THE DUNES OF MONOMOY

Life-savers on Old Malabar

BY WILLIAM INGLIS

WITHIN the memory of men still living, geographies contained this bit of knowledge:

Q. What three capes are on the east coast of Massachusetts?
A. Cape Ann, Cape Cod, and Cape Malabar.

Malabar—how the name rings of fat galleons and hungry pirates!—is the Monomoy of to-day, the lean elbow of Cape Cod thrust boldly out between the Atlantic Ocean and Nantucket Sound. Three life-saving stations on this short strip of sand bear testimony to the dangers of the coast, and it is in the house farthest seaward, the station at Monomoy Point, that Captain Joseph Kelley and his seven rowing-men are sedulously training and waiting for a challenge from the sea. Theirs is a boat-race worth winning—not a struggle for mere dollars or the applause of cheering spectators, but a heart-breaking combat whereof the reward is a handful of human lives dragged back from the edge of the next world. Fifty-two crews saved in the five years since the station was founded is their record.

Upon the sands of Monomoy the sea is always trying its white-edged teeth. The cape is such a shifting ridge of dunes loosely thrown together that he who stands on it must often find himself watching, listening, waiting, with a vague sense of doom, for the one great wave that will surely come and sweep its slack bulk far under the ocean. As the swift currents go racing by, now east, now west, they are ever shearing off part of the land and adding it to the banks and shoals that lie in wait on every hand for lives of men and the bones of stout ships.

Curious old foreign barks with prows quaintly carved, trim Yankee schooners that once looked smart enough to sail themselves, big ships and little, are lying dismembered on the shoals and beaches of this sea graveyard. The skippers lost their way in the fog, they misread the chart, they forgot the meaning of the light, and so staggered to their end. "Dry lead-line," is the epitaph

of most of them, for if they cared enough to take frequent soundings all the Atlantic coast is so well charted that they could not go wrong. But no; the wise man has been over the road so often he needs no soundings even in thick weather; so the line lies snug in its coil—and presently a treacherous slant in the current veers the ship toward the trap, and in the twinkling of an eye the roar of breakers under her forefoot is followed by the crash of masts and spars swept by the board, and the deadly crunching of the ship's body on the close-packed sands. If she is a rotten old hulk sent to sea to gather a harvest of insurance, the fate of her company is swift and certain. A few blows of the ponderous waves, a few plunges of her worn old frame down upon the rigid sands, and she is dashed to pieces as swiftly as a house of laths. Four, five, half a dozen cheap sailormen are whirled away in the white spume, trying to swim in a madness of leaping waters where a gull could not live. Not so much as a fragment of clothing is washed up on the beach to tell their fate.

But if the ship is stout she will hold together for hours, and then her crew will be saved beyond doubt. They will be saved according to rule and formula in such cases made and provided by Uncle Sam, carried out precisely, amid the shricking of the no'theaster and the thundering of the surges, by crews of men who regard the most terrifying displays of ocean's rage with the calm and cheerful impersonal concern that doctors give to an interesting case. Of danger to themselves they do not think. They are simply playing a game with Death. They play it with scrupulous regard to form. Form always wins—at least, almost always wins.

OFF DUTY—A GAME OF "63."

"Give me good gear and a crew that know their business," any life-saving captain will tell you, "and the sea hasn't been kicked up yet that 'll do us any great harm."

All through the night the surfmen are patrolling the beach at Monomoy, as they do from Quoddy Head to Cape Florida, meeting in the little shanty on a sand-dune called Half-way House to tell one another the news of the hour, and to exchange the numbered brass tags by which the captains may know that the watch has gone faithfully to the end of his post. For ten months in the year the vigilance is not relaxed. During June and July the crews are rewarded for their year's labor by the gift of a generous vacation—without pay. They may fish or farm or do what they will for a living. The captains then sit, each one alone, in the life-saving stations, and if any ship is foolish enough to get wrecked at this time, when, according to the rules of Uncle Sam, there should be neither storm nor wreck, the nearest captain picks up a scratch crew of fishermen and other longshore folk and does the best he can to save lives. Storms and wrecks do occur now and then in these periods, but they really should not; and, therefore, Congress in its wisdom refuses to keep the life-savers on duty. From the wisdom of Congress there is no appeal.

Certainly there are more delightful places than the dunes of Monomoy on a raw, darksome March afternoon, when sand-drifts spin through the air, driven by a no'theast gale, stinging like an adder and blinding whom they assail, and the sun is hidden by rushing, ragged, leaden clouds that threaten to discharge at any moment a whirl of icy flakes upon the hissing sea. Yet no place could be more inspiring in its suggestions of heroes ever striving for the greatest prize in the world—the safety of their fellow men. There was no hint of a heroic pose in the homely welcome the cap'n and his hospitable crew gave to the unexpected visitors.

"Come right in and warm ye!" cried the leader. "Must be pretty cold after that walk along the beach. Cup of hot coffee 'll hearten ye up some."

The eight husky men were sitting not too far from the kitchen stove, puffing on pipes of corn-cob and brier, filling the room with strong tobacco smoke and deliberate conversation. Not one of them seemed over one hundred and sixty pounds, but they were of the sort of stuff that would make any rowing coach's heart hunger to train — clear-skinned, deep-chested men, quick and well-balanced, of medium size, but tough as strips of whalebone, bright-eyed and alert; the product of careful selection trained to the minute by right living, good feeding, and lively work in the brisk salt air. Outside, the gale roared and whistled. Now and then a spurt shook the solid wooden house and rattled the thick-framed windows.

The captain led his visitors up the dragging path, ankle-deep in sand, to the top of Gull Point, the very jumping-off place of Monomoy, with the sea grumbling at its foot. One sweeping glance around the horizon showed that the station is perched in the midst of perils, like a crafty spider in the heart of his web. Only, this spider is benevolent in his craft and saves life instead of taking it. Northeast of us the waves were pounding upon Bearse's Shoal; due east lay Pollock Rip, which has cost the lives of scores of ships and many seamen; southeast lurked Stone Horse, Little Round Shoal and Great Round Shoal, well off shore, while close at hand to the south'ard and sou'west'ard were the Shovelful and Handkerchief shoals. And this long spit of shifting sand under our feet afforded the only refuge from all the malices of sea and gale and shoal.

"It's the worst trap I ever saw," said one of the visitors. "I don't understand how your crew can risk their lives in such a place."

"It's a great game—if you like it," the cap'n replied. "Of course you've got to like it or the work would be too hard; and then your gear must be kept in first-class condition, and you've always got to keep cool and use judgment. That's about all you need—judgment and don't get wrought up, no matter how bad things look."

Truly, there must be all the fascination of a game in this serene and skilful contest with raging Death. It cannot be the bait of wages that attracts these heroes to the service. The captains receive $800 a year, and the surfmen $50 a month. During the two months of unpaid vacation they get $3 apiece for each occasion of service. No; there is no money lure in this game. The service

Painting by Harold Matthews Brett

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT SURFMEN ARE PATROLLING THE BEACH

THEIRS IS A BOAT-RACE WORTH WINNING

requires men of perfect health and strength. Whenever the surgeon discovers surfman or captain to have fallen below perfect condition, he is incontinently put out, no matter how many years he may have spent in life-saving. And there is no pension. Mr. Kimball, the superintendent of the department, has tried again and again to persuade Congress to grant pensions to these men, but Congress in its wisdom has always said no. And from the wisdom of Congress there is no appeal.

A stately procession was marching past Monomoy. One mile to the east'ard we could indistinctly make out, through the gray smother, a great tugboat, followed at long intervals by three huge barges with tall pole rig. This was a coal tow bound from Norfolk to Boston. In spite of the gale, they were making good weather of it; but if the storm should increase, and the heavy tow lurch too savagely upon the hawsers, then one of the barges, or all of them, might break adrift and — sailors' lives are cheap. Coal-towing is the least romantic and most dangerous business that is carried on at sea.

Two deep-laden coal-barges came up on Shovelful Shoal in a blow on March 12, 1902. The *Fitzpatrick* settled on the sands not too far off the beach, about a quarter of a mile south of Gull Point. The *Wadena* struck one-quarter of a mile farther out to sea. When the weather cleared, a few days later, Captain Mack, a stalwart young Ohioan who owned the *Wadena,* determined to do his own salvage work. He chartered two tugs in Boston, and brought over four Portuguese laborers from Marthas Vineyard to shovel off the coal. With the cargo jettisoned, it would be an easy matter for the stout tugs to haul the light barge off the sands. The men worked hard under the spur of the owner's presence, and on March 16 the *Wadena* was almost afloat. The tugs passed hawsers to her and crowded on all steam. She shook and groaned, but the sands still held her fast.

Toward sunset it came on to blow from the southeast. The sea rose. Vague masses of fog came rolling in. The skippers of the tugboats held a consultation, and then hailed the *Wadena* and ordered the hawsers cast off. When these had been properly coiled down, the old-

Painting by Harold Matthews Brett

FIRING THE GUN—SENDING A LINE TO A WRECKED SHIP OFF SHORE

est skipper ran as close to the barge as he dared and shouted a warning to Captain Mack.

"Goin' to be a nasty gale for a couple o' days," he said. "We're goin' over to Hyannis to wait till she blows out. You an' your men come aboard of us."

"No," Captain Mack yelled back. "No, 'twon't amount to much. We're going to stay right here. You fellows 'll be 'round here in the morning again, all right."

The tugs backed carefully away from the big waves that were leaping and growling at the edge of the shoal, set their course to the south'ard, passed safely around Handkerchief Shoals Lightship, and were seen by the bargemen no more.

How the five wreckers passed the night is easily guessed. Seafarers from their youth, they had no fear of an ordinary March storm. The barge, they knew, was new and very stout. What if the groundswell did lift her now and then and drop her groaning on the flinty sands? She was an able ship built to stand hard knocks, and not one of her seams was started in spite of all the sea's bombardment. So they ate their supper with good relish, smoked contentedly over their cards, and laughed at the foolish captains who had run away from no danger at all. All hands turned in at nine o'clock, and if any one lost sleep it was only the owner, who went on deck at times to see how fared the ship in which he had invested his fortune.

By daybreak the storm had increased. The wind was stronger. A drizzling rain set in. An occasional wall of fog still came rolling in from the southeast. The tide was slack, but would soon begin to ebb against the wind. A heavy groundswell was running in from the Atlantic in the east. Yet none of these things worried Captain Mack. He knew how far he could depend on his able ship, and he joked with his Portuguese, and ate a big breakfast with them, and offered to bet that they'd all be safe at home within two days. Home!

A sturdy little man they called Manuel ran up to Mack at seven o'clock. His swarthy face had paled to the hue of new-carved meerschaum.

"Ah, Capitano!" he cried, "vaire bad for de sheep. She busta bot' sides an' all gone to de pieces—got two, t'ree feet of water in her. I tell you for sure!"

Mack hurried below and found that Manuel had spoken the truth; there was three feet of water in the hold. He was much cast down. The sea was getting its clutch on the *Wadena*. If this pounding continued she must soon break up. Disconsolate, he went into the cabin, brought up an American flag, bent it on to the main-rigging, union down, and raised it to the masthead. It was his acknowledgment of defeat by the forces of sea and gale. Whatever might happen now to him and his Portuguese was in the hands of Fate and the life-savers. Soon the barge would be broken apart under their feet.

Marshal Eldredge, keeper of the life-saving station at Monomoy, waded through the sand and dead weeds to Gull Point at eight o'clock that morning. He knew there were five men aboard the *Wadena*, and the rising gale made him anxious. In a clear interval, between two walls of fog, he made out the signal of distress. He ran to the telephone in the little shelter on the Point and called up his station.

"Hello, Seth," he said. "This is Eldredge. Say, they're in trouble on that *Wadena* and want to be took ashore. Come on!"

Seth Ellis, the No. 1 man of the crew, wasted no time in explanations as he ran from the telephone to the boat-room.

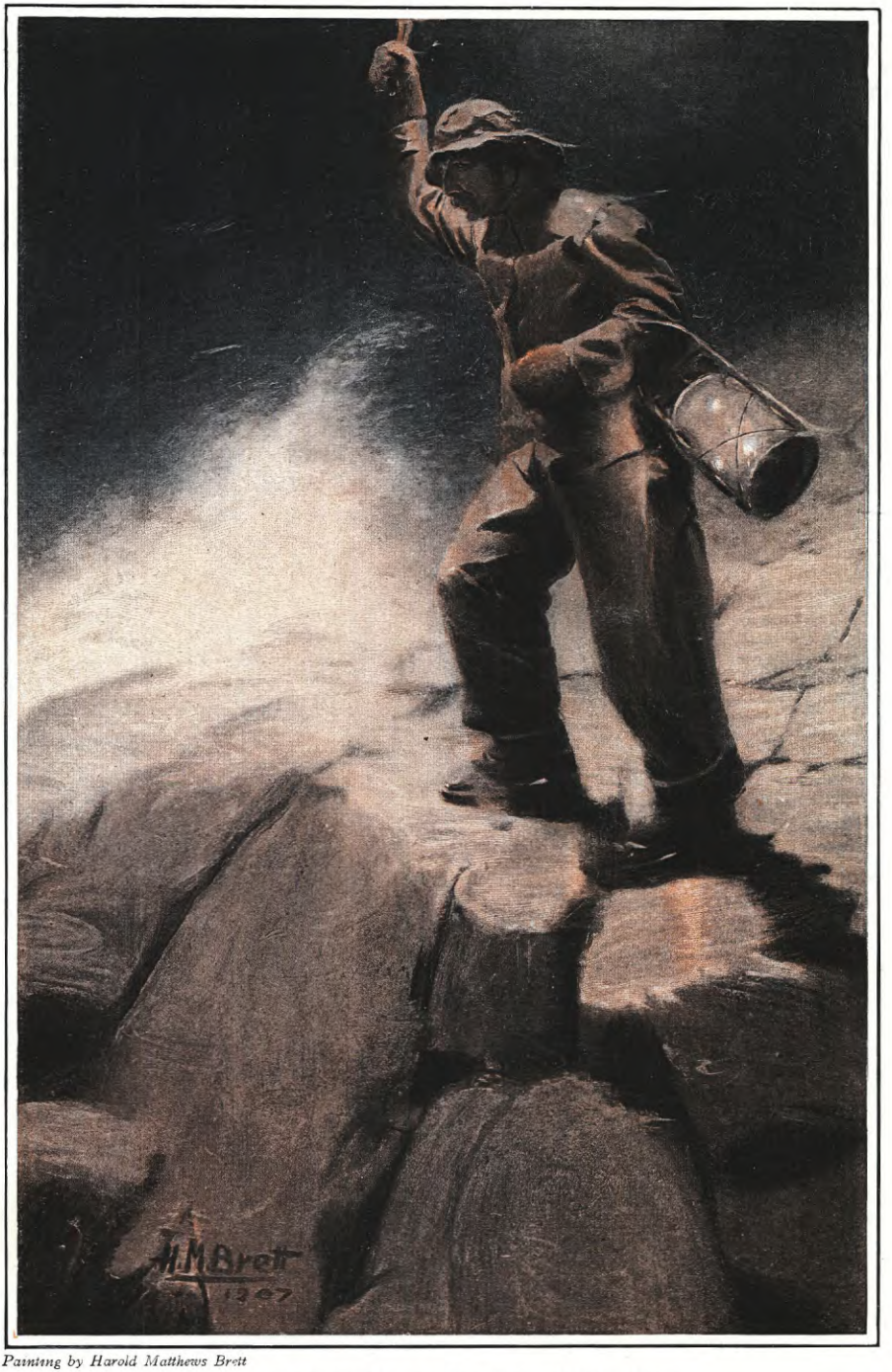
"Stand by!" he called. And the men dropped their pipes and ran after him to the surf-boat—a long, handsome craft, sharp at each end, like a whale-boat, but much heavier in build. In less than a minute from the time the telephone-bell tinkled, they had launched the boat and were paddling down to the Point.

Cap'n Eldredge was waiting for them on the beach. His practised eye instantly detected a fault—the men had in their haste disobeyed one of the most important rules in the service: they had forgotten to put on their cork life-belts. Should he take them back home? No; the five men out yonder on the barge were in danger, and he could not spare the time. He knew the risk that awaited men who omitted this precaution, but it was too late to go back. Seth Ellis

MEN OF THE CREW SIGNALLING

dropped the steering-oar and clambered up to his station in the bow. Eldredge and No. 6 shoved the boat off the beach and leaped aboard as the men gave way on the long ash sweeps. Eldredge picked up the steering-oar in the stern and kept her head to the sea.

On a windless and glassy day in August you will still find the waves leaping and crashing on the sands of Shovelful Shoal. Imagine, then, with what vehemence they were now pushing heavenward, lashed by the conflict of wind and tide on this March day of storm; how they fell back in boiling white froth upon the maelstrom and raced away in swirling eddies! The tide was ebbing fast in the teeth of the southeast gale, and the easterly



Painting by Harold Matthews Brett

LURID IN THE GLARE OF THE RED SIGNAL LIGHT

ground-swell from the Atlantic, now heavier than ever, was multiplying the fury of the surges.

Eldredge took his boat well outside of the Shovelful Shoal, until he came to the very end whereon the *Wadena* was pounding. Cautiously he manœuvred his craft up in the lee of the barge and fended her off, while the eager Portuguese were hauling in the painter that Seth Ellis hove aboard. Captain Mack was doleful over the loss of his barge; but he was calm, as a good man should be, while he held back his impetuous men, and made them drop gently into the life-boat one by one as the seas swung her up close to the rail. He got in with three of them forward, leaving the cook, a fat Portuguese giant of some three hundred pounds, to take a place in the stern.

As the big fellow perched on the rail, he became frightened and leaped for the boat just as it rose on a wave. He came down feet first upon the after-thwart and went crashing through it. At the same instant Seth Ellis chopped the painter with his hatchet, and the life-boat was swept away on the tide.

The big cook and the three other Portuguese were stunned for a few moments by the crash of the thwart and the tumbling of the waves among which they rode. Just as the life-boat came clear of the shoal one of them leaped up in an agony of fear.

"*Dio mio!*" he cried, "we are all lost! We are all lost!"

"Sit down, you fool, or you *will* be lost," roared Cap'n Eldredge. "Seth, bat him on the head if ye have to, but git him down somehow."

But the cap'n spoke too late. All four of the Portuguese were afoot now, leaping and shrieking in frenzy. The life-savers tried to pull them down. A great sea broke over the gunwale as the boat yawed off her course, and in the twinkling of an eye swamped and capsized her. Not one of the Portuguese rose to the surface. All the Americans came up, swimming in spite of the oilskins and the heavy rubber hip-boots that cumbered them. They struck out for the capsized life-boat, grabbed her keel, and hung on. The sea was cold as ice, but they were still warm from the rowing. Now and then a great wave seized one or another, tore him away, and tossed him up as easily as if he were a moth, but always hands were reaching for him as he came down and helping him back to the keel. The wind and sea swept the boat toward Monomoy Beach.

Elmer Mayo and Ben Mallows, aboard the barge *Fitzpatrick,* aground on the same shoal, but a quarter of a mile nearer shore, saw the tragedy and were helpless to avert it. No, not quite helpless. Mayo, a gentle-featured, blue-eyed, soft-voiced, big fellow of middle age, ran toward a dory that lay on the deck.

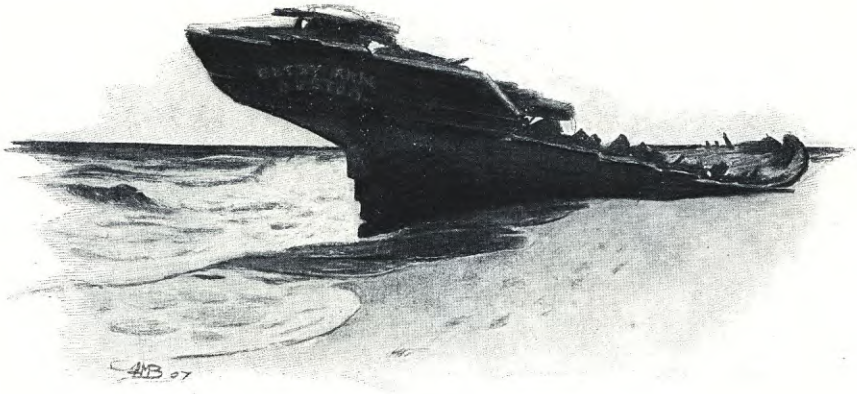
"Don't try it! You can't *do* it, Elmer," cried Ben Mallows. "Your dory wouldn't live a min-nit in that sea, an' look—she hasn't any thole-pins on the sta'b'rd side."

"I'll git 'em, I tell ye," Elmer answered. "Don't you hinder me."

With a calking-mallet he drove a big file into the dory's gunwale for one thole-pin, then plucked out the handle of the mallet, and with the heel of his fist jammed it down into the place of the other missing pin. He tucked a pair of oars under the thwarts, and watching for a lull after three big seas had passed, hurled the dory off the deck into the maelstrom, and jumped. By some miracle he fell into the boat without injuring it, seized the oars, swung her head into the wind, and made for the life-boat.

When the big Portuguese crashed aboard the life-boat he was the thirteenth man in her; when she floated upside down after the capsize only eight were clinging to her keel. There were six left when Elmer Mayo launched his dory; but there were only three when he came near, and only one man was left when he drew alongside. By what process the number was reduced cannot be told here, for Mayo has always refused to talk about the struggles he witnessed that morning.

Well toward the stern of the life-boat, in the after-part of the centreboard trunk, there was a vacant space big enough to contain one hand. Into that space was thrust the right hand of Seth Ellis, No. 1, the biggest, strongest, man of the crew. All the others had vanished beneath the waves. Ellis was almost unconscious when Elmer Mayo dragged him into the dory and rowed him to the beach.



REQUIESCAT

Only once has Elmer spoken of that day's work. A score of men gathered about him in the bereft life-saving station immediately after the rescue, praised him, made much of him, asked him a hundred questions.

"Pretty tired. Cal'late I'll have a cup of coffee," was all they could draw from him. Soon New England raved with his fame. A theatrical manager offered him one hundred dollars a week to go on circuit and be exhibited as the hero of Monomoy. He refused to go; but his brother Ed took up the enterprise and travelled far, enjoying the incense of vicarious adulation and accumulating a tidy bit of money.

The Secretary of the Treasury was so much impressed by the *Wadena* incident that he awarded the Congressional gold medal for exceptional heroism to the rescuer and the rescued. On the day of the presentation the ancient Town Hall of Chatham was crowded with men and women of Cape Cod, who came to pay tribute to their heroes. The Congressman of the district made a speech, a fine speech, recapitulating the horrors of that day, and dwelling upon Mayo's acts. Then he called up Seth Ellis and pinned the gold medal upon his coat. Ellis was thankful. He said so simply and not without eloquence.

Elmer Mayo was called up on the platform. His face was pale, and his eyes were filled with apprehensions. The Congressman told again of his bravery, pinned on his medal, and waited for some reply. Elmer slowly glanced from the Congressman to the people about him, then looked long at Seth Ellis. A sudden sob broke the silence, and Elmer Mayo stumbled blindly from the platform with tears on his cheeks. Since that day Elmer Mayo has never met Seth Ellis face to face.

Congratulations

BY BRIAN HOOKER

HOW can he know your worth so well
As I who never loved you, Sweet?
His love shall bind you, and compel
Your heart, his only, to forget
Whose word first taught that heart to beat.
He is the worthier man—and yet,
How can he know your worth so well?