

# FICTION OUTDONE BY EXPLOITS OF COAST GUARDS WHO BRAVE PERILS OF THE STORM AS DAILY DUTY

Thousands Owe Their Lives to Modest Heroes Whose Vigilance and Skill Yearly Save Sum Seven Times Size of Their Appropriation

UNHERALDED AND UNSUNG, THEY DO NOT HESITATE TO RISK ALL FOR OTHERS

Fleet, in Annual Maneuvers Today at Cape May, Practices Elaborate Routine to Sustain Classic Tradition of "World's Most Efficient Seamen"

EACH year ships go down in hurricanes, get ripped open upon rocks, ram one another in mid-ocean, run onto reefs, are set afire and otherwise get into situations where their passengers and crews are faced with the prospect of a wet death.

Every once in so often an iceberg runs amuck, or a pair of idiot derelicts are reported to be playing tag in the path of ocean travel. Or, closer to home, a pleasure craft capsizes or a fleet of walnut-shell fishing boats is captured by a gale.

On those exciting occasions we read, and usually toward the end of the story we learn that the United States Coast Guard Cutter So and So or the Surf Boat Such and Such has set off in the direction of trouble. We have pictures of gaunt, wind-scarred men in oilskins pushing a boat through mile-high combers, of gunners lashed beside their pieces, shooting lines through a torrent so thick that one man cannot see another on the decks and not a single sound can be heard above the thunder of the seas.

On such occasions only is the coast guard likely to get a portion of its due from our imaginations. Between times we—at least those of us who live inland—are likely to associate it vaguely with the customs house or, somewhat apathetically, with the "prohibition patrol."

The fact is that the work of the coast guard has little or nothing to do with the collection of customs, and only in the most incidental way with prohibition.

It is true that if a ship from the West Indies attempted to land a cargo of boxes marked "Scotch Whisky, Handle with Extraordinary Care" on the beach alongside a coast guard station the crew would very probably be put under arrest. For part of the coast guard's job is to enforce the maritime laws of the United States, and rum smuggling is a serious breach of one of them.

But the primary phase of its job is the protection of lives and property at sea. It does not, as is so popularly believed, "comb the coasts for rum-runners," nor chase rum-smuggling yachts up small creeks. That is the job of a patrol extensively and expensively maintained by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The exploits of the coast guard against rum smugglers—or smugglers of anything—have been negligible.

Property Saved Seven Times Size of Appropriation

In time of peace the great problem is with nature. To circumvent nature if possible, or if not, to repair the damage she has done. Last year the property salvaged by the coast guard counted up to more than \$67,000,000, a sum nearly seven times as great as the appropriation for its maintenance.

This takes no account of the passive side of its accomplishments, of the human lives delivered from the deep, nor of the great missionary work, such as among the natives of the Alaskan hinterland and the fishermen who cruise off the Newfoundland banks.

Of this last phase it is well to speak here. Every one knows that a cruise of New England fishermen may last two months or longer; that the life of these fishermen is an extremely rough one, and that one who may be hurt or fall ill is likely to have a hard time of it.

Frequently in fixing the lines the fishermen get the hooks gouged into their flesh. As often there are accidents which cause them to be cut by their own cleaning knives. Very often the result is a serious infection, which if neglected may necessitate an amputation; and there are probably more one-legged or one-armed fishermen who have lost their limbs in this way than those who have had them bitten off by sharks.

Every fishing season during recent years a hospital ship from the coast guard fleet has cruised among the fishing boats. The doctors and attendants climb aboard every ship, cuterize and bandage the wounds of the fishermen and remove to their own ship the more seriously injured and those who have been taken with disease. The same thing is done in the Alaskan fisheries and in the fisheries off Puget Sound.

Coast Guard Doctors Do Missionary Work In the Arctic possessions around the North Pole there are thousands of American citizens who have never seen



V. W. E. Jacobs, commander of flagship Vicksburg



Part of the work of the Coast Guard—Vaccinating settlers in the remotest sections of Alaska

any physician except a ship's doctor from the coast guard. When Lieutenant Commander F. S. Van Boskerck took the Bear on its memorable cruise from Point Barrow to Siberia and back again hundreds of these citizens were vaccinated for the first time.

The Revenue Cutter Service was created in 1790 by an act of Congress inspired by Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary of the Treasury. It was organized then on the military basis it has ever since retained. Its officers are specially educated; its men enlisted for from two to three years. They are subjected to discipline more severe than that which exists in either the army or navy.

On the other hand, the nature of the life, with its almost constant isolation from the formulae of land, brings a closer relationship between men and officers. So thinly manned are the coast guard cutters that the officers and men know as much of one another as the inmates of a boarding-school dormitory.

Training for the enlisted man begins with an immediate introduction to the sea, and this acquaintanceship is pushed until the time of his discharge. His school of seamanship is perhaps the most thorough in the world. He is not, like the man of war, a specialist. If he knows how to box the compass—whatever that may be—and to haul on a sheet, he must know also how to man the guns and what its trajectory and what is a breach block cover.

If he knows how to man the gasoline stoves in the galley, he must know how to man the helm. He must know by

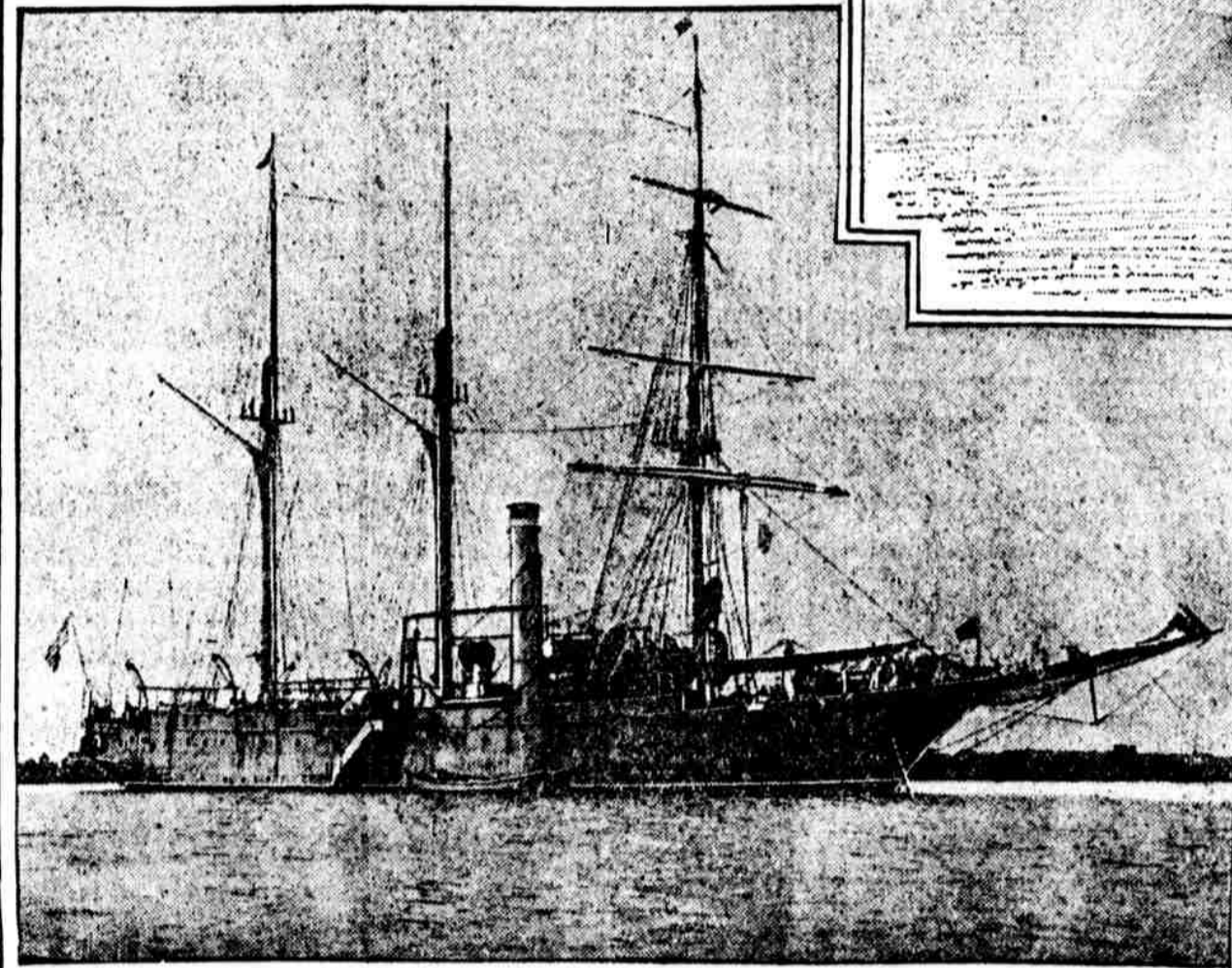
early days of the war, when British and Scandinavian ships were offering bonuses of \$1000 and more to men who could make officer grades aboard blockade runners.

Hundreds of the coast guards became mates, boatswains, engineers, quartermasters, etc., of boats resurrected from junk heaps and loaded with TNT and other tempting cargoes. Without convoy they took these cargoes over seas infested with submarines—or tried to.

Most of these men lie now at the bottom of the North Sea or in the waters off the Irish coast. A few, however, survived, and some are now the masters of ships, and others have returned to the service and are comfortably but lonesomely settled in coast guard stations.

Incorporated in Navy During the World War

When the United States went into the war the coast guard was merged



The Vicksburg at anchor in Cape May Harbor

heard all the idiosyncrasies of every kind of small boat imaginable. A coxswain may find himself coxswain of a tender bound for a sinking ship.

Men of Coast Guard Must Be All-Around Sailormen

He is a "sailor" in a sense not known in the navy nor on liners, nor anywhere else except perhaps on four-masted sailing craft. Beyond this he is a soldier with rifle belt and leggings, who does infantry drill according to the navy formula and tactics, whenever there is time for it.

The grades are the same, approximately, as in the navy, and are called by the same names. Responsibility, however, devolves on warrant officers, and very often coast guard ships have gone to sea with a warrant officer or petty officer in command.

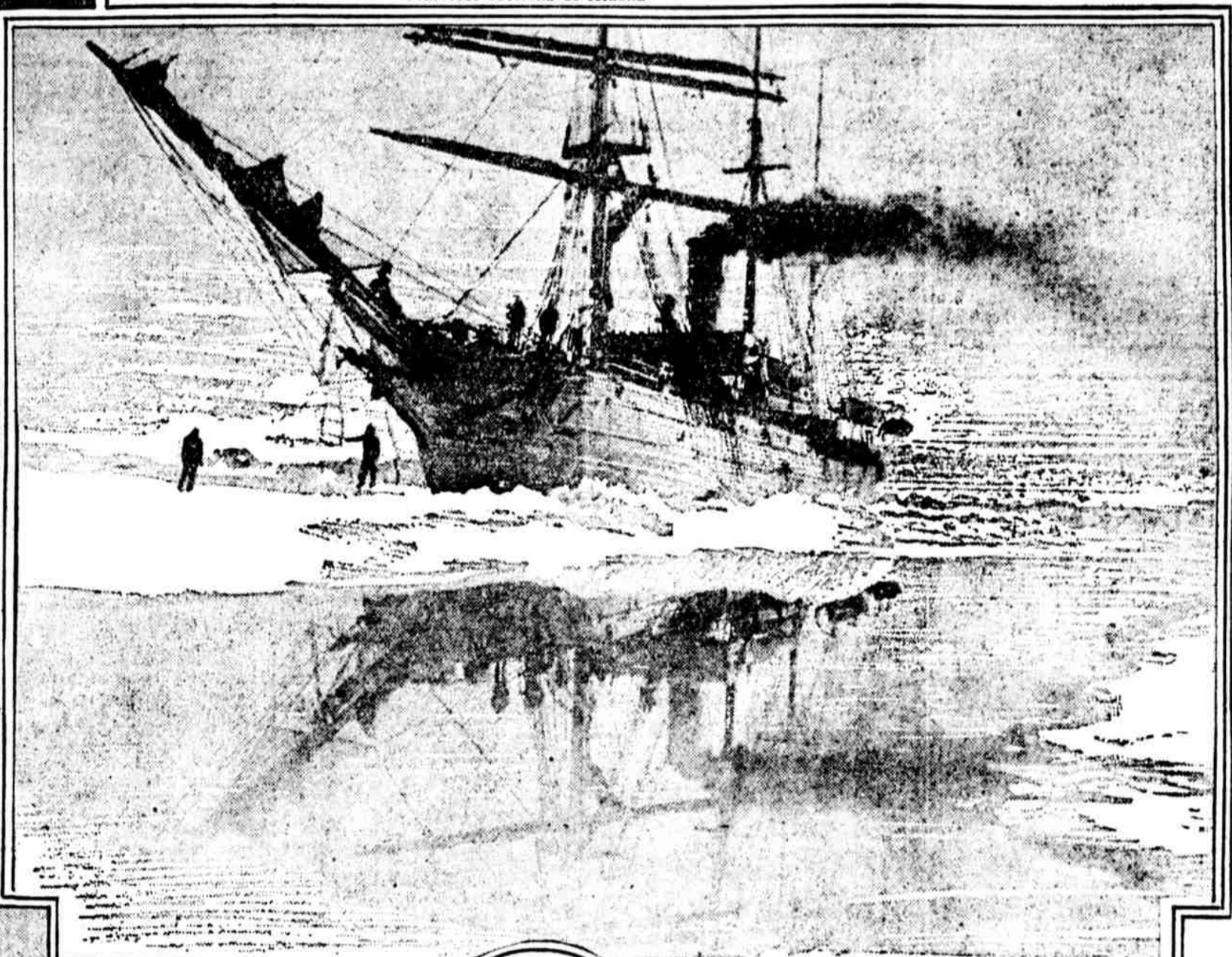
Those seamen who made up the coast guards of the pre-war days were acknowledged as the finest single group of sailors in the world. This organization was more or less disrupted in the

with the navy and coast guard officers were scattered through the naval forces as technical advisers. Others remained in command of the cutters, which became the most effective convoy ships in the allied sea forces.

Many a British sea captain, after a ticklish voyage from India to the Azores, breathed easily when he saw that the merchant fleet to which he was attached was to have a "coaster" for a convoy. Many a German submarine commander swore when he heard there was an American cutter near his base.

The greatest single loss of the coast guard during the war was the Tampa, which went down in the Bristol Channel with all her crew. She was torpedoed within sight of shore, but before a single boat could set out for her all trace of the Tampa had vanished. Previously the Tampa had saved a convoy by sending a couple of submarines to the bottom, and from that hour she was a doomed ship.

The Yamacraw, one of the most famous vessels of the coast guard fleet, however, paid off this score. She sank six submarines off the coast of Gibraltar. Previously recruits for the coast service were men of some sea service before their enlistments—men who from



The Bear in the ice off Nome

rescuer and rescued would have gone to the bottom.

N. Y. Papers Dismiss Heroic Deed With Paltry Line

Next morning one New York paper mentioned in a line that a naphtha launch belonging to W. K. Vanderbilt had caught fire off Fire Island and run aground.

On a bad point off the Maryland coast one afternoon a British steamer ran aground. A coast guard cutter lying nearby at once started for the place. The steamer was hopelessly driven in, and the captain of the cutter urged her commander to abandon her. He refused and declined, moreover, any offer of assistance from the cutter. The captain of the cutter shook his



F. S. Van Boskerck, commander of the Yamacraw

Instinct or inclination chose to dedicate their whole lives to the sea. The same was true of the men of the life-saving services, who were brought into the coast guard in 1915.

These men, for the most part, were born within the sound of the surf, and are seldom without salt wind or salt spray in their faces. Some of them, as mentioned previously, survive in the warrant officers aboard the cutters or as the commanders of the stations ashore. Most of them are Americans from various parts of the Atlantic Coast, but there is also a good intermixture of men from the famous maritime countries of Europe, England, Scandinavia and the Baltic States.

Untold Exploits Would Be Gold Mine for Fictionist

These men have nearly all repeatedly performed exploits dramatic enough to supply a fictionist with a lifetime's material. They have been through instances of mass and individual heroism almost inconceivable. Most of these are unrecorded, except, perhaps, in dusty files at the Treasury Department or in old log books. The men themselves rarely speak to

outsiders of them—not so much out of modesty, perhaps, as from the fact that they have been so frequent as to be commonplace. If they talk about them among themselves, it is because meat for conversation is so scarce in their lonely lives. The newspapers never learn of more than one in a hundred of them.

Off Onk Island, N. Y., a region of shifting sandbars, occurred one of these incidents. One of the "surfmen," making his patrol of the beach with his little automatic clock, discerned a small boat on the bar off Fire Island. Darkness was rapidly closing, but he thought there was a man in the boat. The "surfman" ran back to the station to give the alarm. In less than two minutes the men were dragging the surfboat into the water. There was one of the worst seas of the year running. Twice the boat drove into the waves and twice it was beaten back. A third time, by almost superhuman skill, they managed to get it beyond the surf, and the little crowd of women and children that had gathered on shore saw the boat disappear into the blackness beyond. They had been gone a half hour or more, when some of the women in the crowd knelt down to pray, for the gale had grown wilder and the surf pounded terribly against the beach.

At last some one came shouting that the boat had janded a half mile along the beach, and the crowd ran to the place. The shipwrecked man was with them and alive. The miracle was not so much that fact as the survival of the boat after going a mile through such a gale. Had the commander of the boat or any of his crew made a single error that night, head and took his boat back to the point from which he had brought it. There were already bad omens in the air and the captain forbade any of his men to leave the ship.

Suddenly one of the worst hurricanes ever known to that part of the coast blew up. The commander sent his ship in the direction of the grounded steamer. He had gone but a short distance when his fears were fully verified. The obstinate captain was sending up rockets. For fear of also running aground, the cutter could not swing alongside the steamer, which by now was flooded almost to the rail. The commander knew that no small boat could survive in such a sea. An attempt to shoot a line to the steamer failed.

A boat was then ordered out and a crew in command of a warrant officer put into her. It lasted a bare five seconds. A petty officer and two or three men immediately volunteered to take another. The boat was lowered, and the moment its moorings were loosened it was capsized by a giant wave. A third boat met the same fate.

The commander, standing at the bridge, had seen almost all his crew perish before his eyes. There were left only a mass boy, an ensign, the wireless operator, the engineer and a couple of stokers. These had also volunteered and were now accepted, with the exception of the ensign. The mass boy's boat struggled valiantly with the water a short time and then went over like the rest.

Rescuer Leaped Into Ragging Sea Attached to Lifeline

At this point the ensign tied a rope about his middle and had himself lowered into sea by a stoker, who besides the commander was the only man left aboard. He managed to grab the heroic mess boy in his arms and drag him to the side of the cutter. In this manner he succeeded in picking up a half-dozen from the sea, some his own men and some from the steamer.

Others saved themselves by extraordinary swimming, or were actually washed by the waves back on to the deck of the cutter. The hurricane raged more fiercely. Not a word could be heard above the pounding of the waves, and rain poured over the deck of the cutter as though from buckets. Not one further attempt at rescue could be made. It was indeed doubtful if the sturdy cutter would not be driven by the storm against the bar. The heartick commander ordered his handful of survivors to take her back to harbor.

This was one of the great instances of tragic heroism in the annals of the coast guard. Had the situation been different by ever so little there might have been a rescue as glorious as that of the crew of the Forward, under Lieutenant Roger Weightman off Sombrero Rock Light, La., in October, 1916.

In a hurricane as severe as the one described above, the crew of the Forward saved the crew and 635 passengers of a South American liner, sinking in the Gulf.

Hardly a year goes by without three or four such episodes. There are, besides, facts just as remarkable from a technical standpoint, though with less appeal perhaps to the imagination.

Such, for example, was the feat of the Yamacraw under Lieutenant Frank J. Gorman, which in one cruise last December picked up and towed ashore three valuable derelicts, or the feats of the same cutter under Commander Van Boskerck in the ice fields, or the landing of the crew of the Bear in Siberia when the Red armies and Kolchack's soldiers were contesting for the ground.

Service of Coast Guard Extends to Many Fields

There is also the time the crew of the Forward was landed to quell a riot in Jacksonville, following the fire, and the other extraordinary instance when the inmates of an insane asylum broke loose and the crew of the Yamacraw was delegated to round them up. "For there isn't a job on the top o' the earth, the beggar don't know how to do."

Which, besides being plagiarism, is mild exaggeration—but very mild. Today the fleet of cutters is maneuvering at Cape May to show the country something of the work of these brave men of the sea.



Launching the lifeboat