

## The Sailor Man at His Job on the Deep

*How Three Sailors Save a \$200,000 Derelict Ship, Win \$25,000, and "Do Something for England"*

HERE is a great tale of the sea which begins on the Atlantic in October and ends in the Law Courts in February.

"The courage and fine spirit and absence of physical fear displayed by these men command instant and unstinted admiration, and one likes to think that it is an illustration of the courage of British seamen on the waves."

So said Sir Samuel Evans, in the Admiralty Court, when making his award of \$25,000 to three seamen who saved the American tug *Vigilant*, which had been abandoned in the Atlantic by her master and the rest of the crew.

The three heroes were Robert Ferguson, second mate; Thomas Welch, greaser, and John Smith, fireman.

The *Vigilant*, a powerful ocean-going tug, of 1,200-h.p., was struck by heavy weather. Her captain decided to abandon the ship, as it had only 24 hours' coal on board and he thought could not last long. Ferguson determined to remain on board, and Welch and Smith decided to stay with him. The thirteen other members of the crew and the captain were taken off to the steamship *Rijnndam*, and the three plaintiffs were left in the tug. Ferguson took the wheel, Welch went to the engine-room, and Smith to the engine fires.

### Something for England

An interview with these brave men in "Lloyd's" newspaper reveals the master motive which inspired Ferguson to his great deed. It was to do something for England.

"He knew something about Britain's need of ships in war-time. And he determined that he'd do his bit for the land of his fathers, and get that ship in, or die in the attempt."

"So, when the huge Dutch-American liner, with its thousand souls aboard, came to the rescue, this splendid sailor stood at his post, with the waves of the wintry Atlantic climbing all about him."

"Better come along," insisted the officer in charge of the rescue party. Across the roar and whistling of the wind, through the showers of blinding spray, came two words:

"Nothing doing."

"That was all. The liner went her way, stumbling on through the storm. The tug was left alone."

"But I can tell you this," he said, "that I wouldn't have brought the *Vigilant* back for all the money in the world if the British Government didn't want her. That fetched me. I couldn't see myself getting aboard

that comfortable liner and striking the trail for New York with that little tug left to be battered to bits in the Atlantic. It seemed to me that here was a pretty good chance of doing something for England—and I guess I was glad to get it."

"Well, I guessed the boat was valued at something like thirty-five thousand pounds. Didn't seem to me good enough that she should be smashed to pieces when she

captain sent out S.O.S. signals when we were about 800 miles away from Queenstown. The gale grew still fiercer, and nobody ventured on deck without a life preserver. Huge seas swept over us, and the position looked mighty serious, so the captain put up distress signals and also wireless again for help."

"Our calls were picked up next morning by the Holland-America liner *Rijnndam*."

The captain said he was going to leave the ship. I proceeded to obey orders.

"When I got down below and saw the crew with their life-preservers on I asked if anyone would volunteer with me to stay by the ship. I told them I had a master's licence and would bring her into port if it could be done. But not one was willing of the men standing there. So I went to the engineers and asked them the same. The chief said, 'No; what is the use? Are you tired of living? Have some sense—you are merely throwing your life away.' Then I said to an oiler there, 'You said this morning you were no bar-room sailor. Now prove it and stay with me.' Two of them consulted, and then Tom Welch, an Irish oiler, and John Smith, an American fireman, agreed to stay with me."

### A Cheer For Luck

"That evening the *Rijnndam* came up and put off boats. We helped our men to get transferred. On the *Rijnndam* resuming her voyage the passengers lined the deck and gave us a cheer for luck. With that we headed for Queenstown, with the glass still going down. By half-past six next morning the gale was at its height, waves 30 ft. high sweeping down on us and the wind going at 90 miles an hour. About nine o'clock an enormous sea boarded us, and did damage that jammed the rudder."

"Then from some cause the dynamo was knocked out of service, so I hove the ship to and made efforts to fix up the engine and the steering gear. A line came along and I declined a line, but accepted the offer of being guided into Bantry Bay. On entering the bay the ship lost all sight of us, but I proceeded into the bay, and about 3.30 in the morning I saw broken water only about fifty yards ahead. I looked back of us, but there too was a reef. At last I managed to get the *Vigilant* into clear water. Then we went to Castletown, and later I took on board ten men, and we made Cardiff without further mishap."

Here are some other details which came out in Court:

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A British Sailor Who Has Made History and "The Coming Man"

might be bringing food to the kiddies in England, or sweeping mines or carrying munitions. It isn't for me to say why she was wanted by the British government. I knew that every ship was needed."

### S.O.S.

Mr. Ferguson, a Glasgow man, told his own story of the voyage to a representative of the "Daily Mail." He said:

"We arrived at St. John, Newfoundland, from New York on October 17, and started again on October 22 with 17 men on board. We had dirty weather right through. The