

## MERRIMAC COUP

by Maritha Pottenger

This bridge play was named after an American ship that was deliberately sunk (by Americans) in 1898 (during the Spanish American War) to block Santiago Harbor in an attempt to bottle up the Spanish fleet.

The Merrimac Coup refers to the sacrifice of a high honor in order to remove a vital entry from one hand (usually dummy). The most common occurrence is when dummy has a long suit, with only one outside entry. Defenders realize that it is vital to remove that outside entry BEFORE the long suit is established.

An example would be when you are West and hold:

Kxxx  
Axx  
Axx  
xxx

The opponents are playing 3NT and your partner leads the Jack of hearts. Dummy comes down with:

Ax  
xxx  
KQJ10xx  
xx

You can see that the diamonds in dummy will provide a source of tricks. You must take your Ace of hearts and immediately play the King of spades (Merrimac Coup). If Declarer ducks, you continue with a low spade, removing the Ace of spades entry from dummy BEFORE the diamonds have been established. If Declarer has no more than three diamonds, you can hold up your Ace until the third round, killing dummy's long suit.