



The Faces of the Lost Men of the S.S. Watertown

SPECIFICATIONS:

Date: December, 1924

Location: Off the western coast of Mexico

Photographer: Either Captain Keith Tracy or the first mate of the S.S. Watertown. (Name unknown.)

Type Camera: Unknown

Other Information:

Specters had been seen following the ship for several days. Believed to be recently deceased crew members of the S.S. Watertown.

Another famous photo, this one from 1924, shows the faces of two recently deceased crewmen who appeared in the waves alongside the merchant ship S.S. Watertown. Normally I'm not a big fan of faces appearing in grainy photos due to the brain's tendency to make order out of chaos (known as "matrixing") but this case is different for two reasons: first, the faces had been seen by numerous members of the crew for several days beforehand and, second, the faces were positively identified as those of two crewmen who had died onboard the ship a few days earlier.

The details are a bit sketchy, but the story generally goes that the Watertown—a small tramp freighter of the type common to the era—was making its way from California to New Orleans when two men, identified as James Courtney and Michael Meehan, were

overcome by oil fumes while cleaning an oil tank. As was the custom of the time, the men were buried at sea and the ship continued on to its destination.

Just before dusk following the burial, crewmen began reporting seeing the faces of the two men around the ship and in the waves off the side of the ship. They didn't last long—a few seconds at most—but they were clearly identified as belonging to those of the two deceased sailors.

Upon arriving in New Orleans, the ship's skipper, a Captain Keith Tracy, reported the men's deaths to the proper authorities and, perhaps curious about the apparitions himself, had the first mate purchase a camera, just in case they saw the spectral crewmen again. Sure enough, once they transited the Panama Canal and emerged back into the Pacific, the faces reappeared,

prompting the first mate to snap a few photos the next time he saw them. (Some accounts maintain that Captain Tracy took the photos himself.) In any case, a total of six photographs were taken, after which the camera and the film were locked securely in the captain's safe until they got back to California. Escorting the film to a local film developer under guard, five of the six photos showed nothing unusual but the sixth one appeared to show the two faces, precisely as reported.

What makes this case especially compelling is that Tracy went the extra mile and had the negative examined by the Burns Detective Agency, who proclaimed them authentic and untouched. It's unfortunate there are no known photos of the two deceased sailors to compare to those in the photo.