mexico for target practices off the Californian coast. Captain Halstead was to leave Mare Island dry-dock within 4 days time in order to be able to meet the *Pittsburgh* at the rendezvous point. The *South Dakota* relieved the *Pittsburgh* on station off Guaymas, Mexico, and when the target practice was completed with the *Pittsburgh*, the *California* was to sail south to relieve the *South Dakota* in Mexican waters. Upon completion of the target practice with the *Pittsburgh*, Captain Halstead's term as commanding officer of the *California* was up, and the former skipper of the *USS Mayflower* the President's yacht, Captain Newton A. McCulley, replaced him as skipper on September 1, 1913.

On the fifth day of November 1913, Navy Secretary Daniels announced that the *California* would remain in Mexican waters. She was to be relieved by the *Pittsburgh*, which was now on her way to Mexican waters from San Diego, but Daniels gave orders to keep the *California* on station with the other ships which made up the U.S. Naval force in Mexican waters. Along with the *California* were her sister ships the *Pittsburgh* and *Maryland* and the gunboat *Annapolis* and the supply ship *Glacier*.

By January of 1914 the *California* had returned from Mexican waters and went into the dry dock at Mare Island, San Francisco for routine maintenance from her Mexican cruise. Early in the morning on January 22 she was released from the dry dock and was moored along the quay wall where she stayed until January 29 when she left for San Diego.

The *California* in 1914 flew the Spokane Trophy Pennant as her gun crews had the best marksmanship of any cruiser or battleship in the Navy. *California* was the sixth ship and last Armored Cruiser to win the Spokane Trophy; the *USS Tennessee* was the first ship to win the trophy in 1908. In 1907 the Spokane Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to Victor Metcalf, then Secretary of the Navy in which the Spokane Chamber wanted to donate an annual award for Atlantic Fleet turret marksmanship. President Theodore Roosevelt and Secretary Metcalf decided that it should be awarded annually to the battleship or armored cruiser of either fleet that made the highest final merit with all of her turret guns. Trophy costs of \$1,500 was paid for and donated by citizens of Spokane, Washington to be awarded to the best battleship or cruiser in the U. S. Navy Fleet. The Spokane Trophy has undergone several changes from 1908 and is still active today being awarded by CINCPACFLT to the surface combatant ship considered to be the most proficient in overall combat systems readiness and warfare operations.

California was renamed *San Diego* on 1 September 1914, in order that her name could be given to a new class of larger battleships. She served as flagship for Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, intermittently until the summer of 1915.

On Thursday morning January 21, 1915 the *USS San Diego* is steaming just off the coast of La Paz, Mexico in the Gulf of California near the southern end of the Baja Peninsula. Rear Admiral Howard has his flagship skippered by Captain Ashley H. Robertson, conducting a 4-hour full speed run where she is making 21.46 knots speed. While taking the half hour readings of the steam pressure at every boiler, Ensign Robert Webster Cary Jr. had just read the steam and air pressure on the No. 2 boiler. He had just stepped through the electric watertight door into the No. 1 fire room when the boilers in No. 2 fire room exploded. In the No. 2 fire room was Second Class Fireman Telesforo Trinidad, of the Philippines and R. E. Daly, along with one other man. Ensign Cary stopped and held open the watertight doors which were being closed electrically from the bridge, and yelling to the men in No. 2 fire room to escape through these doors, which 3 of them passed through. Ensign Cary held the doors open for a full minute with the escaping steam from the ruptured boilers around him. Fireman Telesforo Trinidad was driven out of fire room No. 2 by the explosion, but at once returned and picked up R. E. Daly, Fireman Second Class, whom he saw injured, and proceeded to bring him out. While coming into No. 4 fire room, Trinidad was just in time to catch the explosion in No. 3 fire room, but without consideration of his own safety, passed Daly on and then assisted in rescuing another injured man from No. 3 fire room. Trinidad was himself burned about the face by the blast from the explosion in No. 3 fire room.

For His extraordinary heroism Ensign Cary was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He would later retire with the rank of Rear Admiral. For his extraordinary heroism Fireman Second Class Telesforo Trinidad was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor also for this incident.

Captain Robertson orders his ship to the north at best possible speed and puts into Guaymas, Mexico at 2:00 AM on the morning of the 22nd of January for temporary repairs. Admiral Howard sent a wireless report to the navy base in San Diego, California informing them of the accident and in his words "A full investigation has been ordered. Am proceeding to Guaymas." Soon after temporary repairs and her wounded were taken care of Captain Robertson steams for Mare Island Navy Yard, California where the *San Diego* undergoes repairs and is in reduced commission through out the summer of 1915.

The lists of dead and injured included in Admiral Howard's report were:

Dead:

Fireman Oscar J. Wyatt, El Centro, CA
 Fireman Ambus J. Hardee, Joplin, MO
 Fireman William F. Elliott, Brooklyn, NY
 Fireman Clifford A. Western, Davenport, CA

Died Later of wounds:

Fireman R. B. Glidden (died aboard the ship on Jan. 30, 1915)

Injured:

Fireman Benjamin H. Tucker
 Fireman Darnell L. Varnardo
 Fireman William H. Miller
 Fireman Charles W. Peterson
 Water Tender George Ohm
 Seaman Emanuel A. Shippi
 Coal Passer Patrick A. Merriman

But after Admiral Howard's report as the *San Diego* is still undergoing temporary repairs in Mexico another of the severely burned men dies aboard ship. The death toll now stands at five dead and seven injured. Fireman Darrell L. Varnardo of Port Arthur, Texas dies of the burns he received during the accident. Varnardo's body was sent back on the first ship sailing north to Mare Island.

350-miles south of Ensenada, Mexico on February 4, 1915 the Japanese cruiser *Asama* with 500 men on board struck an uncharted rock at the entrance to Turtle Bay, and began to break apart and sink. She sent out wireless distress signals for help, but details of the rescue efforts by the US Navy was kept secret in order that it may have been of some intelligence value to any German naval ships in the area. Admiral Howard on the 5th of February gave orders that the *San Diego*, then near Ensenada should sail for the wreck site to render aid. When the *San Diego* reached the *Asama* late on the 5th, she found the cruiser *USS Raleigh* standing by her. The Japanese sailors and officers were put ashore and the *Raleigh* and *San Diego* stood by the *Asama* until two Japanese ships, the *Hisen* and *Idzuno* came to take the *Asama*'s crew. As far as could be known no Japanese crew were killed or missing.

The crew has time to celebrate President George Washington's Birthday with a feast, which was served aboard ship. On February 22, 1915 the ships cooks assembled a feast, which was enjoyed by all while the *California* was still in Mexican waters. The menu for the day consisted of Portage D' Alemand, Sweet Pickles, Radishes, Celery, Filet de Boeuf, Sugar Cured Ham, Green Peas, Calwa Grape Juice, Roast Young Chicken with Giblet Gravy, Dressing and Mashed Potatoes. There was a Combination Salad with Mayonnaise and Apple Pie, Blackberry Pie Strawberry Ice Cream, Apples Wine Cake and Oranges. With Mixed Nuts and Raisins, followed by Cigars, Coffee and Cigarettes.

On November 6, 1915 *San Diego* answers a call for help and rescues forty-eight passengers from the wreck of the steam schooner *Fort Bragg*. The *Fort Bragg* was a coast-wise lumber schooner and had been in Guaymas, Mexico and was bound north for San Francisco, California when she went aground at San Jose del Cabo on November 5. San Jose del Cabo is about 20-miles northeast of Cabo San Lucas at the tip of the Baja peninsula where the Gulf of California meets the Pacific Ocean. The *San Diego* was then in the general area and answers the call for help and steams toward the wreck site at a speed of 21 knots. She was expected to reach the *Fort Bragg* at about 1 o'clock in the morning of November 6. Once the passengers and crew were safe the *San Diego* went about her duties. Later the steamer *Arctic* took the *Fort Bragg* under tow to San Francisco, California where she was repaired in Alameda, California.

Later in November 1915, elements of the 4th Marine Regiment were again heading toward familiar waters. Civil strife caused by Mexican revolutionaries and Yaqui Indians necessitated the sending of an American force to the vicinity of the disturbances. On the 25th of November, Regimental Headquarters of the 1st Battalion, and the 25th and 28th Companies of the 4th Marines, went aboard the *San Diego* then at anchor off Mare Island and sailed two days later from San Francisco. As ordered, the *San Diego* anchored off Topolobampo, Mexico thus placing pressure on Mexican authorities to act to end the threat to American lives and property. The turmoil ashore, however, had subsided sufficiently by mid-December to allow for the recall of the *San Diego* and her Marines. The Marine regiment, upon transferring to the *USS Buffalo*, preceded north to Guaymas, Mexico and then on to San Diego, California.

About the second week in May 1916 the *San Diego* was known to be in the Canal Zone area. *San Diego* returned to duty as flagship through 12 February 1917, when she went into reserve status until the opening of World War I. Navy recruiters were busy scouring the surrounding towns around the San Francisco area in towns like Vacaville in Solano County, looking for recruits to fill the needs of the Navy. The California Naval Militia was called into active service on 6 April and was mobilized aboard the ships *USS Oregon*, *USS San Diego* and the [USS Huntington](#) then at Mare Island. The California Naval Militia was mustered into Federal Service on 3 May 1917.

The *USS San Diego* was placed in full commission 7 April 1917, where she operated as flagship for Commander, Patrol Force Pacific Fleet, until 18 July, when she was ordered to the Atlantic Fleet via the Panama Canal. On July 16, 1917, two days before she was ordered to steam

for the Atlantic, Seaman Second Class William A. Reider comes to the aid of a drowning shipmate and saves his life. The exact circumstances of the event are unknown but Seaman Reider receives a Letter of Commendation from the Captain for rescuing the drowning shipmate.

On July 29, 1917 *San Diego* enters the Atlantic Ocean for the first time and would never return to the waters of the Pacific again. Reaching Hampton Roads, Virginia on 4 August, she joined Cruiser Division 2, and later broke the flag of Commander, Cruiser Force, Atlantic Fleet, which she flew until 19 September. On August 19, 1917 Captain Harley H. Christy is given command of the *San Diego*. Captain Christy would be her last captain.

Based out of Tompkinsville, New York, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, *San Diego's* essential mission was the escort of convoys through the first dangerous leg of their passages to Europe. During one of these convoy escort trips she stopped at the port in La Croisie, France. Operating in the weather-torn, submarine-infested North Atlantic she safely conveying all of her charges under her watchful eyes. It is known that she escorted a convoy during November of 1917 and among the ships in the convoy was the troopship [USS Madawaska](#) making her first trip across with 1,671 passengers and the destroyer *USS Rowan* (DD64). In early July 1918, *San Diego* had some of her 6-inch guns removed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

On June 15, 1918 the German submarine, *U-156*, left its homeport with 77 crewmen. It passed through the North Sea, around the north end of the British Isles and into the Atlantic Ocean towards New York's Long Island where she laid mines in the area where the *San Diego* was lost. On its cruise to North America, the *U-156* sank 36 vessels and is credited with sinking the *USS San Diego*.

On Friday 19 July 1918, bound from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, *San Diego* steams to New York to meet up with a transatlantic convoy. The day dawned warm and hazy with the cruiser steaming along the South Shore of Long Island in a state-of-battle readiness. At about 10 a.m., a lookout spotted a small object moving on the surface. Thinking it might be a submarine periscope the gun crews fired several rounds until the target disappeared. It was the first time that the *San Diego's* guns had been fired at a suspected enemy. The ship was cutting through the calm sea at more than 15 kts when an explosion rocked the hull violently, and a column of water erupted along the port side. The *San Diego* immediately listed 10 degrees. It was 11:05 a.m. and the *San Diego* had less than 30 minutes to live.

Most of the crew of the *San Diego* feels a dull thud, which originated from the port side engine room. The explosion blew a hole in the hull at the port engine room, killing two seamen instantly. Another crewman oiling the port propeller shaft was never seen again. Just after this occurred, residents on Fire Island's Point O' Woods heard a rumbling noise at sea. The noise was the *San Diego* being jarred to the keel by a violent explosion on the port side just aft of the forward port engine room, later established as contact with a floating mine. The crew that worked in this area must have experienced a large explosion as bulkheads were smashed in. The ocean rushed in and flooding was unstoppable and within 28 minutes the *USS San Diego* gently rolled over and was gone. Three men died at the instant of the explosion, three died while in the water, and three were injured. [Captain Christy](#) rang for full speed on the undamaged starboard engine and turned toward shore, hoping to beach his ship. But the rush of water into the hole flooded the remaining engine and left the *San Diego* without power, preventing an SOS message. Although the *U-156* was already off the New England coast, crewmembers again thought they saw a periscope and began firing at it.

C.E. Sims, an 18-year-old seaman, wrote maritime historian Henry Keatts years later that he heard the explosion while he was on the bridge. *"I looked aft and saw a huge column of smoke about a hundred feet high. There was no panic. There was an officer who stood on the ladder with his hand on his holster. I remember he said "If anyone jumps before abandon ship is given, I'll shoot him."* When the captain gave the order, the crew struggled to launch the lifeboats manually. As the ship heeled, the smokestacks broke loose, one of them fatally crushing a sailor in the water. Another crewmember died when a life raft fell on his head. A sixth sailor drowned after becoming trapped inside the crow's nest.

The names of the six men killed in the sinking are:

Blain, Clyde Chester, Engineman Second Class, USN
Davis, Thomas Everett, Fireman First Class, USN
Harris, Paul John, Seaman Second Class, USN
Munson, Andrew, machinist Mate Second Class, USN
Rochet, James Frances, Engineman Second Class, USNRF
Thomas, Fraziee, O. Machinist Mate Second Class, USN

At the moment of the explosion men throughout the *San Diego* begin to perform duties with coolness and great courage in a time of danger. Up on the bridge with Captain Christy was Lt. Commander Gerald Bradford. Captain Christy sent him below to inspect the ship and report back to him. Lt. CMDR Bradford went below and found out just how bad things were and made his report back to Captain Christy in a way that conveyed the seriousness of the situation to Christy. After Captain Christy gave the order to Abandon Ship, Lt. Commander Bradford directed the evacuation plans and only went over the port side of the ship, without a life preserver on, as the lower bridge deck took water. Captain Christy in his after action report made specific mention of Lt. Commander Bradford's coolness and presence of mind and devotion to duty in a time that was of great peril and danger to all.

Still other men were working with equal coolness as Lt. Commander Bradford had displayed. One such man was Carpenter David Easdale whom Bradford found alone in a compartment on the Berth Deck tightening the dogs on a watertight door that led to a flooded compartment on the other side.

In the Engine rooms Lt. (j.g.) C. J. Collins who was serving as the senior Engineer Officer was taking all measures possible to determine the extent of the damages to the machinery and ship, even after the Abandon Ship order was given. Lt. Collins was also looking after his men in the engine rooms and as a result of his devotion to his duties no lives were lost in the fire rooms. Also down in the engine rooms was Lt. J. P. Millon who happened to be on watch when the explosion took place. Millon took all measures possible to keep the effects of the explosion localized and was able to keep his machinery in operation until it was rendered useless when it was submerged by the rising water. Lt. Millon kept at his post and only left when ordered to do so by the Engineer Officer.

In other parts of the ship equally heroic efforts as what was taking place down in the engine rooms was also going on. Pay Clerk J. D. Gagen, who was the acting supply officer on account of the supply officer being absent on leave at the time, took one such effort. Gagen went to the ships safe and quickly removed all the paper money from it and took charge of the money in a canvas bag he had hastily found. Once the Abandon Ship order went out Gagen headed up on deck and jumped overboard holding the moneybag in one hand and his life preserver in the other hand. He succeeded in reaching a lifeboat and saved the government money, which amounted to \$20,000.

Up on deck ships Boatswain Alva Henderson was acting with great forethought when he cut loose a pile of lumber that was stowed on the boat deck. As the *San Diego* settled deeper and deeper into the sea this pile of lumber was now floating and Boatswain Henderson quickly constructed a floating raft, which probably resulted in the saving of life. His coolness under fire inspired confidence in those men who were about him in the water while constructing the raft.

On the after parts of the *San Diego* Ensign J. P. Hildman, who recently was commissioned and was the acting Ordnance Gunner, showed great fore thought when he rushed to the depth charge racks on the after quarterdeck and doubly secured the forks in order to prevent the explosion of the depth charges as the ship sank. This would have caused many casualties among the men in the water had the dept charges went off as the ship sank deeper into the sea.

On the forward part of the ship 1st Division Officer Lt. F. G. Kutz showed exceptional poise in directing the Abandon Ship operations in his part of the ship. Then while he was in the water Lt. Kutz took charge of getting the boats that had floated clear of the quickly sinking *San Diego*, gathered, filled and in working condition. His coolness served to inspire and calm the men who were near him in that area of the sea. Additionally Captain Christy mentioned Lt. Paul T. Shortridge for his leadership in launching the lifeboats at a time when the deck was fully submerged and his assistance in getting the boats organized while afloat.

Captain Harley Christy jumped from the tilting bridge, descended a ladder to the deck, slid down a rope and then walked over the slowly rolling hull as if he were a lumberjack on a floating log, stopped for a moment to salute his vessel, then dropped eight feet into the Atlantic. In keeping with tradition, the captain was the last man to leave his ship. As a lifeboat picked up Christy, the crewmembers in boats, on rafts or in the water cheered their skipper. And as the *San Diego* sank stern first into the flat sea, the men sang *The Star Spangled Banner* and *My Country 'Tis of Thee*.

Christy dispatched a small boat to shore to contact the Navy. Two hours later, it sailed through the surf at Point O' Woods. Rescue vessels were soon on their way to help survivors and search for the sub. The ships dropped depth charges on a target that turned out to be the *San Diego*.

The Fire Island Radio Station telephoned stating that they had picked up a very faint SOS from a naval vessel. The Navy Yard was notified and boats were sent out from Oak Island and Fire Island. Over 1100 men were in the water clinging to wreckage when the boats arrived. Four officers and 28 men were carried to the shore of Point O' Woods and the others were transported to Hoboken, NJ.

Saturday night July 20 policeman Patrick Corcoran walking his beat near Ninety-sixth Street and Broadway in New York finds 30-40 sailors who were aboard the *San Diego* when she sank wandering around not knowing where to go or where to report to find a place to stay for the night. After they were rescued and taken to shore they did report to the Brooklyn Navy Yard but strangely enough they were turned away because there was no place for them to sleep for the night. They went to the Ninety-sixth Street area because the *San Diego* would anchor there at the Ninety-sixth Street landing so they knew the area. The other survivors of the *San Diego* sinking were taken care of by several organizations but this small group of 30-40 sailors fell through the cracks and just wandered around.

But it was Policeman Corcoran who got the watchman of the Riverside Theatre at Ninety-sixth Street to open up and let the sailors in to the smoking room of the theater. Patrolman Corcoran then made a sweep of the area restaurants and returned with sandwiches and hot coffee for the men. The group of sailors spent the night at the Riverside Theatre and in the morning Patrolman Corcoran was still looking after them. He took them out and got each one of them breakfast from some of the restaurants in the neighborhood. The local citizens in the morning who began to learn of Patrolman Corcoran's goodness towards the sailors informed Mayor John Francis Hylan and later Police Commissioner Richard Edward Enright gave a commendation to Patrolman Corcoran for his actions.

A few months later, on its way back to Germany, the *U-156* hit a mine between Scotland and Norway. Within a few seconds, the German U-boat, *U-156* met the same fate as the *San Diego* and disappeared from the surface of the ocean.

The *USS San Diego* today lies upside down about eleven miles southeast of Fire Island inlet, Long Island, New York at Loran 26543.4 / 43693.2 in 115 feet of sea water. She was the only major warship lost by the United States in World War I. The weight of the massive armor belt along with the hull and its contents crushed the superstructure into the sand soon after she sank. The hull is relatively intact, its keel is at seventy feet and the sand is at around 115 feet. The ship rests upside down with a list to the port side. This angle allows for more light on the starboard side, which is commonly called 'the light side'. The port side is called 'the dark side' because of the shadow in which it resides. The sand line is higher on this side because of the list. The stern has started to collapse, but the propeller shafts, which are the diameter of 55-gallon drums, hang out into space at the seventy-foot mark. The propellers were removed in the early sixties, however one was lost while on its way to Staten Island, New York. A bilge keel on each side on the hull runs a good length of the ship. These were attached to give the ship stability. They now give divers a line of reference for navigating the wreck. Along 'the light side', the 3-inch guns can be found sticking out from their mounts in the hull. Many holes exist at various locations around the hull. These can give advanced divers the opportunity to investigate the *San Diego's* dark interior. The inside doesn't resemble a ship, but rather a junkyard of collapsed machinery, bulkheads, and ship stores. Penetration of the wreck requires special skills and equipment. Hallways and rooms ranging in size from small to very large can quickly silt out, reducing visibility to zero. Six divers have died on this wreck. It is the most popular dive site in New England, attracting hundreds of divers every year.

