

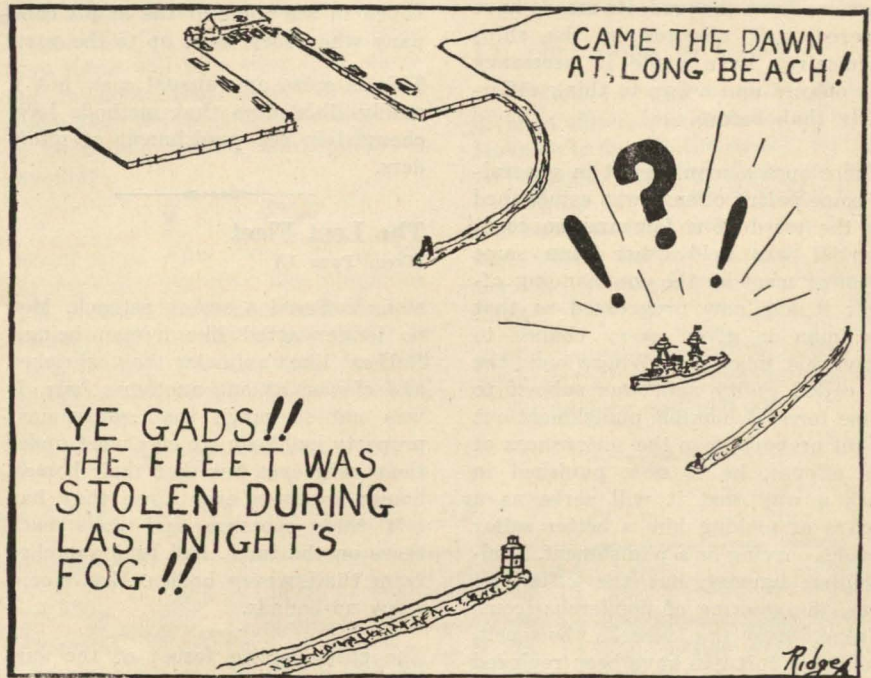
★ ★ **DETECTIVE ISSUE** ★ ★

**The Lost Fleet**  
or the  
**Ribald Robbery**  
**Off The Breakwater**

**G**RIM, tight lipped countenances would have replaced the ones wreathed in smiles and short husky words the careless banter of the sailors had they suspected a hint of the impending tragedy. Soon their little Naval world was to topple in on them like an egg shell house in a flurry of wind. No evidence now of the dark sinister force which had wreaked its vengeance under the quilting protection of the fog, but in a few minutes all would be revealed.

Standing expectantly and awaiting a boat, yet alike the others, in being unaware of disaster, a Houston sailor was talking to his pals of the night before. He talked about home — of his mother, and of his dear old Dad. Words filled with poignant meaning hushed their bantering laughs so that in the group around him only the soft southern drawl of his voice caressed the silence. In awe the others listened, then in sympathy they wept together. Home-sicknessness had banded them a little closer together this morning, of all mornings.

The harsh scraping of a boat, bearing the letters HOU, grated in upon their silence like an ominous presager of a coming storm. A single boat, the first of the morning, had knifed its way through the fog. It awaited its



passengers hungrily.

Houston sailors filed on the float and into the boat. The sailor who had held the others with his mood felt his way forward, then leaped into the yawning launch.

Then without warning; without any further premonition of what was to occur, the fog lifted. It lifted so completely that not a vistige or a streamer of vapor remained. But the pathos, the sadness, all the sorrow in the world welled in the hearts there on that dock that morning. What the sudden disappearance of the fog revealed, or better, what the lifting of

the fog did not reveal was the fleet. Only the solitary form of a heavy cruiser rode to anchor. It was the Houston. The other proud grey silhouettes of steel no longer graced the harbor. No boats were racing to Pico Landing to pick up the liberty parties. The fleet had been stolen under the protection of the fog.

Hell broke loose on the dock. Everyone talked and shouted. There was a slight tendency of the mob spirit as the liberty parties surged back and forth. The discipline which the Navy had instilled in its fighting men and for which they have always been fa-  
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