

The LOOKOUT

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JULY 1956



THE SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK is a shore center for merchant seamen who are between ships in this great port. The largest organization of its kind in the world, the Institute combines the services of a modern hotel with a wide range of educational, medical, religious and recreational facilities needed by a profession that cannot share fully the important advantages of home and community life.

The Institute is partially self-supporting, the nature of its work requiring assistance from the public to provide the personal and social services that distinguish it from a waterfront boarding house and so enable it to fulfill its true purpose: being a home away from home for merchant seamen of all nationalities and religions.

A tribute to the service it has performed during the past century is its growth from a floating chapel in 1844 to the thirteen-story building at 25 South Street known to merchant seamen the world around.



The LOOKOUT

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SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK
25 South Street, New York 4, N. Y. BOWling Green 9-2710

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President

REV. RAYMOND S. HALL, D.D.
Director

TOM BAAB
Editor

THOMAS ROBERTS
Secretary and Treasurer

FAYE HAMMEL
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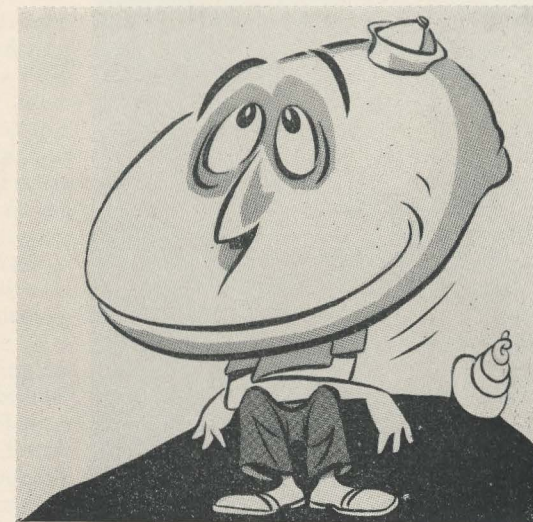
THE COVER: Managing to look cool in the summer sun is the Anacapa Island Light which guards the entrance to California's Santa Barbara Channel. More about lighthouses on page 2. U.S. Coast Guard official photo.

Are Clams

Really

Happy?

Part II



A HAPPY clam, as you will recall from the last issue of this magazine, is one safe from his enemies because the tide is high. The phrase "happy as a clam," however, like many others, is used by almost everyone and understood by almost no one — with the likely exception of old-time sailors and fishermen.

"There'll be the *devil to pay* when he finds out what you've done!" This means there's trouble ahead, to be sure, but it's hardly likely that the prince of darkness is going to profit by it. Sailors used the term "Hell to pay and no pitch hot!" when they had to fill the seams of the deck with hot pitch after caulking. "Hell" was the name of the seam next to the waterway, the most difficult one to work on. Landsmen brought the devil into their corruption of the term because they assumed that to "pay" involved giving money to someone.

"He was a master at *spinning a yarn*." Why stories and tall tales should be spun, instead of told, can only be explained by reference to sailing-ship days. In order to make spunyarn from untwisted rope fibres, two sailors had to operate a small winch, located in a secluded spot. The process was tedious, and they made the time pass by telling tales, tall and otherwise.

"She loves to loll around the house in her *dungarees*." Believe it or not, this word

was invented by seamen, not high-schoolers. The word, of Hindustani origin, was first applied to sailor's working clothes of blue jean, and then transplanted by sailors ashore.

"It was an immensely complicated problem. He had to *grapple* with it for days." Sailors would tell you that to "grapple" means to hook something up from the bottom, or to fasten to the rigging of another ship when boarding her in battle, by means of a grapnel, or multiple-armed hook. The concept of struggle, mental or physical, is still present in current uses of the word.

"The student committee decided to abolish *bazing* on the campus." College-boy rough stuff got its name from "hard-case" mates, who were in the habit of bullying and knocking their sailors about. On whaling ships, it was the custom of some captains to haze their men unmercifully toward the end of the voyage so that they would desert the ship, since pay was doled out on a profit-sharing basis when they got back to port.

"His illness *laid him up* for a couple of weeks." The original use of this term comes from seafaring; when a vessel was taken out of active service in order to await a charter or have repairs made, she was said to be laid up.

Lights to Sail By

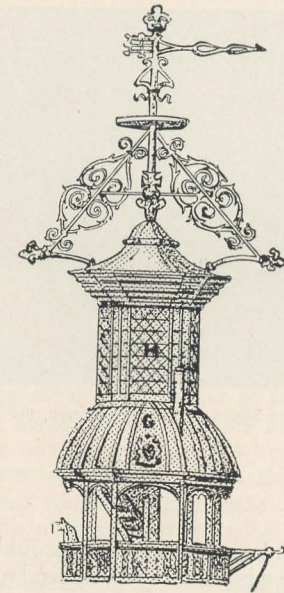
THE world's tallest building is now also its tallest lighthouse. Located on one of the most populous islands in the world and reaching more than 1,000 feet above sea level, New York's fabulous Empire State Building now sheds a two billion candlepower light a distance of some 300 miles by air, some 80 miles by land. While the light on the Empire State Building has navigational value, it seems that publicity was the prime motive for it. Likewise, history shows that other motives were also responsible for the first lighthouses.

In the case of the lights of ancient Egypt, the motive was religion, of the fire-worship variety. The towers of the Libyans and the Cushites, topped by iron and bronze braziers in the shapes of sea creatures, held blazing wooden fires. Mariners used the towers as temples by day and as navigational aids to make their course at night; in turn, the priests, the ancient keepers of the lights, engraved nautical charts on the walls of the temples.

The Egyptians were responsible too, for the most notable lighthouse of antiquity, the Pharos of Alexandria. Completed about 280 B.C., it was of such "wonderful construction" according to Caesar, that it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Its light, which was reputed to be visible for 100 miles, burned on the Egyptian coast for 1400 years. Today, pharology is still the name given to the branch of engineering dealing with lighthouses.

The first of the modern type of lighthouses, built on a submerged foundation, was the famed Eddystone Light. In 1664, when people first started talking about building a light on the dangerous reef that juts out into the English Channel and had become a graveyard for hundreds of ships, the idea was considered preposterous. An eccentric English country gentleman went to work and built an equally eccentric lighthouse, a carved and gilded wooden structure which, one writer commented, would have looked more at home in a Chinese cemetery than in the English Channel. People laughed, but the builder claimed it would withstand the fiercest gale, and he hoped to be on hand if such an event occurred. His wish was granted. In 1703, a violent storm swept him, five keepers and the Eddystone Light into the Channel. Another wooden tower was built and burned before an engineer named John Smeaton solved the problem of keeping a light on the terrible reef. Huge interlocking stones, held together with a horizontal and vertical network of iron bars, formed a massive tower. Smeaton's methods were copied all over the world. In time his original scheme was improved upon through the use of caissons and screw piles, but his construction of the Eddystone remains a milestone of progress in man's battle against the sea.

In America, progress in lighthouse building was slow. Throughout the entire 18th century, only 24 lighthouses were established on the Atlantic Coast. Part of the reason was that safeguarding ships would have seriously damaged the wrecking business. In those days, the otherwise solid citizens of Cape Cod — law abiding folks, erstwhile pillars of the community — had a rather peculiar attitude to disaster at sea. Clearly, maritime accidents were a God-given endowment to wreckers, and whoever got to the wreckage first deserved the spoils. And if nature wouldn't do her best to wreck a ship, they'd help her out. Armed with broomstick handles and lanterns, the "moon cussers" (moonlit nights were bad for business), lured many a ship to certain destruction on the reefs. The story is told of how a sometimes-preacher, whose main business was wrecking, once



This old engraving shows the top of the original Eddystone light, built near Plymouth, England in 1698.

interrupted a passionate revival meeting, told the congregation to bow their heads in meditation, and sneaked out the back door. He had just received a message that a ship had been wrecked, and he wanted to be the first one to make a deal with the skipper for floating her. Rescue stations and lighthouses had to fight their way through miles of local indignation before they were finally accepted.

From the ship, the twinkling light that guides the mariner safely along the coast, warning him of dangerous spots or giving him a guide by which he can determine course and position, looks like a very simple affair. In actuality, it is a complex mechanism, consisting of three parts; the light, its lens, and the mechanism that supports and revolves the light. Early lighthouse fires were sparked by wood and pitch; coal came into vogue for a time and then gave way to oil, and kerosene with its incandescent vapor light, which gave keepers their time-honored title, "wickies." Although most lighthouses today are equipped with electricity and Diesel generators in case of power failure, some lights



Atop the Seamen's Church Institute, the Titanic Tower light casts its beams six miles down the Narrows.

still burn kerosene; the current Eddystone, emitting a beam of 258,000 candle power, is one of them.

Just as important as the light is the lens. Unprotected lights were given glass covers, and these, highly unsatisfactory, gave way to catatropic and diatropic lenses which, while they focused the light in a solid flow, let a great deal of it escape up, down and to the sides. The problem remained a thorny one until the 1820's, when Augustin Fresnel, a member of Napoleon's Lighthouse Board, succeeded in uniting both the catatropic and diatropic approaches into one lens. His remarkable device is still in use all over the world today. Refracting prisms and glass rings surrounding a central reflecting bullseye direct the beam of light into a solid column seaward to the horizon. With the aid of a Fresnel lens, the glare of a match can be magnified into a column of flame.

The lens itself rests on a platform that floats in a miniature lake of mercury. To achieve flashing or occulting effects, which give each light its identifiable characteristic, the lens is usually revolved in conjunction with flash panels.

The key figure in the lighthouse is, of course, the keeper. Since 1939, the keepers of the lights have been the men of the Coast Guard, but before that, the Lighthouse Service attracted a motley crowd of men and women, united by a devotion to

their jobs that was almost incredible. On a light, where the slightest mistake can mean catastrophe at sea, attention to the endless chores of keeping the lights going must be unflagging. Tales of lighthouse keepers who stuck to their posts for years without being relieved, who effected heroic rescues at sea, who went down in storms with their lights, of women and children who tended lights valiantly, against enormous physical odds, while their men were away — all these have become almost legendary. Yet with all the hardships of that life — cramped living quarters, semi-isolation from the world, constant exposure to danger — the job of lighthouse keeper has always held a strange fascination. When the Lighthouse Service was under Civil Service control, there was never a shortage of applications, even in boom times, although keeper's salaries were meager. One man, Francis Malone, a bachelor, was so eager for the keeper's job on a light at Lake Superior, that when the inspector told him only a married man would do, he found a wife within a week. New inspectors were appointed every two years, and the Malones got into the habit of naming their new babies after the inspectors. This worked all right 12 times, but the Spanish American War proved to be too much for even the Malones. That year, three new inspectors were appointed.

Lighthouse keepers had an amazing

record of tenure. Ten years on a light was considered nothing. After 25 years, a man was still to be watched; he might turn out to be a restless drifter. Only after half a century of service did the other "wickies" really consider a keeper as one of them, a man who had settled down to a steady occupation.

One of the great attractions of the Lighthouse Service was the healthfulness of the life. One keeper, who had seen 38 years of service on a light, in perfect health, remarked: "The secret of my good health is that I have been where the doctors could not get to me."

Of course, there was bound to be friction among men who had to stay in close quarters for long periods of time. At one station, two keepers who could no longer stand the sight—or sound—of each other, simply stopped talking. An inspector learned the reason for their disagreement. One of them wanted his potatoes mashed; the other, fried.

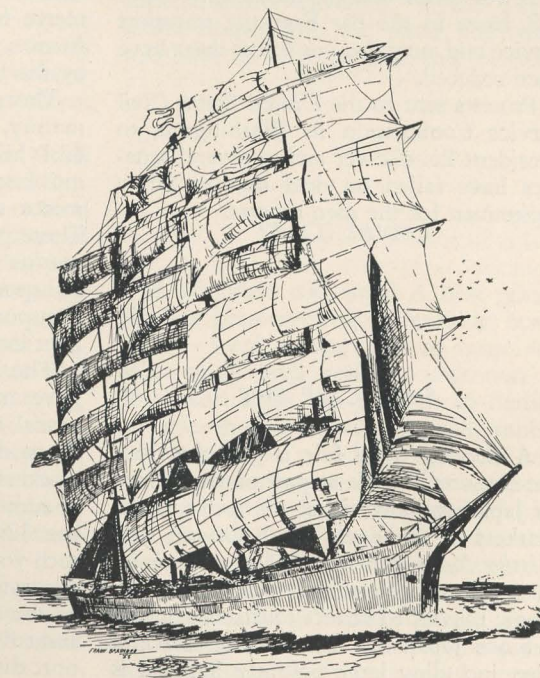
Now that the Coast Guard has taken over the keeping of the lights, the romance and danger of the job is dying out. Men are stationed on the lights for a definite

hitch, then transferred to other duty. Modern improvements make tending the lights easier, and radio and television break up the tedium of isolation. Even service on the lightships, those terrifically exposed and highly dangerous ship-sentinels stationed in places where it is impossible to build lights, has become more pleasant.

In the future, keepers of the lights may well become as obsolete as the fire-worship temples. The wonders of electronics have already caught up with the lighthouses; unattended beacons are in operation and automatic lightships, guided from the shore by remote control are in an experimental stage. Radio beacons and loran allow a navigator to get his bearings in the worst weather conditions. Eventually, electronic impulses alone may give the navigator all the information he needs in respect to position and danger in his path, without regard to day or night, sun or stars. When this happens, the lights themselves may be darkened, and the tolling of bells and screeching of whistles will be heard no more on the sea. At the Empire State Building, however, the trend for the present, is in the other direction.

Great Ladies

This drawing of the *Edward Sewall*, one of the last of America's windjammers, is one of 61 pen-and-ink sketches illustrating a new book just published by Hastings House, "Famous American Ships," by Frank O. Braynard, \$5.00. The book is a lively and informative historical sketch of the United States as told through its maritime life, from the time the Vikings sailed to North America some 500 years before Columbus, to the present day. Here are the stories behind the great ships of American history — the *Mayflower*, the *Savannah*, the *Leviathan*, the *Great Northern*, the *United States* — all shown as an integral part of the American scene. Mr. Braynard is director of the Information Bureau at the American Merchant Marine Institute.



The Work of Ships

JOB LOSS

Ninety American seamen are charging the United States Military Sea Transport Service with putting them off their ships and giving their jobs to Japanese seamen at lower rates of pay. A spokesman for the group said they were "losing jobs as United States citizens to foreign seamen on vessels flying the American flag and operated by a U. S. government agency."

MSTS headquarters in the Pacific have replied that they are cutting down the number of seamen in their employ, but that the proportion of Americans to Japanese would remain the same. They did admit that in some cases Americans had lost their jobs to the Japanese, but they added, "in the long run the number of both Americans and Japanese employed will be reduced."

Fewer ships will be needed to serve U.S. bases in the Far East, the transport service said, now that our forces there have been reduced.

Protests sent to the United States Civil Service Commission in Washington, to President Eisenhower and to several senators have fallen on deaf ears so far, a spokesman for the men reports.

SHOWCASE SHIP

A floating trade fair is going to tour the seaports of Asia as part of an attempt by Japanese industrialists to open up new markets in the East. The 8,800-ton ship *Nissho Maru* will be fitted out as an industrial exposition and will also show scenic movies to attract tourists to Japan.

Since Japan has lost her overseas empire, including large holdings in what is

now Communist China, the Japanese are seeking to develop the markets of Asian countries which have become independent since the war. Not all the countries are particularly eager to establish trade relations with the former enemy, but the Japanese, nevertheless, will send their trade ship to Saigon, Vietnam; Bangkok, Thailand; Rangoon; Burma; Colombo, Ceylon; Bombay, India; Karachi, Pakistan; Jakarta, Indonesia and Manila.

PORT DOLLARS

One out of every four of the 13,000,000 people who live in the Port of New York area is dependent upon waterborne commerce for the economic basis of his existence, according to a report just issued by the Port of New York Authority.

The report, "The Port and the Community," shows that 430,000 people earn \$2.1 billion per year as a result of the movement of 140 million tons of commerce through the world's busiest port. These people are engaged in the fields of marine transportation, auxiliary marine transportation, marine construction, land transportation, port trade and finance, and port industries.

The report committee has employed government statistical techniques of regional money-flow analysis to show that every dollar of income earned by these workers generates or creates two dollars of additional income within the area. Thus the \$2,100,000,000 earned in port jobs each year become \$6,300,000,000 in port-generated income. This is more than 25% of the estimated \$23,000,000,000 earned annually by all people in all jobs in the port district.

In order to maintain the "measurable vitality" of the economy of the port, four things are necessary, the report concludes: the modernization and improvement of waterfront facilities, resortation of equality in transportation rate structure, promotion of the advantage of shipping through the Port of New York, and the establishment of stable and lawful leadership of waterfront labor.

NEW DEAL

Merchant seamen won a minor victory last month in their long fight against the Coast Guard's screening procedures. San Francisco Federal Judge Edward P. Murphy has issued an injunction ordering the Federal Government to restore seamen's papers to 300 to 400 men who have been barred from shipping out of West Coast ports for security reasons.

The men were victims of a Coast Guard screening procedure instituted during the Korean War which has since been ruled illegal by a Federal Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. Under that procedure, the Coast Guard commandant could tell a seaman he was a security risk and take away his papers without confronting him with accusers or witnesses who had informed against him. New rules, adopted early in May, provide that a seaman charged with being a security risk must be notified of it and confronted with the informants or the evidence against him. He must be permitted to cross-examine the informants.

Judge Murphy's injunction will permit the suspended men to go back to work before they are rescreened under the new rules.

STONY

On a lonely atoll in the South Pacific, a pure white ship of solid stone is being built. The ship is the *President Taylor*, and her shipbuilders are no ordinary workers. They are tens of millions of coral insects who discovered the famous round-the-world steamer, once known as the *President Polk*, when she ran aground on a coral reef at Canton Island in 1942. The insects started by patching up the holes the reef had ripped into the bottom of the vessel and from there, they have worked upward, deck by deck, filling everything with living rock. In a year or two, say scientists who are studying the phenomenon, the ship of steel will be a ship of white coral sitting on the reef. Since the coral insects can work only below the water line, their construction will stop at the superstructure. However, if the *Taylor* settles deeper into the water, the world will have its first complete ship of stone.

SPACE SAVERS

Shipbuilders take note! A new principle has been applied to building boats, which—were it adaptable to large vessels—could well relieve congestion at docks and make the problem of finding space for mothball fleets practically vanish.

The boats we're talking about are currently blossoming on New York's waterways. When not in use they can be folded up, carried under the arm and neatly stacked away. Called "stowboats," these ultimates in sea-going collapsibles are made from nylon and plywood and open in 60 seconds into 10-foot long, 4-foot wide boats accommodating outboard motors.

Foreign language books distributed by the Institute often travel far. Institute Ship Visitor Captain Gorgen Bjorge points out some of the routes to Librarian Elizabeth Colman, who prepares the Spanish, Dutch, French and German book bundles.



Wayfaring Books

A SCANDINAVIAN seaman who had to find the square root of the earth, a Belgian sailor bent on improving his education and an Argentine seaman who needed to know where to buy puppets all found the answers they were looking for a little while ago at the same place—the Conrad Library of the Seamen's Church Institute of New York. Elizabeth Colman, librarian, estimates that she receives about 30 calls a week from foreign seamen for shore-side reading, reference information, and books to take back to the ship for that long voyage out.

Some of the foreign sailors have become steady library patrons, like the blonde, blue-eyed German boy who has been coming to the library for the past four years. On his first visit, his rating was Ordinary Seaman; he spoke English so feebly that he could converse with the librarian only in German. Four years of study have made him a Second Mate (he's now studying for First Mate's papers), and a fluent conversationalist in English, to boot.

"The reading interests of foreign seamen are of an unusually high calibre," Miss Colman reports. "We have an Egyptian officer who keeps coming back for books on economics, a Belgian boy who told us 'I want to have good books from which I can learn something,' and a Dutch seaman who is working hard on sociology texts." Frivolous subjects, too, are appealing. A British sailor recently read up on the trotters and

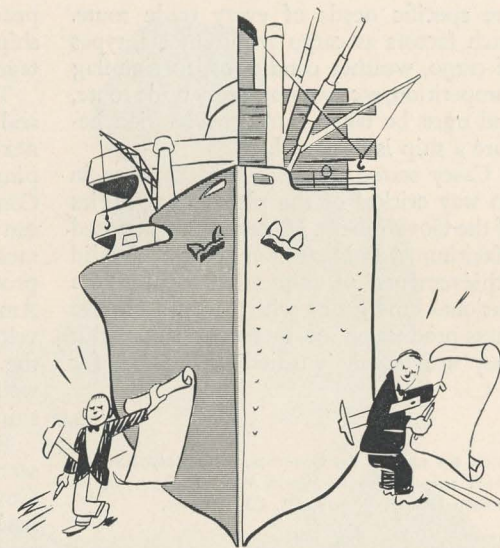
a Belgian brought back to his ship books on life among the Eskimos.

Unfortunately, Conrad Library is not able to meet all the requests for foreign language books. It had to disappoint a Costa Rican lad who devoured every Spanish book in the collection, but couldn't get Spanish-language copies of the works of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Shakespeare and the Bhagavad-Gita. Since so many foreign seamen are now coming to the Port of New York, and hence to the library, it's modest collection of foreign language books has to be spread out pretty thin. For this reason, it is making a plea for contributions of books and/or magazines in French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Dutch. Current popular reading is favored, although classics are also welcomed. Incidentally, Conrad Library also hopes to build up its stock of Oriental, and especially Indian books. "When Indian seamen come here, we have to call their consul to get reading matter for them," says the librarian.

Conrad Library hopes to get enough foreign books so that it can make up more packages like the one it sent recently to the crew of the German ship, *M.S. Goettingen*. The men were surprised and delighted to get so many books in their own language. "I can't get over it," one of the boys told an Institute Ship Visitor, "that you give away all these wonderful books for nothing."

SHIP DESIGN—

Who Knows Best?



WHO decides how a ship should be built? — the Government which provides the subsidies, or private industry, which runs the ships? In top maritime circles, this question has become of major importance. The wraps are finally off a controversy that has been brewing for the past year between the Government, which insists that ship operators adopt its standard designs for their fleet replacement programs and the operators themselves, who maintain that a ship must be adapted to her specific trade route before she is built, not redesigned afterwards.

The disagreement vitally affects the 700-or-more cargo ships that must be built within the next ten years to replace the country's aging merchant fleet. Since the merchant marine got most of its ships at one time, during World War II, over 80% of them, figured on a 20-year-life-span, will be obsolete within a few years. The controversy over design has already stalemated negotiations between the Maritime Administration and three leading shipping companies seeking replacements for units of their fleets.

Chairman Clarence G. Morse of the Federal Maritime Board has stated that since the government pays about 40% of the costs of the ships and 75% of sea-

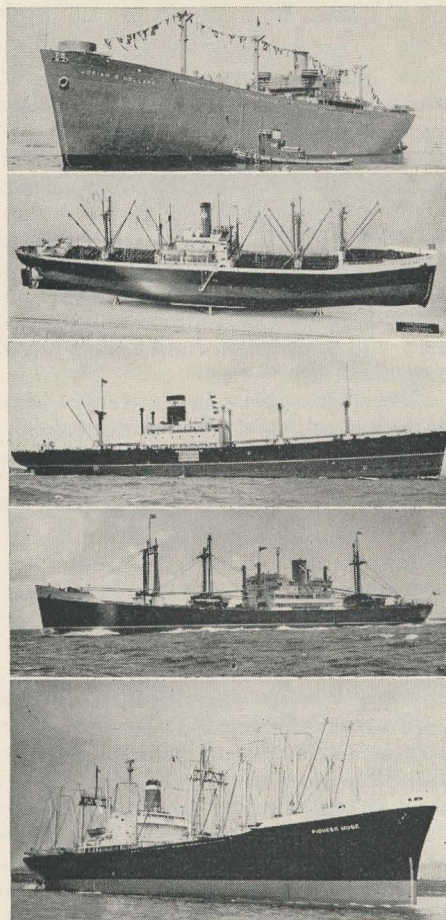
men's wages, it can say what it wants about speed and design. The Board believes that the seven prototype vessels it designed last year — four dry cargo ships, a tanker, a bulk unloader and a trailer ship — are ideally suited for defense purposes. Private industry, on the other hand, feels that for peacetime trade purposes, specifically designed ships must be built to contend with competition from foreign maritime nations.

The opening blast in the shipping industry's attack on the Government policy came from Ralph Casey, president of the American Merchant Marine Institute. Casey told a Propeller Club meeting in June that "a ship should be adapted to her trade route before she is built, not redesigned afterward." In the past, he pointed out, the American Merchant Marine has been composed primarily of standard-type ships — the Hog Islander, the "C-types," Libertys, Victories and Mariners. These ships were useful, but not tailor-made; extensive modifications, often at "staggering" costs were necessary in order to suit these ships to carry the dry-cargo loads of all U.S. trade routes. If we are to meet competition from foreign maritime nations, Casey said, we must at least do what they do—build special ships, designed to meet

the specific needs of every trade route. Such factors as cargo requirements, types of cargo, weather conditions, foreign-flag competition, etc., vary on every trade route, and must be taken into consideration before a ship is designed.

Casey stated that his remarks were in no way critical of the planning activities of the Government. He called the proposed Maritime Administration ships "splendid achievements" of unquestioned value in a national emergency which would require mass-production of merchant ships. But they are largely unsuitable, he said, for

Below are some of the Government's prototype vessels which saw service in World War II. From top to bottom: Liberty, Victory, C1, C3, Mariner.



peacetime commerce, where American ships must compete at a great disadvantage with custom-made foreign vessels.

Testifying before the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee the next day, Mr. Louis Pate of the Seas Shipping Company, chairman of the Technical Committee of the Committee of American Steamship Lines, had this to say: "The most efficient, most economical and most profitable ships for replacement of the American merchant marine will be developed by making full utilization of all the experience and skills of industry as well as government in the design of new ships."

Pate's committee has just released a secret study which punches holes in the Government's contention that standardized design brings economy in construction costs. In shipbuilding, mass production very quickly reaches the point of diminishing returns, the report states, and "no major economic advantage is possible with standard ships."

The main bugaboo of standardization, the report implies, is that standardized ships must continually be changed once they are built. Not only are these changes costly to the Government, but they also make it impossible for the shipping operator to have a fleet of identical ships, which would facilitate the interchangeability of parts and make quick repairs possible. Before a ship is designed, the trade route, cargo flow, and all the other factors affecting the particular service for which the ship is intended must be thoroughly analyzed.

Shipping operators are complaining that the Government's prototype vessels are too large, too small, or lack certain desirable features. A big argument against the vessels is that the 18-knot speeds required in standardized designs are unnecessary and too expensive.

And so the fight goes on. Industry wants its ships custom-made, and the Government still contends that the prototype vessels will be the most economical to build and the ones most practicable for either foreign trade, defense or military purposes. Meanwhile, the new ships are still on the drawing boards.

Fish Prints

Mrs. Janet Canning, one of the few Gyotaku artists in this country, demonstrates the fine art of making a fish print.

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Photos courtesy of American Museum of Natural History

IF the art of Gyotaku continues to grow in Japan, her fisherman may have to forfeit the time-honored angler's privilege of exaggerating just a bit about the fish that was "so-o-o big." A direct impression of the fish itself, a Gyotaku print leaves no details as to size or shape to the imagination. A collection of 30 Japanese fish are preserved for art and science in a collection of Gyotaku fish prints now on display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

Practically unknown in this country, Gyotaku is an old form of Japanese folk art which has long decorated fishing gear stores, seaside inns, and fishermen's homes. Only lately, however, has it caught the

fancy of several groups in Japan who are trying to develop it into a new artistic genre. The Gyotaku-no-Kai or Friends of the Fish Print, who loaned this exhibition to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, are a group of ardent anglers who are also painters, ichthyologists, metal-workers, photographers and woodcut-printers.

The Gyotaku artist handles the fish the same way a woodcut printer handles his wood block. Using either the direct or indirect methods, he takes an actual impression of the fish itself. In the direct method, India ink or some other coloring material is applied directly to the surface of the fish and a fine sheet of rice paper is rubbed over it. In the indirect method, which is more precise as to details, the paper is applied over the fish as it is beginning to dry, and gently patted with the coloring material.

The results, which resemble delicate Japanese water-colors and pencil drawings, are so accurate scientifically, that ichthyologists are investigating them with "enormous curiosity," according to Francesca La Monte, Associate Curator of Fishes at the Museum. Fish prints are more useful than photographs in studying certain details such as scale count, says Miss La Monte.

This print of the John Dory fish is the work of Japanese artist-ichthyologist Yukoku Shimizu.

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Book Watch



SEA WAR

Felix Riesenberg, Jr.

Rinehart & Company, New York, \$5.00

Felix Riesenberg, Jr., has done the American Merchant Marine a tremendous service in writing this first over-all account of its role in World War II. The Army, Navy and Marines have had their full share of history written, and scores of books extoll our former naval enemies as dauntless, albeit misguided heroes. *Sea War* provides a sorely-needed antidote.

Before World War II was over, more than 5,000 merchant mariners had met violent deaths at sea; their casualty toll was higher, percentage wise, than that of any branch of the Armed Forces. Unarmed and unprotected, they carried their precious cargoes through hideously infested waters. Few ships survived the U-boat slaughter on the Atlantic coast; in two months of winter, 1942, Admiral Doenitz's boys, who considered their work as much fun as hitting sitting ducks, sank 145 ships, totalling 800,000 tons and 600 lives. Tanker explosions turned the Atlantic into a flaming graveyard. Small boys, playing along the debris-littered Atlantic coast beaches, often found human limbs among the trophies of war.

The men and the ships suffered from colossal neglect. Months passed before the Navy could provide merchant ships with guns or convoys. Governmental red tape and civilian selfishness combined to prolong the hell at sea. Perfectly silhouetting the ships for the U-boats, luxury lighting continued at Miami and West Palm Beach until the winter tourists had gone home. German U-boat crews, with no one to bother them, spent lazy days on the decks of their ships acquiring sun tans.

Public treatment of merchant seamen was shameful. Not members of the Armed Forces, they were entitled to no special courtesies or privileges. They were paid only when they were on a ship; they spent enormous amounts on private medical care because getting into a Marine Hospital involved so much red tape. Men coming off a ship suffering from fatigue and near-nervous breakdowns were given 30 days to get into shape before being hustled off by the draft board. One torpedoed survivor, who had to walk a mile, barefooted, off a rescue ship to get a pair of shoes, almost didn't get them because he had mislaid ration coupon No. 17.

Yet there were surprisingly few gripes from the men themselves. They accepted the constant threat of death as the ordinary risk of a day's work, freely chosen. At the Seamen's Church Institute and other seamen's centers, the answer to the persistent question was always the same: "Hell yes, I'm shipping out again."

The book goes on to discuss the work of the Wartime Shipping Administration and Admiral Land's Liberty ship program; the feats of the Merchant Marine in the various theatres of war and the victory haul home. An ex-seaman who has seen combat himself, Riesenberg writes with vigor about the subject he knows best.

He closes on a note of warning. Less than 15 years since the U-boats roamed the Atlantic coast, the American Merchant Marine is again in dangerously low straits. Only 1,000 commercial ships are active; only 55,000 men are going to sea. While the Navy has upped its annual expenditures from half a million dollars before the war to six and one-half billion now, the Merchant Marine marks time. With Admiral Land, the author asks, "Will we never learn?"

Summer Along The Shore

Gold splashed on the wave
The still seemed
Bright color
Pulsation.
Gleaming bird traffic
Sauntering
The sky's rich
Blue avenues
Of silence.
Glittering mist
Of breathless July
Brushing soft
The gilded waters
Where they lie.

Droned against the brow
Red drumbeats
Of the sun's
Heart
And drawing
To the shore
The old tide's
Surge of light
And sound
Slow mounting
To a white calm
And the spreading
Of spun folds
For horizon's arm.

Swerved in leisured power
The cream run
Garlands drop
Beachward, run
Agglitter to pools
Weed green
Dappled
In light.
The crisp splash
Of deep music
Vibrating to space
Sun dissolved
To jewels
On Summer's face.

Antony de Courcy

