

CREW MADE CAPTAIN JUMP

Men on Bow of Mercer Insisted He Leave

Cutter Brings Four Survivors Into Portland

By BARRY CADIGAN

PORTLAND, Me., Feb. 20 — The skipper of the broken tanker Fort Mercer, who insisted on being the last of the four men off the bow section, was forced to jump into the ocean by three crew members who were afraid he wouldn't make it to the rescue ship if he waited.

The dramatic story of the nine men trapped on the split bow in the raging sea, was learned for the first time tonight when the four survivors were landed here by the Coast Guard cutter Yakutat.

Capt. Frederick C. Paetzel, 48, of Houston, Tex., ill with pneumonia and with first degree frost bites of both hands and feet, was rushed to the hospital, so weakened he was only able to mumble his thanks to the Coast Guardsmen.

But the three other crewmen, all frost bitten, were able to tell of almost 24 hours of terror in which they saw a shipmate swept to death from the bow, and saw four others drown, unable to help them.

For hours they clung to the bow, unable to get to shelter or food during the raging storm.

The skipper endured the wait without shoes. All eventually had to leap into the ocean to reach lifeboats, and life rafts sent over from the Yakutat.

"We never thought we would make it," was the general feeling.

YAKUTAT

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Pendleton Wasn't in Top Shape, 2 of Crew Charge

Two of the crew of the tanker Pendleton, which broke up off Chatham, told a Coast Guard board of inquiry yesterday that the vessel was "not in top shape" and had received a "bad three-way fracture in a bulkhead" that had not been repaired.

The board, meeting at Constitution Base, said it would hear testimony of the crew of the other stricken tanker, the Fort Mercer, at 10 this morning.

INQUIRY

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Half Ship, 13 Aboard, Towed Toward Port as New Storm Brews

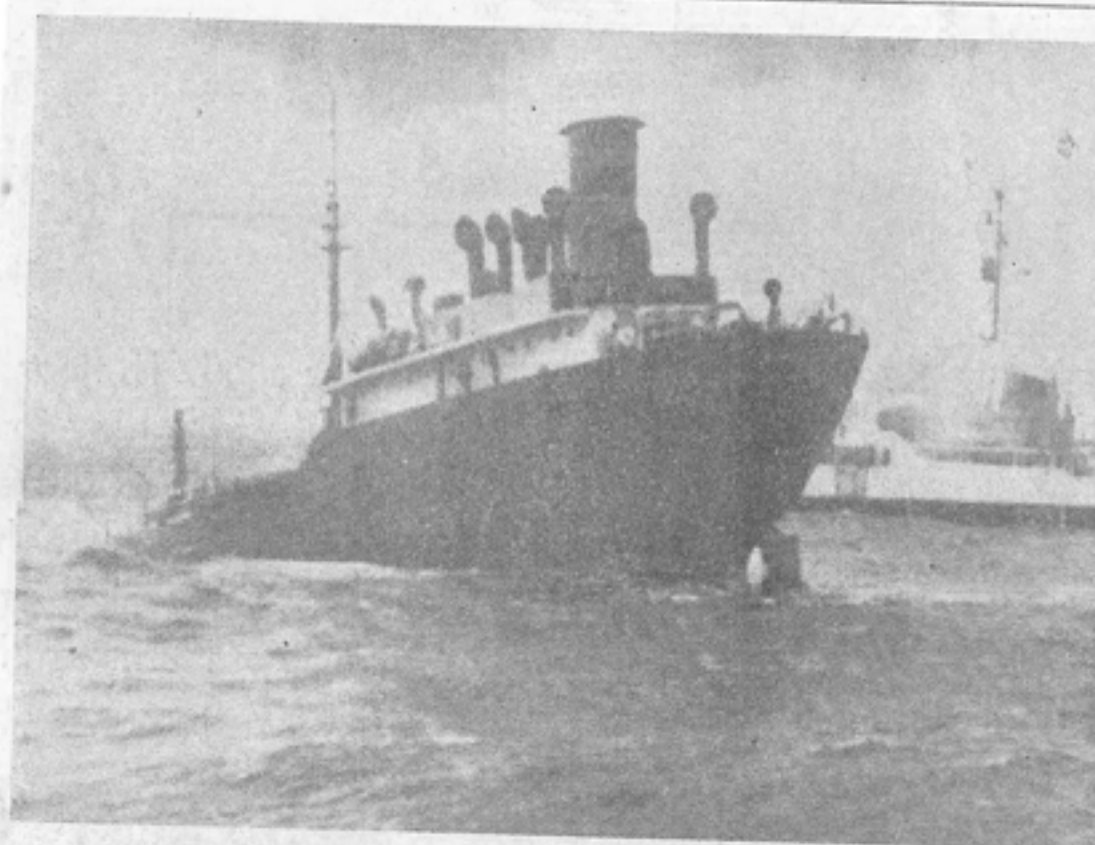
Half a ship—with a volunteer crew of 13 merchant mariners aboard—plodded under tow for the shelter of Marthas Vineyard last night amid ominous warnings of a storm as violent as the one that split her and a sister ship in two.

At three knots, the swaying stern section of the tanker Fort Mercer undertook the perilous voyage toward salvage shortly after a Coast Guard cutter sank the ship's severed forward section with gunfire as a "menace to navigation."

While the strange procession of three tugboats, a Coast Guard cutter and half a ship, plowed 120 miles offshore at a speed no greater than a walk, the last of the men taken off her decks Tuesday were being sped to port.

ANKERS

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NOW IN TOW—Stern section of tanker Fort Mercer shown as she awaited arrival of tugs to take her in tow. In background is cutter Eastwind. (Coast Guard Photo From AP)

18 Rescued Off Tanker Grateful to Coast Guard

Eighteen survivors of the broken tanker Fort Mercer felt the heartening solidarity of Constitution Base under foot yesterday, but their hearts and thoughts were still at sea where 13 shipmates clung to the storm-battered hulk.

Like the seagoing men of the twin ship Pendleton, broken in a similar disaster, the survivors, three of them New Englanders, had the highest praise for the Coast Guardsmen who saved their lives.

In matter-of-fact, simple terms, each recalled the feelings that struck with the realization the ship had snapped in two and the events that led to the dangerous and dramatic sea rescue.

The men of the Coast Guard cutter Acushnet, skippered by Lt. Com John M. Joseph, drew their admiration for the seamanship the servicemen displayed in effecting their rescue. For the Coast Guard this was ample reward. From the toughened merchant mariners, this was the highest praise.

The Acushnet was ordered to bring survivors to Boston, ending a job well done.

TANKERS

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The Coast Guard cutter Eastwind, which had maintained a nightly vigil over the floating hulk since she and the Pendleton foundered in a violent winter storm Monday, headed to Boston with three of the Mercer's survivors.

The Eastwind radioed she expected to arrive at Castle Island at 10 a. m. today. Aboard were Raymond S. Rodriguez of New York, seaman; Gilbert J. Murphy of Alton, N. H., fireman, and C. W. Hindsley of Houston, Tex., utility man.

Four other survivors, including the captain of the broken tanker Mercer, who was virtually forced by his mates to quit what remained of his ship, were landed at Portland last night at 6:35.

The skipper, Frederick C. C. Paetzel of Houston, Tex., ill with pneumonia, and the others, all suffering from frostbite, were taken from the State Pier in ambulances to the Marine Hospital.

There they told the same grim story that 18 of their shipmates had given when they were landed at Constitution Base yesterday by the cutter Acushnet.

Need Medical Attention

At a later date, they will be called upon to narrate their stories again, before a Coast Guard Board of Inquiry, just as members of the Pendleton's crew did yesterday.

Among the 13-man crew left aboard the Mercer were several men reportedly in need of medical attention.

It was this fact which prompted the ship owners to order the ship diverted toward Marthas Vineyard. Plans call for the towing vessels to continue from Marthas Vineyard to Block Island, where she will be inspected for salvage possibilities.

The reclaimed derelict portion of the tanker is not expected to reach Marthas Vineyard until Friday, about the time a new and possible violent storm is expected to hit the coast.

The sea-going tug Foundation Josephine out of Halifax, N. S., hooked a tow line onto the stern of the Mercer after relaying medical supplies from a Coast Guard cutter.

The Coast Guard cutter Unimak is standing by the floating hulk, along with the salvage tugs Peter Moran and Ocean Prince out of New York.

Earlier, gunners on the Unimak

No Sign of Life on Pendleton Bow, Webber Reports

CHATHAM, Feb. 20 — Coast Guardsman Bernard C. Webber, BMIC, hero of the rescue of 32 men off the split tanker Pendleton reported "no sign of life" today aboard the broken bow of the ship aground off Pollock Rip Lightship.

Webber commanded a motor lifeboat which returned to the scene of her previous exploit today, even as land patrols searched the rugged shoreline for any trace of the bodies of the nine men lost off the Pendleton, one of two tankers that foundered.

Today, for the first time since the two tankers split, WO Daniel W. Cluff, commanding officer of the lifeboat station here, found time to sleep.

blasted with 40-mm shells what was left of the forward portion of the broken tanker until the bow slipped under the surface.

The Coast Guard was given permission by the Trinidad Corporation of New York, the vessel's owners, to destroy the hulk as a "menace to navigation."

The bow vanished under the wind-swept seas at 4:45 p. m., according to the Unimak's log. The Unimak then proceeded to relieve the Eastwind, allowing the latter to start her voyage home with survivors.

The 10,000-ton Mercer, her deck high out of water, rode the rolling seas easily, according to dispatches from the towing tug.

A plume of smoke was visible from the ship's stack as it gained headway again. The seamen aboard have heat, light and power.

"There is plenty of food in the galley, too," said Chief Cook Vincent Aguirre of New Orleans, who was taken off the stern along with 17 others yesterday by the cutter Acushnet.

As the salvage of the Mercer got underway, plans for saving what remains of the Pendleton were progressing.

A New York salvage tug curb is en route to Chatham, where the remains of the tanker roll heavily in the same surf that borders Cape Cod's "graveyard of ships."

Men on Mercer OK

At 8 last night the Eastwind, en route to Boston, radioed her position as about 120 miles east of Marthas Vineyard.

The Coast Guard said the position of the Unimak and Mercer was roughly 10 miles further at sea than the Eastwind at the time.

The radio report said that all personnel aboard the Mercer were in "good shape" except for one man with a slight back injury, and another with a case of pleurisy.

Cigarettes were heaved over to the 13 men aboard the Mercer at the same time that medical supplies were thrown to the men from the tug.

The function of the tug Peter Moran will be to serve as a rudder for the broken tanker, while the Foundation Josephine does the actual towing, the Coast Guard said.

Still unanswered was the question:

"Why did the ships break up?"

Capt William W. Story, merchant vessel safety chief for the Coast Guard in Boston, said last night that extreme cold and violent motion in heavy seas—combined with locked-up stresses in welded metal—may cause a crack.

Both ships were under such stresses when the Mercer broke at No. 5 tank, and the Pendleton near No. 8—farther aft.

Seas 'Too Powerful'

William Rentz, the American Shipping Bureau's principal surveyor for the Boston district, said that in his opinion Monday's storm-whipped seas "were just too powerful."

While the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the breaking up of the Pendleton were continuing, praise for the Coast Guardsmen who figured in the rescue of 57 men from the two tankers mounted.

In a radio message to Rear Adm Harold G. Bradbury, commander of the First Coast Guard District, the acting Secretary of the Treasury, E. H. Foley, last night praised the rescuers as "true samaritans of the sea."

One of the heroes of the rescue, Bernard C. Webber, BMIC, yesterday captained a lifeboat trip to the point off Pollock Rip Lightship, where the bow of the Pendleton still floats.

Webber's report upon returning:

"No sign of life."

Tanker Firm Thanks Men of Coast Guard

The owners of the tanker Fort Mercer thanked the Coast Guard yesterday for "what they did under impossible conditions" in rescuing the crews of the broken ship.

Capt E. V. Schaefer, representing the Trinidad Corporation, at Constitution Base to meet 18 survivors landed by the cutter Acushnet, said:

"In behalf of the company and for anyone else familiar with the conditions off Cape Cod through the past 48 hours, we are extremely grateful to the Coast Guard for what they did under impossible conditions."

YAKUTAT

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Saw 4 Men Disappear

Brought into Portland with the captain were 2d Mate Willard F. Fahrner, 28, of Pleasant st., Winthrop; 3d Mate Vincent A. Galdon, 22, of West 27th st., and Purser Edward E. Turner Jr., 32, of Portland.

Three of the crew, interviewed in the wardroom of the cutter, said they had a choice of remaining on the ship, which was threatening to capsize at any moment, or jump in the water in an attempt to swim to life rafts.

Before their eyes they saw four mates leap overboard in the turbulent waters. "Not one of them was able to make the rafts. One minute we saw them; the next minute they were gone. There was nothing for us to do but wait it out. It would have meant death to follow the other guys in," one said.

Nine men were in the forward section of the tanker when, with a terrific noise, the ship split in two.

To get to the bow the men on the bridge had to lower themselves on an improvised ladder made of signal flags.

"We had no ropes and we had to get up on the bow so the Coast Guard could rescue us," Fahrner said. Then came the dash across the open deck.

Turner said: "There were nine of us on the bridge when the ship broke. The bridge started to go under and we had to make a run for the bow."

"The captain, who was in his cabin, rushed out without shoes. It was a race against the water. We all made the bow except one. Radio Officer John Reilly was with us, but I guess he lost his footing, because someone saw him swept overboard before he could get to us. It was awful to see him go and not be able to do anything."

Huddled in Cold

The men stayed huddled together in the sub-freezing weather from noon until about 8 o'clock Monday night, when the welcome sight of the Yakutat brought cheer. Earlier an Army tug reached them but could not help.

Fahrner said that O'Reilly's last action was to radio an SOS before he tried to make it across the open deck to the bow. It was then the wave got him.

On the bow the eight men found they were missing one life jacket, so Fahrner and Galdon tied themselves together.

The men were rushed to the Marine Hospital before they could tell much more of their story, but Com Joseph W. Nabb Jr., 38, skipper of the cutter, told his part in the dramatic sea rescue.

Cape Bridge 'Frozen Up'

Capt Nabb said:

"At 12:30 p. m. Monday we were in Provincetown harbor, where we had anchored when we were unable to pass through the Cape Cod Canal on our way to Newport, due to the railroad bridge over the canal being frozen up."

On order from Coast Guard headquarters in Boston, we proceeded at full speed to the rescue of the Mercer. The seas were so bad that we smashed our forward doors as we were proceeding.

"The Military Transport Service Ship Splice was on the scene, and having kept both sections of the Port Mercer on her radar screen, she directed us right to it."

"It was snowing hard, and the wind was at 55 knots with the seas 30 to 40 feet high. We passed the stern section of the Mercer, and when we saw that they were in no trouble we dispatched the Splice to stand by the stern, and we went to the bow section."

"It was a horrible night. It broke just aft of the bridge section and the two lower decks of the hulk were submerged with the seas breaking over it. She had a 20-degree list."

Situation Desperate

"In my opinion the situation was pretty desperate, and the hulk was liable to sink or capsize at any time. One man on the bridge had a flashlight and was able to signal that there were eight men on board."

"We tried to shoot a line to them seven times and each time the terrific winds and seas fouled us up. We almost cried each time the wind blew those lines away."

"Finally, one line got aboard, but broke before we could send them over a heavier line. During this time a Coast Guard plane had appeared on the scene and dropped flares. This was about midnight."

"At 1 a. m. we were afraid that the ship would capsize any time, and the winds and seas were rising."

We decided to float life rafts down to the Mercer from the Yakutat. It was tricky business, but we had to take the calculated risk. It was impossible to put over one of our men aboard without almost certainly losing every man."

"We floated the lighted rafts along side the Mercer, three of them connected with lines that were buoyed with life preservers. We felt if they couldn't reach the rafts they could grab the lines and work their ways to them."

"We saw the four men jump, by the light of our searchlight and from the flares dropped from the plane overhead. Just as they jumped the line, the life rafts parted. It was 30 minutes before we could work our way around to the rafts, despite all our efforts. There was no one on them."

One of My Worst Hours

"When I saw that those men were lost I felt the way any seaman would feel when he sees that the best he has to give isn't enough. It was one of the worst hours of my life. That's the way I felt and all my men felt. All those men realized that the decision to jump was theirs. They knew we weren't going to leave them."

"There were four men left, but we decided to cease operations until daylight, making operations easier and hoping the seas would abate. We prayed that the hulk would stay up."

"Our prayers were answered. In

triguing mystery. Thousands of superstitions developed over the years, and everything was suspected of either being responsible for the weather or of being able to forecast changes.

Household pets were observed closely for indications of storms. The cat especially was a favorite animal around which proverbs were built.

From Cape Cod came this: "It is a sign of rain if the cat washes her head behind her ear."

This one is from Germany: "If the cat is basking in the sun in February, it must go to the stove again in March."

Here are a few others:

"The cardinal point to which a cat turns and washes her face after a rain shows the direction from which the wind will blow."

"When a cat sneezes, it is a sign of rain."

"When a cat washes herself with her back to the fire expect a thaw in winter."

"If a cat snores, bad weather is sure to follow."

"Approaching rain is indicated when a cat scratches itself."—S. B.

the morning we thought the conditions made it so that we were able to launch a boat. Ens Edward R. Kiley of Long Branch, N. J., temporarily of Portland, my 1st Lt., and four men volunteered.

"They fought their way through the waves, and after surveying the situation, Kiley shouted up to one man to jump. It was the captain. He wanted to stay aboard to the last, but they made him go first. The other three made him. They practically threw him over the side. He had no shoes all through the wait to be rescued, and his feet were extremely frostbitten. He didn't know how he lost his shoes. The poor man was in a daze."

Turner Jumps

"Then Turner jumped, and as the boat tried to pick him up they smashed into the hulk. Kiley brought it back to the Yakutat in a sinking condition. It was impossible to launch another one."

"On the third try we got a shot aboard and were able to send down a life raft. The third mate, Galdon, jumped, and with superhuman effort uprighted the raft that had somehow overturned. He was so fatigued he couldn't climb in, but Fahrner, who jumped after him, pulled him on the raft."

"It was only 19 minutes after Fahrner jumped that the bow capsize. You could almost see them heave a sigh of relief out there on the raft."

"My boys jumped into the water after Galdon and Fahrner. They were wonderful through the whole thing. Kiley will be recommended by me for an award, along with other deserving members of my crew. In my opinion all hands did a remarkable job under extremely difficult circumstances."

Coast Guard Warns Many Marine Aids Out of Order, Missing

Mariners along the Massachusetts coast were warned yesterday by the Coast Guard that the recent gales and heavy seas have carried away or extinguished many buoys and other aids to navigation.

Seamen were advised to "treat all unattended aids with extreme caution."

Listed, were only those reported to authorities. It was pointed out that many more may be missing or off-station.

The list follows:
Sabbat lighted buoy No. 1, extinguished; Newburyport bell buoy No. 1, off-station; Annisquam River lighted bell buoy No. 2, missing; Rockport Breakwater light, destroyed; Baker's Island lighted buoy No. 3, off-station; Scituate bell buoy No. 2, missing.
Brewer's Bank buoy No. 1, off-station; Cape Cod Canal entrance lighted buoy No. 2, off-station; Cape Cod Canal Breakwater light (East) extinguished and fog signal inoperative; Peak Hill Bay, lighted whistle buoy No. 2, missing; Pollock Rip entrance lighted whistle buoy, missing; Bearse Shoal lighted bell buoy No. 2, missing; Pollock Rip lighted whistle No. 1, missing; Pollock Rip lighted buoy No. 2, off-station, and Nantuxet Breakwater (East) light, extinguished.

Only One Survivor From Mercer Injured

The only crew member of the Fort Mercer requiring hospitalization when 18 survivors reached here yesterday was Arthur Hendrickson of San Diego, who injured an ankle jumping from the tanker's stern to the deck of the cutter Acushnet yesterday. He was taken to the United States Public Health Service Hospital in Brighton.

Treasury Praises Coast Guard Work

The Secretary of the Treasury last night praised Coast Guardsmen who participated in the heroic rescue of 57 men off two broken tankers as "true Samaritans of the sea."

In a radioed message to Rear Adm Harold G. Bradbury, commander of the First Coast Guard District, E. H. Foley, acting Secretary of the Treasury, said:

"Once again members of the United States Coast Guard have proved themselves true Samaritans of the sea in the rescue operations off Cape Cod Feb. 18 and 19."