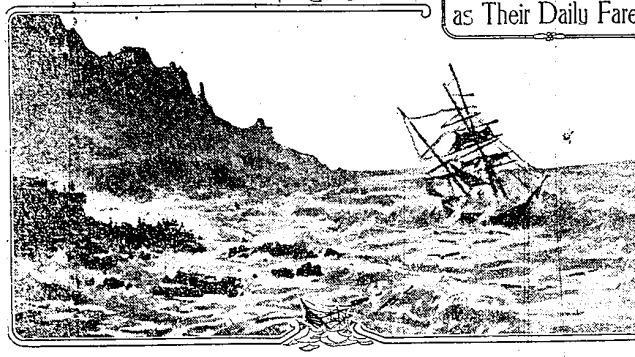
The COAST GUARD LIFE-SAVERS

HOW Hardy Men Patrol Our Shores and Take Heroism and Peril as Their Daily Fare



THE best time to read this story would be a night of storm. For with the howl of the wind in his ears and the spatter of the sleet upon his windows it would seem good to the reader to reflect that the men of the coast-guard patrol, in relays that interlock from sunset to sunrise on clear nights and through all the hours of the twenty-four on days and nights of darkness and danger, are tramping the beaches of the whole United States in an almost unbroken succession from Quoddy Head to Cape Fear, from Oswego to Duluth, and from Peterson's Point to the Golden Gate.

Nightly the members of this hardy and heroic band of men patrol a thousand miles of the coast of this country. They oscillate like a big pendulum. Away at the far North a man swathed in oil skins starts south and at the same time a guard at the far South starts north, and between these two end links of the long chain there are hundreds of other watchers, each tramping his beat to the midway point where he meets the patrol from the adjoining station, and then tramping back to his quarters, alert every minute, peering through darkness and fog, blinding rack and flying spray, ready any instant to burn a Coston light, to hurry to the wire with a report of a ship in trouble, or to leap into the lifeboat for a race through the surf to a vessel in distress.

A Hard Life.

The coastguardsman's life is a hard one. It abounds in peril. But it has the fascination of the lure of danger, and no enlisted man of the army or navy surpasses the beach patrol in fidelity to duty or ingenuity in devising ways to help the helpless. It is no unusual thing for a guard to be blown off his feet by a gale, and sometimes he is washed out to sea. No wonder his face is hard as leather, for he has to make his way through rain, sleet and sand many nights every winter, and through the driving blast he must see all that a keen and trained pair of good eyes can see in the midst of a storm that would leave the landlubber helpless. Many a time in the teeth of a stiff northeaster he pulls his tired legs through sodden sand into which he sinks to his boot tops at every step, stumbling over half-buried casks and timbers that have been thrown up by the sea. On clear and cold nights the beach may be hard and smooth, but such nights often enough are of freezing temperature. But the guard never falters. He bucks the gale and endures the cold, his eyes always watchful and all his senses quick to catch the tokens of human need and possible rescue.

A Visit to the Station.

It is an illuminating experience to visit one of these stations. It matters but little which one you may choose to see. Every station has its history and its traditions, but all are similar in their methods of work and in general equipment.

Probably you would appreciate a visit to the Peaked Hill Bars station. It is a brown wooden building which a stranger unaided might have hard work in finding. It is but a few hundreds of feet from the shore line, and yet is invisible both from the beach and from off shore. Big hummocks of sand have been piled about it by the shifting winds, and on every side these make the entire view which the eye of the undiscerning would perceive. There is no beaten track to the door; the winds and the sands obliterate trails very quickly. You tramp several miles of desolate dunes before you reach the door, but when the door is reached and you look into the faces of the husky guardsmen you know you are in good hands and welcome.

At Race Point.

Or you may choose Race Point for your visit. You find the road a mile and a half from Provincetown lifting slowly, and at the top you stop to look beyond upon the long reach of sand, heaped into curious mounds, with the curving shore and the heaving sea beyond. Amid these sand mounds the road winds along, then climbs abruptly to the summit of a cliff, and there at the top are the three gray buildings of the Race Point station.

It may be your good fortune—or ill fortune, as you choose—to be at Peaked Hill when a storm rages. The sand is beating like ocean spray on the windows of the station house and the rain is coming down in sheets. Your experience is likely to be that of a man who a few years ago spent several days at one of these stations. He thus told of the temerity with which he went out into the storm and of his rather speedy return.

"We ate our breakfast by lamplight, as the windows were battened up for safety against the fury of the storm. I noticed the morning patrol washing at the kitchen sink. 'It's a howler,' he said; 'sand in mouth, throat, everywhere, coming up in bucketfuls; eyes near knocked off me.'

Peaked Hill in a Storm.

"All this was just what I had hoped for. I wanted to see the real thing, and no half measures; so after breakfast I put on my thickest clothes, supplemented with a borrowed sou'wester, and started out. Started, however, hardly described my exit from the station, for on opening the door I was literally hurled into space. The rain I could stand; it was the sand, the ever-shifting sands, that needed a stronger physique than mine to keep time to their war dance. This sand can pile up outside your door three feet of a night, can in one day take all the paint off your house and make it white and clean as bleached bones, can so cut the glass of all your windows that in a few hours they are useless, all transparency gone out of them.

"Up the beach I forced myself, enveloped in this dazzling drift. Blinded and bewildered by it, buffeted yet supported by the on-rushing torrent of air, I was obliged to own myself beaten this time; my face was suffering as if cut by knives. I forced my way back with even greater difficulty, for the wind was off shore. I entered the house once more with gratitude. The men said nothing about my speedy return; one merely muttered to another: 'No need for the lad to punish himself.'"

The Men and Their Lives.

If you can ingratiate yourself with these men and stay at a station for several days, you will get a rather complete notion of the life they lead and the kind of men they are, and of the rescues they have accomplished.

The guardsmen are as a class weatherbeaten and strapping fellows, recruited largely from the Grand Banks and Cape Cod fishermen. Many of them commanded vessels on the Banks before entering the service. Most of them also have been local pilots. Therefore they are very familiar with the waters and coasts to which they are assigned, and in case of war they would be likely to be very valuable because of their local knowledge and their general all-round ability.

Theirs is a military service. The guardsmen are actually enlisted, for a year at a time, in every case, with the privilege of re-enlisting within a few days after the expiration of their time, when the service would be regarded as continuous. Many of the men thus come to consider theirs a life service. Their training is acquired before their enlistment for the first time, largely from their previous callings. At the first enlistment they must qualify as expert boatmen, they must be physically sound and not more than thirty-five years of age. The service now has an arrangement by which the men may retire at three-fourths pay when they have served thirty years or have reached the age of sixty-four. But in the former case they must hold themselves in readiness for any duty for which they may be called by the secretary of the treasury. In time of war this service would be transferred from the department of the treasury to that of the navy.

On Duty Ten Months.

The stations, really the homes of the men for many months each year, are frame buildings, all of the same general pattern, housing four or five boats and the keepers and crews. The men are on duty from August 1 to June 1, ten months each year, and in that period they are allowed, in turn, twenty-four hours of liberty. Each crew consists of seven men and a keeper. Thus the men divide into watches for the night, two and two, with one extra, and one off duty. During June and July only the keeper is at the station.

The beats over which these men tramp measure all the way from two miles to five in length, and when making their rounds they cover the distance twice, in each case of course, once out and once back. The beats are regulated somewhat by the distances between stations. If they are more than ten miles apart the patrols would not be able to make a round in two hours. However, not every mile of coast is patroled.

And now—What happens if a ship is seen in danger?

If a patrolman sees a vessel in trouble, which is not yet actually a wreck, he burns a red signal light. The Coston light is a tube-like affair; a little tap on a spring and a percussion cap explodes and that sets the light afire; it burns four minutes, with a brilliant red flame; seeing it, a crew knows that their need has been noted and that all assistance possible will be rendered them. If the vessel already is a wreck when she is seen, so that the service of the station crew will be required, two Coston lights are burned.

Power Life Boats.

More and more the stations now are being equipped with power life boats. All depends upon the possibility of using them. A power boat cannot be launched from the beach itself like a surf boat; it requires a harbor of some kind. The oar boats may be launched anywhere; the power boats are preferred, however, whenever facilities make them available.

In the half-way houses as well as in the stations telephones are always located. The patrolmen make use of the wires in sending out their alarms. If a wreck is accessible to more than one station, or if the need is greater than one crew may be able to render, the telephone call is sent out. From the half-way houses also full details will be sent by the patrol to his own station, and from thence the notice may be sent on to the general headquarters; at times thus the service of the wireless may be requisitioned, the Charlestown navy sending out the S. O. S. to the revenue cutter cruisers which may be off shore searching through the fog or the storm for ships in distress.

The guardsmen also make considerable use of the international code of signals, using the ordinary signal flag, and of the international wig-wag system, using the Morse code.

News From Rumpus Ridge.

"I had a mighty narrow escape t'other day from having a lawsuit on my hands," related Mr. Gap Johnson of Rumpus Ridge, Ark. "My least boy, Bearcat, was playing in the road when one of these yere fuddy little motor cars came tuttering along and run smack over him. I expected nuth'n' but what the blame contraption would be busted all to thunder. But the feller in it managed to fiddle and snort off down the road, with Bearcat cussing and throwing rocks at him as far as he could see him."

THE WORLD OVER

It is reported that an earthquake in Union county, Ore., has caused a hot spring to become cold, its flow increasing tenfold, while in another spot a large spring burst out right in the middle of a much traveled public road.

The bureau of standards has found that better glass melting pots can be made of clays found in the United States than of clays imported from Germany, heretofore believed necessary.

It is believed that all lions are "left-handed." A famous explorer says that when a lion desires to strike a forcible blow it nearly always uses the left paw.

Norway will build a canal, nine miles of which will be through a tunnel, to open to navigation a lake separated from the sea by a mountain ridge.

According to German electricians, snow never collects on transmission lines that carry 100,000 or more volts, even when they are charged.

Why Leave a Good Thing?

Edward B. Clark says the American farmer is taking to scientific methods avidly and that within a decade the farm population problem will have solved itself. Values are growing constantly. Children are showing remarkable interest in raising superior vegetables, fruits, dairy products and live stock. Federal and State action helps the cause.

IN Washington, D. C., the answer to a certain question is made by asking another question. To the query, "Why should the farmers and the boys stay on the farm?" the answer comes, "Why should they want to leave a good thing?"

There is war in Europe, and therefore it may be held by the entirely thoughtless that the farming prosperity in the United States to which attention has just been called by the department of agriculture's statisticians, is merely a thing of the year, and that a slump will come, and that as a consequence there will be simply one bright spot to offset several black spots. There is a good deal of nonsense in this view of the case.

It is not always wise to take what may be called a boom year and to use it either as a basis of comparison or as a towering landmark to which some hole in the ground of the past is to be compared, with the dismal prophecy that other holes in the ground are sure to be dug by fortune in the future. This sort of thing tends to discourage the men who believe that hilltops are to remain the general features of picture landscapes.

Values Grow Constantly.

The year just past has been a great one. The aggregate production of all crops is estimated to be seven per cent larger than the preceding year. The American farmer has profited, but it should not be understood that because attention is called to a particularly marked growth that development and increasing prosperity are only matters of a twelvemonth that is past.

Let us see what has happened in the country in the last few years. Complete government statistics, because the census is taken only once in ten years, are not available for the last two or three years, but the word is that the progress of the preceding decade has been maintained. Here are some figures which mean something:

In the year 1900 the value of farm property in the United States, including land, machinery, houses and all other things pertaining to agricultural production was $20,439,901,164. In ten years these values had more than doubled, reaching in 1910 the astonishing figures of $40,991,449,090.

Farmers Better Off.

Now it might be held by some persons that these figures simply would mean that the farm had multiplied tremendously and that the increased valuation would be spread over an enormous territory occupied by new farms and that therefore the individual farmer was in no wise better off. Well, let us see about this.

In the year 1900 there were in the United States 5,737,372 farms. In the year 1910 there were 6,361,502 farms. A glance at the figures will show that while the farm property values more than doubled, the increase in the number of farms, comparatively speaking of course, were small. To have kept things down at the old basis of values, the number of farms should have doubled, while the values were doubling.

In the year 1900 the average value of all property per farm was $3,563. In 1910 the average value of all property per farm was $6,444. These figures perhaps almost better than anything else can show the advance of prosperity in the agricultural regions of the United States.

Other figures, however, are available. In the year 1900 the average value of farm land per acre was $15.57. In the year 1900 the average value of land per acre was $32.40, more than a doubling up in land wealth.

An 83 Per Cent Increase.

The census bureau of the United states furnishes other figures which have to do with crop values. In the year 1899 the value of all crops in the United States was $2,998,704,412. In the year 1909, that is just a decade later, the value of the crop was $5,487,161,223, an increase of 83 per cent in ten years.

For the same ten years we find an increase of another kind. In 1899 the average value of crops per farm was a trifle more than $500, while in 1909 it reached the value of $862.

A curious thing is noted in Washington concerning the thoughtlessness of some men in gauging the proceeds of industry on the individual farm, or if you will, on farms in the aggregate. Some men who think of farming ignore utterly the actual land value to the man who owns his farm. They say "So and So made so much last year, but the sum is not big." To the amount made must be added about five per cent on the value of the land. A city man who owns his own house deducts the rent that otherwise he would have to pay from his yearly expenses, and so, of course, it must be with the man in the country.

Mortgages Are Disappearing.

The farmer who owns land to the value of $10,000 must add $500 a year to his farming profits. If he did not own the land he would have to pay that amount at least for its use. Into this, of course, must be figured the selling value of the property. If land is valuable it also is valuable when it is turned into cash. It seems ridiculous, but these things frequently are overlooked by the average layman when he is inquiring into prosperity conditions on the farm.

Statistics show that mortgages are disappearing from the farming communities, that outward evidences of prosperity are appearing as mortgages disappear, as the land becomes more productive, as the result of the energies of the state and federal departments of agriculture become more manifest, and as the farmer applies more modern methods to his work. The children at college, the automobiles which are displacing the buggies of the olden time, the improving, slowly improving as yet it is true, conditions in the rural schools, the marked improvement and extension of the country roads and a dozen of other things show not only increasing prosperity in the country, but the means of increased comfort and happiness.

Many Farm Opportunities.

The opportunities on the farm are growing daily in number and attractiveness. Already there have been for a year or two evidences that the leave-the-farm movement has been checked, and there are further evidences that later it will be stopped and that the return movement will set in. There is a reason for the objection of Agricultural department officials to the cry of "Back to the Farm." They have made it "Stay on the Farm." They know that if the young men stay by the land that with things as they are, they will be everlastingly glad of it within a few years, and that as farm life grows more attractive and prosperous the back-to-the-farm movement will take care of itself, for men go where lies the lure of comfort and prosperity.

Under the Smith-Lever act the United States government aids the states in co-operative demonstration work on the farms. The total amount set aside for this work for the years 1915-16 is $4,782,000, of which $1,080,000 is from federal Smith-Lever funds, $925,000 from appropriations to the United States department of agriculture for farmers' co-operative demonstration work, and $110,000 from other bureaus in the department. These amounts make the total from federal sources of $2,115,000.

State and Federal Aid.

Of the funds contributed from sources within the states $600,000 is from state Smith-Lever funds made up mainly of direct appropriations of the state legislatures. In addition to funds used under the Smith-Lever act, $625,000 is appropriated by the state legislature for extension work; $235,030 by colleges from funds under their immediate control, $921,000 by county authorities and $292,000 from miscellaneous sources.

It is said in Washington by the officials that the interest in the co-operative agricultural extension work is nothing short of remarkable. At the outset there was some little objection to the appearance of instructors in the field. The thought in a few cases by individual farmers was that it was presumptuous for the scientific fellows to come along and attempt to teach them their work. This feeling never was widespread, and it has virtually disappeared.

Children Much Interested.

The boys and girls of the country have shown an admiration and a wonderful interest in the instructive work of the agents of the departments. The canning clubs, the corn clubs and other clubs which have been established have added to the prosperous conditions of the farm, but as yet there is only a beginning. The promise is great for the future. The interest that has been aroused in the young and the increasing assurance of success makes the boys and girls desirous of staying where they see success is certain.

In the agricultural colleges the result of federal and state action in the work of increasing prosperity on the farms of the country is manifest. Young men and young women are taking courses, the men as instructors in the actual farm work and the women as instructors in household economics.

Prosperity is increasing on the farms in the United States. Under recently quickened government aid and general interest in the subject, and under the improved conditions of country life, it seems certain that the pace of prosperity is to be greatly accelerated. Stay on the farm.

For Efficient Farming.

Efficiency is as necessary on the farm as in the factory, the shop or the store. To be efficient in farming involves a certain amount of preparedness just as to be efficient in war involves careful and scientific preparation. It behooves every young man who expects to secure his living from the soil to prepare himself for his life work just as thoroughly as his circumstances will permit. He may do this by studying at home and by observing the methods of successful farmers.

Wireless Men in Demand.

Radio operators are enlisting in great numbers in the ranks of the belligerent nations of Europe. It is reported that in the British navy alone more than 5,250 radio-operators have enlisted. Among those serving on warships one has earned the Victoria cross, one the cross of the Legion of Honor and four the distinguished-conduct medals.

He Was Right.

A man rushed to the entrance of a lunatic asylum in the middle of the night and yelled to the keeper to let him in.

"Let me in!" he cried. "I have suddenly gone insane."

The keeper woke up, thrust his head out of a first-story window and bellowed down in rage:

"What? Come here at this time of night? Man, you must be crazy!"

Seasonal Activity.

Mrs. Knicker—What is your trade?

Weary Willie—I shovel rain, mum.

—New York Sun.

If a man can afford to sit down and wait for a golden opportunity to come along he doesn't need it.