

1929

Men of Coast Guard Fight Elements in Salvage Work

Surfmen and Patrols Clear Cape Waters Of Half Its Ancient Terror to Mariners

As man has not yet devised a means of controlling storms, ships are still caught in the fury of the northeaster and driven mercilessly toward the rocks or shoals.

And it is still the men of the Coast Guard who don oilskins and as the occasion requires they have to be rescuers, salvagers, sailors, doctors, policemen or firemen.

As distress calls generally come when the elements are raging at their worst, there is no body of men who are called upon to face danger more frequently than these American lifesavers. Through quicksands and snowdrifts, in cutting sandstorms and in blinding snowstorms they hasten to the rescue of stricken vessels. They have robbed the coast of half its terrors to mariners.

Many a time they must engage in a hand-to-hand struggle with the elements, a struggle demanding strength and endurance of a high order, quick thinking, experienced skill, discipline and courage. Hours of the hardest labor and protracted exposure are their lot, and they receive small wages and little glory.

The blowing and stinging sand eventually gives eye trouble to almost every surfman, and added to this are changing physical features along the coastline with water rushing over the mainland and cliffs caving in.

In 1786 the Massachusetts Humane

Society established shacks along the Atlantic coast to harbor the shipwrecked, and the United States Government didn't take over the work of life and property salvage until 1871. In 1915 the Life Saving Service was combined with the Revenue Cutter Service, and became known as the Coast Guard.

It is not the occasional wrecks that are the hardest part of the job, but it is the daily routine that is arduous. However, there have been more than a few wrecks, particularly on the back side of the Cape, and it is said that if all the wrecked boats were placed bow to stern they would make a continuous wall from Chatham to Provincetown. The surfmen often rescue drowning bathers, the Ice Patrol keeps the trans-Atlantic steamship line clear of icebergs and the Night Patrol sends solitary men with lanterns out into the darkness to scan the shore and sea.

Because of the terrors of the sea, picturesque lighthouses have been constructed with steel towers from which flash beacons at night to warn mariners of the dangerous shores. Off the shores in pleasant weather one may catch glimpses of lightships riding at anchor. In addition,

Coast Guard stations have been built along the 13,000 miles of coastline in the country. There are about 275 stations—one to about every 50 miles—although there are many more than this on the Cape, as here is one of the pronounced salients along the Atlantic coast.

Wreck centers lie off Provincetown, Peaked Hill Bar, Highland Light, Nauset, Chatham and Monomoy. Coast Guard records show 911 wrecks, \$10,000,000 worth of property lost and 300 lives taken between 1900 and 1920. Some of the famed wrecks are the pirate ship Whidaw, the British Man-of-War, the Josephus, Somerset, the Peruvian, the Jason and the Portland.

Most of the Coast Guard stations on the Cape are uniform in construction with rooms for the keeper, boat, kitchen combination mess and living room, and beach apparatus on the first floor. There are bunks and room for rescued persons upstairs.

Coast Guard stations on the Cape are open to the public and visitors are received between the hours of 8 a. m. and 4 p. m. There are stations in Chatham, Eastham, East Orleans, North Truro, Provincetown, Sandwich and Wellfleet.



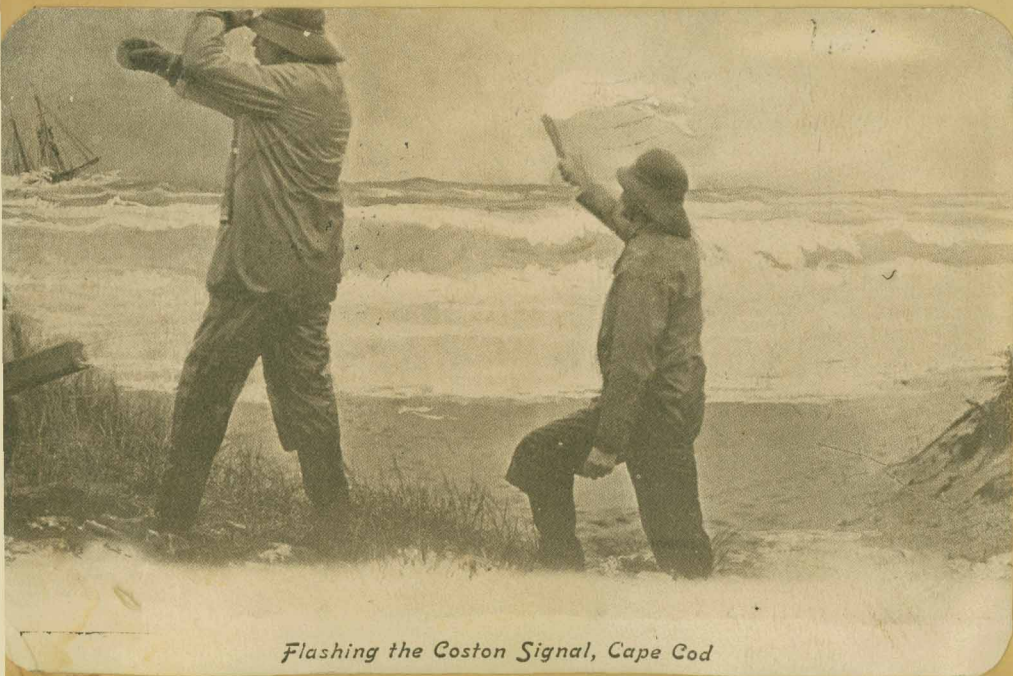
Going on Duty at Sundown,
U. S. Life Saving Service.

August 24, 1899

Severe Test

We understand that one of the recent requirements of the Life Saving Service is that the crews shall go out at stated periods and capsize their surf boat in order to get practical experience in case of an upset by accident. We read of a case down along the Sound of several members of a crew being injured by this heroic method of drill, and that some members had resigned, while others were in open

revolt. It does not seem as though a man would come up real good natured with a "smile that was child-like and bland" after crawling from under an overturned boat in water just removed from a zero temperature. Sea water is nice and dry on paper, but along the outer coasts during the active season of the life saving corps, it has a very damp and cooling influence on the blood, and makes a man who has been suddenly spilled into it full of a desire to rise up and kick his "daddy" or someone else.



Flashing the Coston Signal, Cape Cod



The Start of the Life-boat, Cape Cod