

A Misfit Ghost

By Anonymous

Every boy with a knowledge of adventurous literature, otherwise “novels of action,” knows of the “phantom ship,” the spook of the high seas.

But it has not been known that ships themselves are haunted, and that in the service of the United States Coast Survey there is a vessel now in commission that is by her own officers supposed to be haunted.

Yet the *Eagre*, a 140-foot schooner of the coast survey, is looked upon in the service as a very undesirable vessel to be aboard of. About her there is an atmosphere of gloom that wardroom jest cannot dispel.

Duty on board her has been shunned as would be a pestilence, and stories have been told by officers who have cruised aboard her that are not good for timid people to hear. Officers have hesitated about telling these uncanny stories, but they have become sufficiently well known to make a billet to duty aboard the *Eagre* unwelcome among the coast survey men.

The *Mohawk* was launched June 10, 1875, at Greenpoint, and she was then the largest sailing yacht afloat.

William T. Garner, her young millionaire owner, was very proud of his new craft, and all the then leaders of New York society were invited to participate in the good time afloat with which her launching was celebrated. Commodore Garner, then but thirty-three years old, and his young wife entertained charmingly, and the trim, speedy *Mohawk* was christened with unusually merry festivities. Soon after that she was capsized by a sudden squall off the landing at Stapleton, N. Y., and six people were drowned like rats in her cabin and forecabin.

Then the *Mohawk* was raised at a cost of \$25,000 and purchased by the United States Government for the service of the coast survey. Her name was changed to *Eagre*, for Jack Tar is proverbially superstitious, and with the old name it would have been impossible to ship a crew.

Lieutenant Higby King describes his initial experience when he was assigned to duty on the *Eagre* in this way:

“She had her full complement of officers minus one when I boarded her at Newport to complete the list. Every cabin was occupied but the port cabin by the companion way, and to that I was assigned.

“We had a jolly wardroom mess that night, and I retired from it early, as I was tired by my journey to join the vessel. The others who were still at the table regarded my retirement to the port cabin in absolute silence, having bidden me good-night. Their silence did not lead me to suspect anything, though I knew that the *Eagre* had once been the *Mohawk*. My cabin door had the usual cabin lock of brass, and the porthole was also securely fastened. There could have been no one under the bed or sofa, as beneath each was a facing of solid oak paneling.

“I undressed lazily and left the light burning dimly in my bracket lamp. I tried conscientiously to go to sleep for I don’t know how long with my back turned to the light. The noise ceased in the wardroom after a time, and I knew the others had turned in, but I felt unaccountably nervous and restless. I turned over and faced the light, thoroughly wide awake, and there in the single chair sat an elderly man, seemingly wrapt in deep thought. He was dressed in a blue yachting reefer, and had a long, gray beard. His hands were clasped in his lap, and his eyes were

downcast. His face was not pale and ghastly, as the faces of ghosts are popularly supposed to be, but ruddy and weatherbeaten.

“I regarded him in scared silence for I don’t know how long, though it seemed an hour when he, or it, or whatever it was, disappeared. During that time the ghost, and such I now believe it to have been, made not a motion, nor did it say anything. Presently I looked again, and it was gone.

“At breakfast the others watched me critically as I took my seat. I had not intended to say anything about my experience, for I thought then I had seen some sort of hallucination and strongly suspected that I was verging on insanity. Lieutenant Irving asked me if I had slept well. I replied that I had. ‘Didn’t you see anything?’ he inquired. I then frankly admitted that I had and described my experience. Then I learned that each one of the seven others present had tried the port cabin at one time or another, and each had seen the self-same apparition. It had acted in exactly the same way in each case, except in the case of Irving, who shot at it with his pistol, when it immediately disappeared. Some of the others had been led by their curiosity to inquire if anyone lost on the Mohawk resembled the figure, and found that none of the unfortunate ones at all fitted the description. It had been dubbed by them the ‘misfit ghost.’ That one experience was enough for me, and after that I, by courtesy, shared the cabin of another fellow.”

Lieutenant Irving and others corroborate the story of Lieutenant Ring, and as additional evidence that the Eagle is haunted, Lieutenant Irving describes a New Year’s eve experience of the Eagle’s officers, that is, to say the least, novel in the way of supernatural manifestations.

“It was at mess. The first toast, ‘Sweethearts and Wives,’ had been drunk, as it always is by Yankee sailors the world over on occasions of festivity. Everyone was feeling happy, or, as Thackeray has it, ‘pleasant,’ when suddenly the sliding-doors separating the wardroom from the companion way closed slowly with a loud, squeaking noise. They had seldom been closed, and it took the entire strength of a man to start them from their rusty fastenings. Yet upon this occasion they started easily and closed tightly, while the officers jumped to their feet in breathless astonishment. Half a dozen men hauled them open in haste, but not a soul was behind them or anywhere about. ‘It must be our old friend of the port cabin,’ suggested one, and in awe-stricken silence the health of the ‘misfit ghost’ was drunk.”