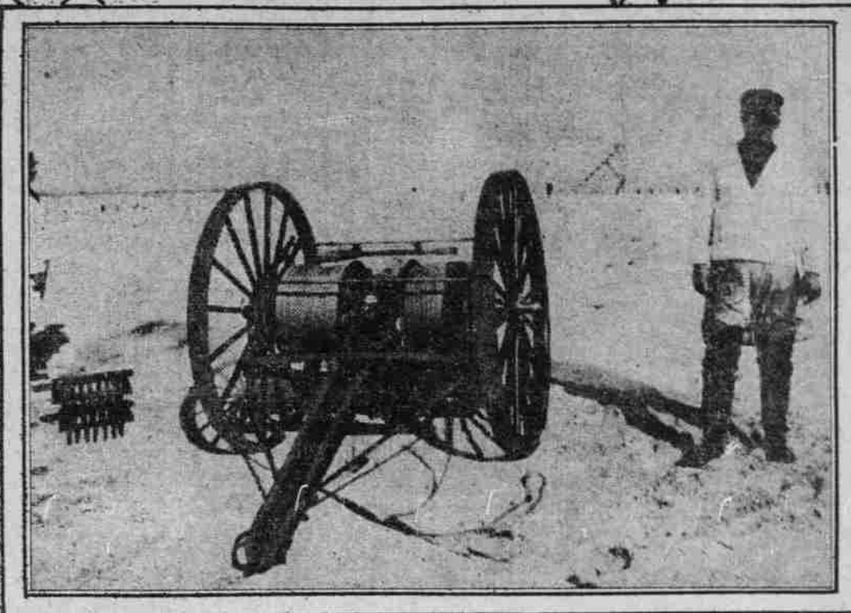
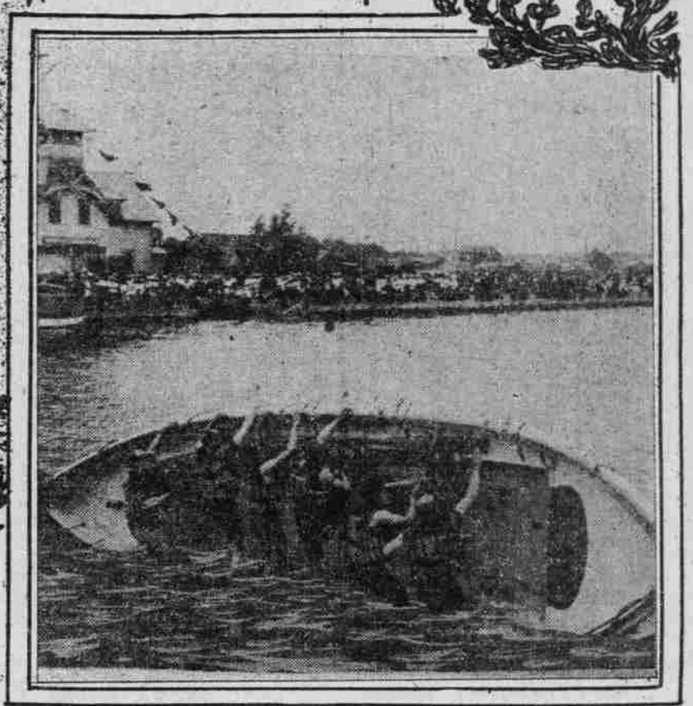
OUR STORM FIGHTERS ASK ADEQUATE WAGE

Dependents on Men in the Life-Saving Service Likely to Be Provided for by the Government

SIGNALLING A WRECK FROM STATION.



FIRING LINE TO WRECK.



A BOAT CAPSIZING DRILL.

RESUSCITATING A WRECK VICTIM.

THE NIGHT PATROL PREPARING TO SIGNAL A WRECK.

BY JOHN ELFRETH WATKINS.

OUR army of storm fighters is in the fix of our army of man fighters, only in a worse one. Nearly all—over four-fifths—of those who filled its ranks five years ago are now in other employments where wages are more proportionate to the higher cost of living and where work is less hazardous.

Realizing that continued discontent among these coast guards must result in increased death and destruction along our shores, the commerce committees of both houses of Congress have just favorably reported bills granting increased pay of about 10 per cent to superintendents, keepers and assistant keepers; giving a ration allowance of 30 cents a day to all crew members; allowing dependents of a man dying from injuries received on duty to receive his pay in all cases for two years after his death, and allowing mothers within the official category of dependents. Mr. Sumner I. Kimball, general superintendent of the life-saving service, worked hard for pensions for his men, their widows, orphans and dependent mothers, such as was granted lately to those of the revenue cutter service. But the leaders in Congress are not yet in a humor to grant this recognition to our only plucky coast guards, who, of all our fighting men, are, year in and year out, the hardest worked and by far the worst exposed to suffering and danger.

Save 14 Lives Out of 15.

To learn just what these brave fellows do to earn their salt I called yesterday upon Mr. Kimball. He is a Maine Yankee, who was graduated from Bowdoin five years ahead of Tom Reed, and left the Maine Legislature ten years before the great Speaker entered upon his apprenticeship there. Mr. Kimball has been in his present position for 37 years, and connected with the Federal Government continuously since 1862. An interesting man to chat with on any topic—one who could stock a Bancroft with personal reminiscences of a half century the Nation's great, or a Stevenson, with plots of sea tales enough for a lifework—he has a tongue's end ever ready with the smallest detail of the great system, which he has organized and extended along our four great coast lines. He showed me in the official records that since he organized his bureau in 1871 his boys have worked at nearly 18,000 wrecks, imperiling nearly 125,000 people and about $250,000,000 worth of property. Fourteen out of every 15 of these human beings and over two-thirds of this imperiled property have been saved. Most people have the idea that visiting and looking out for wrecks is the only work of these storm fighters. Their chief told me that last year, in addition to saving five dozen of people who had gotten into the water from other causes than accidents to boats—would-be suicides, lunatics, careless bathers, skaters, children who fell from docks, etc.—they had rescued 107 flood victims, carried 17 sick people to physicians, given direct medical aid to 10 recovered 83 corpses from the water, cared for 13 others found on beaches, recovered 14 lost fish nets, saved 100,000 feet of drifting saw-logs, worked at 21 fires and rescued from the flames 65 horses and 110 vehicles. In addition to this they rescued a number of other persons endangered in other ways—fallen into sewers, gotten caught upon breakwaters, lost in blizzards, stranded in automobiles, endangered by runaway horses and one woman victim of attempted assault. Thus the life-saving man combines with his best-known duties those of fireman, policeman, salvage man, ambulance surgeon, hospital steward and morguemaster.

Sufferings During Night Duty.

Most of the men disabled in this perilous service are victims of exposure during the night patrol, at which each surfman must take his turn along the lonely beach. None of the four night watches is ever omitted in a coast precinct, and wherever there is darkness on our shore, fair weather or foul, there stretches an endless chain of men, pacing up and down, with weather eyes skinned on the sea. The stormier the night and the harder the way the more important is this duty deemed, and failure to reach the signal box at the end of a patrol is punishable by dismissal, even when the way has to be gained by floundering over the slippery ice banks or the shingle, stumbling over the driftwood thrown up by the mad waves or wading waist deep through beach gullies dug by the storm. In degree of exposure, peril and exhausting toil there is no duty in any branch of the Government service comparable to that of the beach patrol. Besides the scores of men who have been disabled for life by this duty, Mr. Kimball could recall the cases of seven of his men who have been found dead on their beats. Two of these died thus in 1906. He told me, also, that of his eight district superintendents who have died in office only two have passed away at home, and one of the latter was the victim of pneumonia, contracted on duty.

Officers Who Have Succumbed.

Two of these officers were drowned. Superintendent Guthrie of the North Carolina district met this fate by the pitch-poling of his surfboat at the famous wreck of the Huron in 1877, while Superintendent Sawyer of the great lakes district was drowned during duty on Lake Huron in 1880. Perhaps no case illustrates the ordeals of these superintendents better than that of the death of Superintendent Eldridge, who succeeded the ill-fated Captain Guthrie of the South Carolina district. Required by the regulations to go 46 miles along the coast, in February, 1893, he started by schooner, but getting stuck in the ice shipped a pony and cart across the nearest inlet and proceeded thus until the pony smashed the cart. With the animal now hitched to an oxcart, he walked half of the time to keep from freezing, and caught by nightfall at a fisherman's deserted hut, he had to tear one side of the habitation away for firewood. Lying upon rushes, which he cut to protect him from the frozen earth, he was taken with the premonitary chills and fever of pneumonia, from which disease he succumbed after reaching his destination. Another such case was that of Superintendent Sparrow of the Massachusetts district, who, after walking to and from a wreck for 14 miles through one of New England's severest snow storms, in December, 1896, shattered his health, nearly lost his eyesight and entirely lost his mind. On this trip he waded kneedeep in snow-covered marshes and scrambled on all-fours over sand dunes while the snow was falling so thickly that it well-nigh smothered him.

Entire Crews Drowned.

But the most terrible ordeals of our life savers are suffered while struggling with the waves in times of shipwreck. But when death is the wages of valor here it comes quick and fast, and does not inflict a lingering sting. The list of widows and orphans and helpless mothers, heart-broken and left dependent by sudden death met in these heroic moments, is long. The first great tragedy of this kind occurred at the wreck of the Italian bark Nuova Ottavia off North Carolina in 1878. The life savers put out at night through a heavy surf, beyond which the bark appeared as a mere mass of shadow. The progress of the lifeboat could be traced from shore only by the glimmer of its lantern. A sudden extinction of this flame, a scream from the sea and then corpses rolling in through the surf, followed by the empty boat tumbling in upside down, were the only evidences of the catastrophe which claimed the lives of an entire life-saving crew. From one of the surviving sailors of the bark it was afterward learned that his fellow Italians, becoming panic stricken when the lifeboat had come alongside, had all attempted to jump aboard at once and had swamped the little craft.

All of the surfmen were lost at the wreck of the J. H. Magruder on Lake Huron in 1880. This crew was from the Point Aux Barques station, Michigan. The wreck was three miles out, and for two hours the life boat tried to reach her through a treacherous surf, which turned the little craft over time and time again. Finally she capsized after the crew had become exhausted by repeated rightings and bailings. Finally they had only strength enough left to hold on to her sides; then they dropped off, one by one, to death—all save the keeper who managed to hold fast until washed into safe water.

Screamed to Aid Heart Action.

"I was conscious only at brief intervals," said the keeper, who was in the water three and one-half hours. "I was not suffering, had no pain, had no sense of feeling in my hands; felt tired, sleepy and numb. At times I could scarcely see. I remember screeching several times, not to attract attention, but thought it would help the circulation of my blood." The same year the keeper and two surfmen of the Peaked Hill bar station, Cape Cod, were drowned while trying to rescue the crew of the sloop C. E. Trumbull. The life savers had landed part of the crew, and having gone back for the remainder, were alongside the wreck when the latter's boom came down into the water, then rose again and lifted the lifeboat bottom up. The life savers righted her, but before they could turn her bow-on a big sea capsized her once more, drowning the three men.

Victims of Australian Wreck.

The Barnegat crew, New Jersey, also lost three tried men in Winter of 1886 when the Austrian bark Kraljevica struck on Barnegat shoals during a night of thick darkness and dense fog. The Austrians left the bark in their longboat and after drifting for hours capsized. Eight were drowned, but the captain and five others clung to the boat and gained the beach. Almost dead from exhaustion, they dragged themselves to a gunner's hut, well provisioned and supplied with fuel. The members of the Barnegat crew at dawn first espied the wreck, and not knowing that the Austrians had put off, went out through the ugliest surf seen in years. They were half way back when to their horror a towering wave, so hollow that the lifeboat could not rise in it, swamped them, killing one man by a blow from the gunwale and drowning two others. The same year the keeper and two surfmen of the Grand Point Au Sable crew, Lake Michigan, were lost at a wreck by the capsizing of their boat, beneath which one of the men was smothered. The thermometer stood at zero, and the survivors of this catastrophe reached shore with their clothing frozen as stiff as boards.

Raced to Death Through Snowdrift.

The next year part of a picked crew from the two stations near Cape Hear, Va., met the same fate at the wreck of the German ship Elisabeth. Some of these men had dragged their apparatus for miles through snowdrifts, often waist deep. Arriving at the wreck, they found 22 Germans in a longboat alongside the sinking ship and had taken seven of these aboard when an immense wave suddenly swept around the rear of the wreck and turned the two small boats over and over, throwing all of the 29 men, including the seven life savers, into the sea. Keeper Belanga, as he swam with the men toward shore, helped a surfman remove his boots, and this man was saved, while the brave keeper himself was lost. Out of the 29 men only one other—also a surfman—escaped. The latter after reaching shore fell exhausted in the snow, where he was found by his wife, who, with another woman, dragged him home and nursed him back to life. This keeper's brother and two brothers-in-law died with him.

The breaking of a defective oar caused a capsize which drowned four surfmen of the Cleveland, Ohio, station who were out at the wreck of a skiff in 1893, the remainder of the crew being rescued by a tug.

Panic among the men taken aboard the lifeboat caused the last sad catastrophe of this kind, in 1902, off Shovelful shoal, Mass. Keeper Eldridge and his men had rescued the crew of a wreck March 11, and on the 17th were returning to take off the wreckers working thereon. The latter were safely in when a sea struck the surfboat. This would have caused no damage, but the wreckers became so panic-stricken by the sudden lurching of the craft that they obstructed, stood up, clung to the surfmen and crowded them from the thwarts. A second sea capsized the party before the life savers could turn bow-on, and of the 13 in the little boat 12, including the keeper, were drowned. The water was cold and the men clung to their craft until one by one they dropped off exhausted, save one surfman, the sole survivor, who managed to hold fast until the upturned boat drifted into quiet water.

And now let us see the life-saving man in the glory of success. Thus far we have been dealing largely with failures—failures unavoidable though they be. The night of December 14, 1902, the schooner John R. Noyes struck three miles off Lakeside, on the New York shore of Lake Ontario. Keeper Gray, of the nearest life-saving station, at Charlotte, 28 miles away, tried to put off at once in the harbor tug, but it was frozen fast in the ice. Hastening to the nearest railroad station, inland, he ordered two flat cars on a siding shoveled clear, hauled his beach apparatus for two hours through the snow, lifted it into the cars, chartered a special locomotive, put out for Lakeside, unloaded his apparatus on sleds, and with his men thus hauled it four miles to the beach through the snow six feet deep. When he launched his boat he could not see 12 feet ahead in the blackness of the night which had fallen upon the wreck, and, although he and his crew groped about the wintry sea for hours, they did not sight it till dawn. She had drifted 20 miles out, and here, after hours of toil at the oars, he found her, with all on board nearly dead from exposure. The wellnigh exhausted crew, while steadying their little craft against the storm waves, lifted all of the imperiled ones aboard and rowed back over the 20 miles of wintry sea. But on nearing shore, after all of this ceaseless toil, kept up all night and all day, the crew found the ice barriers along the brink too high to let them beach their boat. Just as the second night of their adventure was falling these nearly fainting men, their backs bent and aching, their muscles chilled and knotted, steadied their little boat once more, picked up their human burdens, one by one, and now, wading waist deep in the chilly waters, now carefully feeling their way over the slippery ice, laid them safely upon the soft snow.

It is the women and children made dependent, the men themselves disabled, by such ordeals as these that Congress is now asked to give a square deal. Four out of every five of the plucky chaps left in the service has a wife at home, and race suicide is not a crime to be laid at the doors of salt-water folks. Nearly all of the bachelors in the service have dependent mothers. Are not the women and children of men who slave like this for others, and for others alone, as worthy of a Nation's protection as the women and children of the soldier and bluejackets, who fight once in a generation, or of the revenue cutter sailor, who seldom smells gunpowder in a lifetime? The life-saving man is engaged in ceaseless hand-to-hand combat with a foe far more relentless, far more horrible than the most treacherous human monster that ever bore arms—a foe which grants no armistice, respects no flag of truce, allows no quarter to the prisoner or the maimed.

Washington, D. C., March 14.

Following a Bad Example.

Mr. Smith (after ill-tempered speech by Brown)—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, following the example of Mr. Brown's luncheon, I shall venture to disagree with him.

An Old Song in New Form

Philadelphia Press.

There was an old decanter, and its mouth was gaping wide; the rosy wine had ebbed away and left its crystal side; and the wind went humming—humming, up and down the sides it flew, and through the reed-like hollow neck the wildest notes it blew. I placed it in the window where the blast was blowing free, and fancied that its pale mouth sang the queerest strains to me. "They tell me—puny conquerors! the Plague has slain his ten, and War his hundred thousands of the very best of men; but I," 'twas thus the bottle spake, "but I have conquered more than all your famous conquerors, so feared and famed of yore. Then come, ye youths and maidens all, come, drink from out my cup the beverage that dulls the brain and burns the spirit up; that puts to shame conquerors that slay their scores below, for this has deluged millions with the lava tide of woe. They in the path of battle darkest waves of blood may roll, yet while I killed the body I have damned the very soul. The cholera, the plague, the sword, such ruin never wrought as I, in mirth or malice on the innocent have brought. And still I breathe upon them, and they shrink before my breath, and year by year my thousands tread the dismal road of Death."