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By Town Father - Tom Kane

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It being the time of year when folks start to think about spring cleaning with its attendant muscle aches, housemaid's knee and parboiled hands from modern detergents, we're reminded of a yarn once told us by the late John Adams, sometime farmer, more importantly a career surfer in the old Coast Guard Service here on the Cape.

"I gorrey," is the way John spun the yarn. "To hear women folk nowadays complain about house cleanin'. The have runnin' water, hot water systems, cleanin' soaps and powders, rubber gloves so's they won't hurt their hands, and, most of all, they have the man of the house to paint up afterwards. Why they ought to be thankful. Now you take back in the old days, when I was number three man at Pamet River Coast Guard Station up't Ballston Beach, things was a good deal different. We always kept the buildings clean as a whistle, year round. You could eat off the floors and there warn't a speck of dust anywhere on the premises. The windows, you could use 'em for mirrors even though they was usually sand-blasted on the outside after the winter season. But come middle of March each year the skipper would remind us at the supper table one night that it was time for spring cleanin'. Superintendent Sparrow and his party would be visitin' the station soon and we'd best do a good job, or else he'd put us on report.

"Next morning we'd begin. Take the furniture out of each room and have at it. Scrub the ceiling down and lay on a coat of gov'ment ceiling paint. Looked like snow when we'd finished. Then scrub the sidewalls. We had to use gov'ment soap with lots of ammonia. Strong enough to take your breath away and lift the hide off'n your hands. And then brush on a special white enamel that was so dern thick you had to put the can in a bucket of boiling water to loosen 'er up and then add a dash of bluing to keep 'er from turnin' yellow as she dried.

"Next we'd scrub the floors with gov'ment holy stones and varnish 'em with spar varnish. Then polish all the bright work with gov'ment formula polish made of Bon Ami and ammonia 'til the clock and the watch tags and the barometer looked like new gold. Same thing with the bunkroom upstairs and with the galley, of course. Then we'd tackle the boat room. Overhaul the gear, recoil all the ropes, paint the lifeboat and the cart, polish the Lyle gun and remake

the line in the faking box, and put a coat of linseed oil on the foul weather gear. The flagpole and the drill mast had to be scraped and painted, the breeches buoy checked over and the outside of all the buildings scraped, spot primed and painted. I got so tired of them two cussed colors, white and gov'ment buff, I vowed I'd never paint any of my own prop'ty the same colors. That's why my house was always barn red in later years."

Sounds as though John had touched all the bases in his story of the spring cleaning project. Not so. "Allie Paine and me, bein' alternate mess-cooks, had some privileges. When we were cooking the meals we got clear of the cleanin' for a few hours each day. We drew the dog-watch, the beach patrol that comes in the early evening. But we also had the job of cleaning up the hoss stall and the barn, not to mention the hoss.

"I remember one year Allie and me had just finished the project. We'd swept up all the loose hayseed in the haymow, put a few shingle patches on the roof, and painted the whole building, inside and out. We'd overhauled and painted the station hoss cart, worked heatsfoot oil in the harness and finally we'd groomed the old station nag, Sam, until he shone like a new coin. We even carted off the manure, half and half between me and Allie for our gardens at home."

Well sir, the duo of grizzled old surfmen/cooks made a final check of their work, found it well done and then they sat down behind the barn for a well-deserved pipeful of Mayo' dark plug. "I gorrey," sighed John to Allie, "We've scrubbed and painted every damn thing on the premises but the hoss' grommet." Allie nodded and pulled on his pipe. And at that time came the voice of Captain John Rich from the interior of the spick and span barn. "And if I had the mind to you'd scrub that, too, boys."

THE OLD "HALFWAY HOUSE" between Cahoon's Hollow Beach in Wellfleet and Ballston Beach, Truro, where members of the old Life Saving Service and later the Coast Guard met on their patrols, has been dug out of the sand and transported as a museum piece to Mystic Seaport, Conn. The Coast Guard agreed to donate the old halfway house to Mystic Seaport and the National Park Service agreed to its removal from Seashore territory. But the eight-foot-square shack was buried under accumulated sand and the Park Service was reluctant to have a bulldozer plow up the fragile dunes in order to dig it out. When the Coast Guard asked the Marines for help, the Leather-necks came in with a big helicopter and lifted it out of the sand, loading it on a flatbed. At the small shelters the surfmen of the Life Saving Stations exchanged information and warmed themselves a bit before heading back into often freezing weather to their respective stations.

The Wier - a hunting German submarines off Truro, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. World War I

