



UP ALONG and down along

by
"Bossy" McGady

HOMER AND WE want to thank all you swell people here on the Cape and everywhere else for what seems like a million Christmas cards. From our heart, folks, thank you very much. We would like to send you cards in return, but golly, we haven't got that kind of money . . . the Simon Legree who publishes this rag is only paying us \$150 a week. (Wont the revenooors be interested in this! Ed.)

ROPE YARN SUNDAY: Many afternoons we sit by the old red-hot pot-bellied stove, in the Outermost Shop at Peter Hunt's Peasant Village to chat with our friends, Artist Bruce McKain and Cap'n Bert Bangs, and many times the conversation drifts around to that terrible Sunday night of November 27, 1898—the time, which will forever be remembered by Cape Codders, as "The November Gale."

At the time, precisely at seven o'clock, the previous Saturday evening, a long, deep ship's whistle blast, rolled over the placid water of Boston harbor, as a beautiful gold and white side-wheeler inched away from her berth at India Wharf, and sailed away into the unknown. At the helm was her master, Captain Hollis H. Blanchard. Carved in gold leaf, on her quarterboards, was the name S. S. Portland.

At the same instant, a 24-year-old boy, Surfman Bert Bangs of the then United States Life Saving Service, left the High Head station and walked east along the "Great Beach" to meet the man from the High Land station at the "Half Way House". It was an unusually calm night for the month of gales, but the breeze was freshening, the wind had shifted around to the no'east. It started to snow, and as Surfman Bangs watched the lazy surf rolling over the Peaked Hill Bars, he recalled the official motto of the Coast Guard Service, "Semper Paratus," he also recalled

the unofficial one, which runs, "The Book says you got to go out, it don't say you got to come back".

Bert and history record the swiftness and fury with which that storm struck. At the "Half Way House" the man from High Land told Bert that just before he started out, the wind gauge at Highland Light was blown away in the first wind gust which registered 90 miles an hour. They never did find it, Bert said.

With his so'wester reversed to shield his face, which didn't do any good, and by crawling on his hands and knees along the ridge of the dunes, the sea breaking over him, Bert got back to his High Head station sometime after midnight. Several of his fingers were frozen, his face bloody and raw from the driving sand. But what he remembers most, strange enough, were the awful streaks of lightning and crash of thunder above the roar of the storm.

By two o'clock, Sunday afternoon, the storm was worse than ever, and as Surfman Bangs fought his way east again that evening, on the same patrol the surf was breaking through the dunes and flooding "the hollow". A few miles beyond "the outer bar" three ships were wallowing in the huge seas in the last stages of foundering. They were the 96-foot granite schooner Addie E. Snow, the steamer Pentagoet, and the S. S. Portland, the latter with 176 persons aboard.

Several men were fighting their way along the "Great Beach" that dreadful night. All of them fired their Costan flares. They were Surfman John Johnson and Jim Kelly of Peaked Hill, Surfmen George Bickers and Edwin Tyler of Race Point and Surfman Bangs of High Head. On the return trip west, to his station, between 11 and 11:30 that Sunday night, Bert saw wreckage coming ashore—mattresses, chairs, upholstery, windows,

doors and paneling, milk cans, tubs of lard, butter and cheese, brief cases, bottles of Peach Blossom whiskey, White Owl cigars, Admiral Dewey Twist Chewing Tobacco. Then Bert found the first body, a colored fellow in a white coat and apron, a cook or waiter apparently—his watch was stopped at 9:15, as were the other watches on the 36 bodies recovered from the Portland. No body from either the steamer Pentagoet or the Addie E. Snow was ever found. Nor any of the other 140 persons aboard the Portland.

But this is not the story of the Portland, rather it is the tale of the Frances Butler, a three-masted schooner bound from the East Indies to Boston with a cargo of dye-wood logs, which struck on the "inner bar", directly in front of the "Half Way House" between the High Head and Peaked Hill stations at ten o'clock that following Monday morning. There was still no sign of the storm diminishing, nor any slacking in the work of the exhausted crews of the Coast Guard stations. The Butler struck on the spot where some 122 years previously the "Big MO" of her day, the Somerset, British man-of-war, had come ashore.

Bert was on the ridge of the dunes, overlooking the "Half Way House" between High Head and Peaked Hill. The sea was the highest ever, running all the way back to the Race Point highway. The Butler came high over "the outer bar", a colored crewman clinging to her rigging. When she hit hard on "the inner bar", he was shot into the air like a gull's feather and lost in the surf. Bert never saw him again. At the same time, a great wave washed over the vessel, swept the captain over the side, and landed him high on the dune's ridge, at Bert's feet.

Captains Charlie Kelly of High Head and Walter Cook of Peaked Hill, with the surfmen, their horse's heads covered with hoods, arrived and set up a Lyle gun. A six-ounce charge of powder was used for the 16-pound shot, the first shot burning off. But the second was true and carried the line across the center of the vessel. The Butler's crew members hauled the hawser aboard and three of the crew went aloft to make it fast for the breeches buoy. But at this instant the masts snapped off and these three men were lost in the sea, two others coming hand over

hand, along the hawser, through the surf to shore.

The great storm ended as quickly as it started, and some time before sunset that Monday afternoon a small group of Coast Guard men and town folks, stood and watched on the dune's ridge, above the broken hulk of the Frances Butler, high and dry, amid thousands of tons of wreckage, strewn along the Great Beach.

The tide had receded to an extreme low mark. There was no wind. The sun-drenched green-blue sea was calm as a trout pool. Someone remarked about the long column of smoke spiraling up from the chimney on the cabin of the wrecked Frances Butler, apparently the storm hadn't put out the fire in the captain's stove. Then two men emerged from the cabin, dropped over the side to the beach, and utterly unconcerned, joined the group on the hill. Besides the captain, and the two men who came ashore on the hawser, they were the fourth and fifth members of the crew of the Frances Butler to remain alive—perhaps a record for the great many vessels lost in New England waters during "The November Gale."

One of these two fellows had a big parrot on his shoulder, and Bert said it was the most belligerent, furious bird that you ever saw, and its language was something you wouldn't hear in the Casbar. Bert said he couldn't see what the bird was squawking about. It was kept nice and warm. Its feathers were dry. So was the clothing and shoes of the two lucky fellers with the damn old crow. "But if it was referring to the weather", said Bert, "Then I agree with that bird, 'The November Gale' sure was a hum-dinger!"

SCHR. ASHORE AND OFF AGAIN

Schr. Kossuth, Capt. Lee of Newburyport, from New York to Portsmouth, with flour and general cargo, came ashore 2 miles east of Race Point. It being high water, she was soon left dry, and Mr. Eben Smith, underwriter's agent from this port, immediately secured a gang of men to unload her cargo, and on Sunday she was got off without damage and towed into port by the Steamer Acorn. Her cargo was re-loaded and on Thursday she had got up to Cape Ann, but the gale beat her off, and after blowing away her jib sheet she became unmanageable, from ice, and drifted ashore, without loss of life or serious damage. . . .

Schooner Kit Carson belonging to J. & L. N. Paine of Provincetown, was run down and sunk with loss of Thomas McCarthy and Camelian Pelham, both of Provincetown. The schooner was uninsured. (Kit Carson was one of the finest vessels ever engaged in the mackerel fishery. It was once commanded by Sylvanus Robbins of Yarmouth.)

On January 29, 1861 the bark J. H. Duvall, Captain Tribble, of Provincetown, owned by J. E. and G. Bowley, ran into a hurricane in the Indian Ocean. Thrown on her beam ends, she was obliged to cut away her foremast, which took the mainmast, mizzen topmast, and bowsprit with it. On February 27th she got into Mauritius for repairs, which cost between seven thousand and nine thousand dollars. She finally sailed from Mauritius on April 15th.

LETTER FROM CAPTAIN WILLIAM LAW TO CAPT. ASPAH ATKINS

Bermuda, April-9, 1871

I am here a complete wreck. Have had three gales of wind since I left home. Sunday 2nd was a hurricane. I never saw it blow so before. It lasted 22 hours but the last nine hours it took everything before it. I lay with a reefed trysail, but by four o'clock in the afternoon we shipped two heavy seas. The first one split my tiller and knocked the wheel on deck taking four spokes out of it, split two whale boats to kindling wood and stove galley. In about 15 minutes another worse than the first came; that finished all the whale boats and broke the tiller close to the rudder head, took all our head gear on the weather side, bowsprit shroud, jib-boom, guys, martingale-guys and where the boats did not break they drew. Our mainsail was furled as snug as could be but the sea split from gaff to the two reef. We have no bulwarks left. The vessel leaks badly out to sea but here not so much.

Yours respectfully,
W. H. Law.