

Here is a detailed account of the legendary “Cape Horn Dash” of USS Oregon (BB-3) from March 19 to May 24, 1898 — one of the most famous single-ship voyages in U.S. Naval history. Why the Dash Happened.

- February 15, 1898: USS Maine exploded in Havana harbor.
- Late February–early March: War with Spain appeared inevitable.
- The U.S. Atlantic Fleet had no modern battleships on the East Coast capable of immediately reinforcing Dewey’s squadron in Asia or defending the Pacific coast against Spain’s armored cruiser Cristóbal Colón (thought to be heading for California).
- USS Oregon, the only modern battleship on the Pacific Station, was at Bremerton Navy Yard (Puget Sound, Washington) having her bilge keels installed.
- March 7: Secretary of the Navy John D. Long ordered Oregon to sail immediately for San Francisco, then to Callao (Peru), and finally around South America to join the North Atlantic Squadron.

Command & Key Personnel

- Commanding Officer: Captain Charles Edgar Clark (promoted from Commander just before departure)
- Executive Officer: Cdr. William H. Everett
- Chief Engineer: Robert E. Carmody (critical figure — the engines performed flawlessly for 14,000+ miles)

Timeline & Mileage

- Total distance: ~14,700 nautical miles (some sources round to 14,000–16,000)
- Duration: 66 days underway (March 19 – May 24, 1898)
- Average speed: ~11.6 knots (remarkable for a coal-powered ship coaling at sea and in primitive ports)

Detailed Chronology

Date	Location / Event	Notes
Mar 19, 1898	Departed Bremerton Navy Yard, Washington	Full load of coal (1,625 tons), provisions for 90 days
Mar 22–Apr 4	San Francisco – loaded ammunition, final coal (topped off to 1,726 tons)	Crew now 33 officers, 474 enlisted (many raw recruits)
Apr 4–16	San Francisco → Callao, Peru (4,156 nm)	First long leg; heavy seas off Mexico
Apr 16–20	Callao, Peru – coaled 800 tons in 48 hours using lighters	Diplomatic tension; Peru still neutral
Apr 20–30	Callao → Valparaíso, Chile (2,450 nm)	
Apr 30–May 5	Valparaíso – coaled 1,100 tons (again by lighter)	Chile friendly but officially neutral
May 5–18	Rounding Cape Horn – the most dangerous part	Encountered violent winter storms (50–70 knot winds, 40–50 ft seas). Ship rolled 35–40°. Coal consumption soared. Crew secured 13-inch guns with extra chains.
May 18	Entered Strait of Le Maire	Cleared the Horn proper; weather finally moderated

	(east of Tierra del Fuego)	
	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil –	
May 21	emergency coaling (500 tons in 24 hours)	Brazil still neutral; coaling done under cover of night to avoid diplomatic incident
May 24	Reached Bridgetown, Barbados	Sent famous cable: “Oregon arrived. All well.”
May 26	Departed Barbados → Key West, Florida	
June 4–5	Arrived Jupiter Inlet, Florida, then Key West	Greeted by cheering crowds; joined Sampson’s fleet
July 3, 1898	Participated in destruction of Cervera’s squadron off Santiago de Cuba	Fired 27 × 13-inch, 225 × 8-inch, and hundreds of smaller shells

Extreme Conditions off Cape Horn (May 9–17)

- Winter in the Southern Ocean: constant gales, near-freezing temperatures, sleet and snow.
- Heaviest roll recorded: 42° (almost capsizing point for the low-freeboard Indiana class).
- Coal bunkers nearly empty at one point — only 200 tons left when they finally sighted calm water.
- Crew worked 4-hours-on/4-hours-off watches the entire time; many coal passers collapsed from exhaustion and heat in the fire rooms (temperatures >120 °F/49 °C).

Coaling Statistics (the real hero of the voyage)

- Total coal consumed: ≈4,500–4,800 tons
- Coaled 10 separate times (7 in port, 3 at sea using colliers when possible)
- Best single coaling: 1,100 tons in 48 hours at Valparaíso
- Worst: 500 tons in 24 frantic hours at Rio under threat of diplomatic expulsion

Morale & Legends

- The ship’s band played every day at noon and sunset — even in 60-knot winds.
- Captain Clark refused to reduce speed despite engineers’ fears for the engines.
- The crew adopted the slogan “Oregon or Bust” and painted a huge broom on the smokestack after the voyage (symbolizing a clean sweep).

Strategic Impact Oregon’s arrival off Cuba on June 5 proved that the U.S. could rapidly shift naval power across hemispheres without the Panama Canal (still 16 years away). It terrified Spain, boosted American morale enormously, and directly influenced the decisive Battle of Santiago exactly one month later. The voyage remains a textbook example of seamanship, engineering endurance, and sheer determination in U.S. Navy lore — and is why USS Oregon is still remembered as “the Bulldog of the Navy.”