

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 1963

## Damaged Equipment Being Repaired Divers Plan To Resume Explorations

Captain Jackson Jenks, operator of the New England Naval and Maritime Museum at Newport, R. I., who arrived here to begin a 30-day search for old shipwrecks along the Cape tip seabottom and to resume the hunt started last month for the sunken British man-of-war H. M. S. Somerset, told the Advocate that scheduled operations have been held up by damage to his 45-foot vessel, the Dorothy W II, during the recent galeforce storm here.

The vessel, more familiarly known as the "Captain Nemo", took on two feet of water as a result of the storm, but more serious than the leak which appears to have corrected itself to some extent, he said, is the damage to his electronic equipment which was "knocked out" during the storm lashing. He said he cannot send his crew of divers into full operation as originally planned without availability of the fathometers and the electronic devices necessary to safe and efficient operation.

### No Protection

The Captain expressed disappointment that such a well-known port as Provincetown has no harbor protection from storms. He said he's trying to get Coast Guard assistance to put the electronic equipment back in working order, but he pointed out that workers skilled in repairing this complicated equipment were not immediately available in this area.

If damage is so extensive as to make it necessary to discontinue operations this season, a study will be made of methods to use here next season, Captain Jenks said. He pointed out that the sand is so coarse off Peaked Hill Bars and Highland Light that even the Coast Guard DUKW has a hard time to "grasp in", causing it to get stuck in the water. Methods will be adapted for most efficient operation under existing conditions, he said.

Shipwreck hunting expeditions are planned with careful and painstaking deliberations and it is not unusual for a project of this kind to take a year or two to complete. Captain Jenks said it took two years to complete a survey for the wreck of the Cairo, a 175 foot, 512 ton ironclad vessel sunk in the Yazoo River near Vicksburg during the Civil War, a

task the Museum undertook at the request of Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi. After 100 years untouched by man at the river bottom, the Cairo was recently boarded by Museum divers who pumped out the mud and went inside.

Recently one of the divers from the "Captain Nemo" went down to work on the German bark, Francis, off the Had of Meadow in North Truro, where he found the wreck considerably more uncovered than when last viewed in July and its location changed due to action of the recent storm. The wreck of the iron sailing bark which sunk in 1878 was spotted by Captain Jenks' crew last month. He related a strange coincidence told him by Frank Henderson of Provincetown of how the Francis and an Italian ship which left the China Sea on the same day were both sunk off Cape Cod the same night during a storm.

### Somerset Search

The search for the Somerset was started last month with the assistance of Admiral Donald B. MacMillan and Mr. Henderson who helped map out the possible effect of tides and currents on the former location of a wreck long reported to be the sunken Revolutionary raider, Somerset. The initial search in the Peaked Hill Bars area uncovered old-time ship's fitting-pins and pottery with the initials G. R. and the British lion. The discovered material has been forwarded to experts for possible identification.

In addition to the hunt for the Somerset, the Captain with his crew of divers and historical experts had planned to comb the ocean floor of the Cape End in a search for other shipwrecks. This work is being conducted in conjunction with Admiral E. M. Eller, director of history, Department of the Navy, of the Pentagon in Washington, who has requested the Museum to turn over to the Navy 10 objects from each authentic wreck discovered. Captain Jenks said he would like to donate materials to the Provincetown Museum if he makes authentic discoveries here.

Stressing the authenticity of all research conducted by the Museum, Captain Jenks pointed out that positive identification of any

wreck discovered by the Museum is never declared until absolute proof has been established, without a question of a doubt. The Museum also goes to considerable lengths to try to disprove under undersea evidence before considering such evidence as a possible link in the chain of research data.

"We disbelieve that the Portland has been found," Captain Jenks said.

He reported as an example of the difference between childlike unsubstantiated belief and scientifically-trained thinking Admiral MacMillan's relating to him of how the Admiral at the age of 10 had stood on the deck of what he then believed to be the wreck of the Somerset out at Peaked Hill Bars. 'But', Captain Jenks recounted the noted arctic explorer's words, 'How can I know that it actually was the Somerset on which I stood?'

Captain Jenks said that his is the only museum in the country which is doing this type of research on a basis of scientifically-established positive identification.

### Museum Of Missing Ships

He said that he started his underwater research program in 1956 after Howard I. Chapelle, curator of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, proposed that if the Capain would build a museum to deal with nothing but underwater shipwrecks, the Institute would support such a museum with advice, information relative to wreck sites, historical data, etc.

Some 288 shipwrecks have been located, a 32-room museum built, and some 350,000 miles of sea have been travelled in search of materials since that time, the Captain said.

Included among the Museum's advisers, he said, are the Salem Maritime Museum, Marion V. Brewington, naval architect; Mr. Chapelle, who helped with the raising of the Philadelphia from Lake Champlain; Carl C. Cutler, the only surviving founder of Mystic Seaport, Mystic, Conn., famous for his book, "Greyhounds of the Sea."; Howard J. Sniffen of Mariners Museum Warwick, Va.; captain James Kleinschmidt of Mystic, Conn.; Dr. Albert B. Corey, director of State History, University of the State of New York; Kathryn S. Graywacz, director of the New Jersey Museum; George Bass, of the University of Pennsylvania who discovered the bronze age wrecks in Turkey; Anders Franzene who found and raised the more than 300-year-old Vasa in Sweden, and Admiral Eller.

The New England Naval and

Maritime Museum now contains more than 30,000 items, "all from in, on, or under the ocean — excepting fish," Captain Jenks said. Cost of this research is up in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, he stated. The research includes the services of geologists, archeologists, naval architects, historians and explorers, he pointed out.

An Underseas Archeology Conference, the first such conference in this country, was held in Minnesota last April for scientific discussion of underwater archeology, he reported. It was attended by top men in the field in this hemisphere, including representatives from the University of Ottawa, the University of Manitoba, both in Canada, George Bass of the U. of Pa., Princeton, The California Archeological Society, the Smithsonian Institutet, the U. S. Dept. of the Navy, the University of Chicago, Captain Jenks' Museum, Edward Link of Link Trainer Company, whose expeditions found the wrecks in Israel; and Steffin Borhegi who found the sacrificial wells in Guatemala.

Wishing to discourage rumors that the "Captain Nemo" is a "skin diving outfit", he emphasized that it is a field research unit assisted by specially trained divers who volunteer their services on weekends in pursuit of history which lies buried beneath the sea. He rarely dives himself, he said, pointing out, "The only time I dive is to identify a piece of material."

He said that past experience has shown that divers untrained in this type of research merely tear to pieces historical material discovered on the ocean floor. He said he has a list of 1,000 divers who have volunteered their services. He added that all diving operations are conducted with full attention of archeological techniques and principles for uncovering and preserving the discovered material.

Captain Jnks reported that he found here in Provincetown that Bob Cabral who operates a skin-diving business at MacMillan Wharf is most co-operative in assisting the Museum's operations. He also said that Chairman of Provincetown Selectmen, Ralph S. Carpenter, and Town Manager Walter E. Lawrence have been most helpful.

He said that use may be made of aircraft of the Armed Forces to take aerial photographs to map out the area from Race Point to Highland Light so that cartographic studies can be made of wreck mounds and other geologic con-

ditions of the Cape End seabottom, showing underwater changes through the years.

### Many Skills

He stressed that in order for a research unit to be competent in this field it must enlist the advice not only of archeologists, geologists, naval architects and historians, but also of chemical preservationists, who direct the Musum in the procedures for preserving various kinds of materials which have altered in chemical composition due to years of immersion in sea water. Certain chemicals are used to absorb moisture from the discovered material; others to coat the material to prevent it from flaking apart, he said.

The estimated cost of an average project is from \$5,000 to \$10,000 with no financial return expected from salvage and with all values purely historical, he said.

Other projects conducted by the Museum included the finding of one of the vessels of the lost Naval Fleet of the War of 1812 and only one found of the 17 ships which were lost, the Captain said.

Captain Jenks recently directed three divers in a dangerous project at the bottom of the Mississippi River at Natchez where they "sketched" the underwater location and position of a sunken barge containing four tanks of deadly chlorine gas. He noted that if the tanks had ruptured and the gas escaped it would have combined with the water to form a searing hydrochloric acid bath for the divers. Authorities in the area were ready to evacuate 30 thousand people. "Sketching" underwater in zero visibility, the divers used a Braille system recording in memory the dimensions, angles, and surface that they touched and felt. When the divers returned to the surface they could literally draw the pattern of what they had touched and felt, the captain said.

He added that he and his three divers were flown by jet plane to the site by the Corps of Army Engineers who knew his divers are trained in the careful handling of fragile material.

## Did Somerset Yield Treasure?

Did some enterprising, long-dead citizen of "the Truro-Provincetown area" find the safe and its contents from the British warship, "Somerset," which foundered off Peaked Hill Bars, November 1, 1778? Did the finder remain discreetly quiet about his treasure, dipping into it from time to time to boost the family fortunes?

Believe it or not, this story is one in the abundant crop of fact, fiction and hearsay turned up in exhaustive research on the "Somerset" conducted by the New England Naval and Maritime Museum of Newport, R. I. Capt. Jenks, director of the museum, who has been investigating sites of historic wrecks off these shores, says the story, with some detail, is part of accumulated scuttlebut about the British raider.

### Who Got It?

If the yarn is true, who was the lucky citizen in the "Truro-Provincetown area" who got the safe? The legend actually goes so far as to name names, Capt. Jenk laughs, but he prefers not to mention them because the story, after all, could be only a yarn. Legends of all kinds grow up around a shipwreck, like moss around a piling. But there's something about the story that continues to fascinate him.

Could a heavy iron safe be washed ashore? It could, and easily, says Capt. Jenks, under the tremendous tidal force at work in repeated storms. For that matter, the safe of the steamer "Portland" could also have come ashore, he says, and there is a rumor, he adds, that it did. Names are included in that yarn, too!

Capt. Jenks has a store of tales he has dug up about local shipwrecks but he accepts only what can be documented from recorded information or proved by concrete evidence. Wreckage tends to move westward, the Captain says, and if the safe of the "Portland" got loose, ocean movements indicate it would have borne toward Cape shores. (Large numbers of bodies and wreckage from the "Portland" came ashore at Truro but if the safe was ever beached in this general area, the tale remains one of those heard only by researchers.

As for the "Somerset" she was,