



Even if the line held,  
Barney didn't see how  
they ever could make  
it back to the boat

## Semper Paratus

It's an old Coast Guard motto, and it means: "Always Be Ready." When Barney, that sheep-brained young mountaineer joined the service, he didn't realize the sort of things you were always supposed to be ready for

By LESLIE T. WHITE

SOME guys, because of a dame, join the Foreign Legion; others commit suicide, or become wanderers on the face of the earth. Barney enlisted in the Coast Guard. But now as he sweated over the gleaming brass of the one-pounder on the foredeck—the same one-pounder he had so religiously polished only yesterday and the day before that, and all the days before that during his five months of service—he began to feel that no dame on earth was worth it.

Two girls suddenly materialized on the edge of the dock, and Barney knew what they meant; it meant that McCrady was

coming, Barney reflected bitterly. That was just one of the things he had against McCrady. He uncorked his six-feet-two of loose-jointed awkwardness, gathered up his rags and the can of muck the supply-depot insisted was brass polish, and moved around to the starboard side of the gun to escape McCrady's ice-gray eyes.

McCrady wasn't a captain; he was only a Chief Bosun's Mate, but he was the All-highest on the seventy-five-foot patrol boat CG-803, which did not rate a commissioned officer.

He was a tough disciplinarian—and tough generally. But even worse, as far as Barney was concerned—he was small and dapper and handsome. In the hill country back in Kentucky where Barney hailed

from they didn't favor men who were small and dapper, and Barney saw nothing about McCrady to make him change his opinion.

A passing oyster-barge rolled up a light swell that put old *CG-803* to nuzzling her gray topsides against the dock pilings like a fawning dog; but Chief Bosun's Mate McCrady never altered his jaunty stride.

His white cap and double-breasted blue jacket were immaculate. He dazzled the two girls with a quick smile and a snappy salute as he hopped nimbly down to the deck—and put his foot squarely on the mop which lurked in the shadow of the wheelhouse.

The mop started down the deck like a cat with its tail trod on. McCrady went into a spin like a weary top's, until his heels hit the weatherboard and he ricocheted backward into the wheelhouse and landed hard on his seat.

The girls giggled. Barney guffawed, although he was sorry McCrady hadn't followed his cap which had rolled overboard. The Chief bounded to his feet and eyed the offending mop while Oleson, the engineer, grappled for the cap with a boat-hook. When the cap was retrieved, McCrady shook the water from it, slanted it over one eye at an aggressive angle, and picked up the mop.

Barney stopped smiling.

"Twist her tail!" McCrady snapped at Oleson, and as the big Swede ducked below to get his engines going, McCrady started forward. Barney found a tarnished spot under the shoulder-piece of the gun and concentrated on that.

"Hey, you! Boot!" barked McCrady.

**B**ARNEY inched his nose a little closer to the gun and kept on rubbing. He knew the chief was addressing him, for *Boot* was the name that had always been given to brand-new enlisted men since the ancient days of the service when future seamen were taught their way around ships by the well-directed toe of a boot. But those days, Barney trusted, were gone forever. He was wrong. McCrady planted a fast one where it belonged and Barney

straightened smartly. The girls giggled again. So did Leary, the cook, and Disher, Oleson's assistant.

"Ow!" yelled Barney. "You cain't kick me!"

"Pipe down!" grated the chief in a voice like a blow-torch. "You left this swab right on deck."

"I was just usin' it."

McCrady controlled himself by sheer force of will. "You been told before about putting things away when you're done using them. Can't you get it through your thick skull this boat has to be ready to roll at all times? Here." He abruptly pushed the soggy mop in Barney's face.

Barney had opened his mouth when the mop changed his mind, so he was spitting desperately when the big engines roared alive below.

"Stand by to cast off," McCrady snapped at him. "And for once in your life, do something right." With that parting shot, he stalked aft.

Joe Bunch, McCrady's mate, did not laugh. From the shelter of the wheelhouse he contemplated the incident with a sad eye.

He liked the lanky lad from Kentucky, but he sincerely wished the boy had stayed in the mountains and become a moon-shiner, or done whatever inlanders did. Joe wouldn't know about that because, like McCrady, he had spent all his forty years of life either on the sea, or within sound of it. All the Bunches and all the McCradys had been seamen.

Joe couldn't understand people who didn't love the sea, but if they didn't, he couldn't understand why they enlisted in the Coast Guard, for that service absorbed more salt water than even the navy.

He knew Barney had enlisted, not because he loved the sea, but because he loved a dame. That was Barney's business, Joe admitted gloomily; but Joe's business was to keep the organization of the seventy-five-foot patrolboat in perfect coordination. So when McCrady stormed into the wheelhouse, Joe said:

"Look, Mac, why don't you get rid of

Barney? Have him transferred to one of the cutters or something on shore."

McCrary was steeled with Maine stubbornness. "I picked that lemon and I'll keep him."

Joe Bunch sighed. He knew only too well McCrary's pride in his ability to pick good prospects out of the new enlistment lineups. The Chief insisted he could pick a man and then make a seaman out of him who would do ample credit to the service. Joe had been along the day McCrary first saw the gawky kid fresh from the mountains. Barney had a dead-pan face, short brown curls that screwed close to his skull, and rangy muscles.

McCrary had said, aside to Joe: "He'll do—you watch," and he had chosen Barney.

Neither of them had known then, of course, that Barney was inflicting a sort of willing martyrdom on himself because his girl had trotted off with a drummer. When a guy enlists for a three years' stretch he usually plans to stick it out for six years and then get the white ticket that will give him a permanent future in the service. But not Barney. He had never seen more water than a small river, and he did not want to see any more.

"Look, Mac," Joe argued mildly. "You're entitled to one mistake in twenty years. That kid just hasn't got it in him. He's not going after his white ticket; he'll quit right after his first enlistment. Transfer him an' get some guy that's been around the sea."

"If he leaves this boat," the Chief said stubbornly, "he'll go over my head for his transfer. I won't admit I could make such a bonehead error. He stays, an' I'll either kill him or cure him." He stuck his head out the open window and signaled for the docklines to be cast off.

JOE watched Barney fumble with the lines. It was hopeless, he knew. Perhaps the kid could do it if he wanted to, if he got the spirit of the service. But

you can't put that into a man. Joe waited until McCrary backed the patrol boat into the channel and got on the course, then he played his ace card.

"It's not only Barney hates the sea an' the service, Mac; he don't get along with the boys."

McCrary turned his pale eyes on his mate. When McCrary got that glint in his eyes, they reminded Joe Bunch of the peculiar color of gun-steel where the bluing has rubbed off.

"What's that?" barged the chief. The one thing he insisted on was teamwork; it was a religion with him. He didn't mind taking an undermanned boat into any sort of weather, just so long as each of the crew did his part and worked in harmony with the others. It took harmony and teamwork to do the kind of work they had to do; teamwork and headwork.

"Well, it isn't entirely the kid's fault," the mate explained. "He's not used to livin' close with other people. Anyhow them mountaineers are always feudin' with somebody. Like his quarrel with the cook. Leary took a correspondence course in muscle-buildin' from some school. He's got his diploma, too. But Barney's takin' a mail course from another school, and he got crossed up with Leary. The cook says Barney insulted his alma mater."

McCrary rang for an extra notch of power and slammed past a channel buoy closer than he ordinarily did. He spoke slowly. "Quell that kid, Joe, if you have to kill him. He's goin' to make a sailor, or . . ."

Joe had played his card, and lost. Later he tried to talk a little sense into Barney. "Look, what's wrong with you? Did you leave that swab underfoot on purpose?"

The lad from Kentucky wagged his head. "No, suh, I did not. I was haulin' water out of the ocean with a bucket an' swabbin' down them decks with the mop. Why don't that . . ."

"Easy," warned Joe, "he's your superior."

". . . anyhow, why don't he look where he's goin'?"

Joe Bunch took a deep breath of good salt air. "Look, Barney, listen close to these few, simple words. Try to understand them. This is the United States Coast Guard, not the mountains. There has to be a place for everything because you can't ever tell when something—"

"I read that in the manual. Sounds like school."

"It's a tradition of the sea, Barney."

"I hate the sea."

"Look—why don't you apply for a transfer? Maybe you could get on one of the big three-stackers," suggested Joe.

"No use. It'd just be another darned boat."

"You should have been a forest ranger."

Barney missed the sarcasm. "Don't I know it! But I'll stick out this one enlistment."

Joe was reluctant to admit defeat. "Look now. Maybe if you put in a request you could get transferred to yeoman duty ashore—you know, office work. Then you wouldn't be around guys like Leary."

"I'm not afraid of that cook. Some day I'll bop—"

"I know, I know, but it would be more pleasant."

"I don't expect it to be pleasant," grumbled Barney sadly. "I'm stickin'. McCrady cain't break—"

"Okay, okay." Joe Bunch's voice took on an edge. "Only you're goin' to obey orders as long as you're around here. You're goin' to work with the boys if I got to pin your ears back myself. An' keep things where they belong, understand? This boat is always ready." Just then McCrady rang for him, so he hurried up to the bridge.

They pulled a small yawl off a sandbar, and saw it on its way. The skipper of the yacht gave them a careless wave and that was all.

"Not even a thank you," sneered Barney. "Mugs who love the sea! Nuts!"

**I**T WASN'T that he didn't try to get along; he did, in his fashion. He did it like a convict doing his stretch, looking

to the day of his release. Only for Barney, his sentence could not be shortened by good behavior. He was a steady workman, but he liked to be doing something sensible, not just polishing brass over and over, week in and week out, even when there was nobody around to look at it. And sougeeing paint work until his fingers bled.

Why, back in his hometown the folks figured it was something swell to paint a house *once* when it was first built. Certainly nobody ever heard of scrubbing what had already been painted.

All this useless work was bad enough, but what Barney just could not assimilate was the necessity for all the rituals of the sea; nonsense such as putting every little rag and rope exactly where it was before, as if it was being arranged for a blind man to find.

He figured out that nearly twenty percent of his time was spent in putting something away, then going and getting it out again a few minutes later. He couldn't see that.

On the farm where Barney was raised, when you heard the dinner bell clang you didn't take the plow apart, polish and oil each piece, and hang it in a leather case some place: no, suh, you let go the plow handles right where she was, and ran for the table.

That's where he got balled up with McCrady, like leaving the mop right where he'd dropped it when dinner was piped. If you didn't duck when Leary announced chow, you got left. Not that you'd miss much either, Barney ruminated. Leary's coffee—affectionately known as mud—was corrosive, and his dessert specialty, tapioca pudding, known as snake-eyes, reminded Barney of a saucer of buckshot.

But the gnawing ache always centered in Barney's stomach was not put there by Leary's cooking. It was fear did that.

In his five months of service, he had seen no rough weather—not what Bunch and the Chief called rough—but Barney knew it was coming.

It always came with the Fall.

Seas that crushed big ships and let men and debris trickle to the depths; winds that screamed like madmen and tore out the masts; skies so black they smothered lights. No tropical hurricane blew harder than the storms of Barney's imagination.

He watched a casual swell raise a giant liner, and multiplied that force in his mind. Someday he would have to go out in a storm like that, and when he visualized it, his stomach knotted, and refused to digest Leary's snake-eyes.

For a whole week after Bunch's lecture, Barney kept out of trouble and Joe began to pride himself as a mediator and a handler of men.

True, Leary took offense one night at a slanderous criticism Barney made of Leary's teacher's method of thickening the neck muscles—Barney insisted what the method thickened was six inches *above* the neck—but Oleson and Disher separated the students before anybody was hurt.

Joe Bunch was glad because now it was getting along toward October and a bang-up line storm was due about this time of the year. Most of the yachtsmen were hauling out, but there was always the fishing fleet to worry about, and it took mighty smooth teamwork to handle a big trawler in a north Atlantic gale.

**S**ATURDAY the wind started to build up from the southeast. The barometer went down and the sky became slate-colored and sullen. Little clouds in huddled bunches fled before the wind and disappeared shoreward.

Watching them Barney felt his stomach sag and he wished he was aboard one of them, for at the rate they were heading they would pass mighty close to his beloved hills in Kentucky. Barney couldn't read a barometer, but he could read Joe Bunch's worried expression.

He felt sick.

On Sunday the wind began to haul around to the northeast. The sea, even here in the harbor, became restless, like a champion stallion. 803 stood stiff against her dock lines, and McCrady ordered extra

springlines secured. Then, leaving orders to be called if anything happened, he went home.

Joe Bunch hung out storm pennants to warn small craft, and haunted the radio. Barney trailed after him doglike, mute and worried. Finally Joe snapped at him:

"Quit followin' me around. Do something! Swab down those decks!"

Barney fished out the big galvanized pail and the mop and went forward. He didn't go right up into the bow because 803 had developed an ominous roll. He tied an extra-strong, extra-long length of rope on to the handle of the pail and heaved it overboard, clinging to the lifelines with one hand and trying to raise the bucket of sea water with the other.

*One hand for the ship, the other for yourself*, was the old slogan, but the bucket seemed to require two hands, and Barney felt the same way about himself. He looked around to see if Oleson or one of the boys was in sight to help him, and when no one was available, Barney took a couple of turns with his end of the rope around a stanchion, then tied a knot.

Leaving the heavy pail hanging overside, he started aft to get Disher. Just then Leary announced chow, so Barney trailed down to the galley with the others.

They were halfway through the meal when they heard McCrady's feet hit the deck, and a moment later his voice rolled down the companionway.

"Let's go, boys! Boat in trouble."

Barney piled out the hatch with the rest of them. He had a half-formed hunch there was something he should do, but before he could develop it into a full-fledged thought, McCrady barked at him:

"Come on, come on, snap into it! Get those springlines off her."

As Barney stumbled to his post the big engines came alive. Their powerful staccato coughing attracted people up and down the waterfront. Clouds of white exhaust poured out of her stern, skipped briefly on the water to whirl away like dust.

Barney clutched the rail and fumbled with the springlines. They were going out



into a storm. He wanted to jump ashore and stay there.

Joe Bunch ran up and elbowed him aside. Joe didn't hang onto anything; he gave both hands to the ship. McCrady took his place on the upper bridge and ran the boat up a little on the lines so Joe could slip them over the bitts. Leary cast off the sternlines.

Barney went over to the wheelhouse and hung to the rail. He looked into the eager faces of the crowds on the dock to whom the call of the Coast Guard was an exciting event. Barney looked above to the flag and the commission pennant shredding in the wind. They gave him no thrill, only another ache as they indicated the wind's force.

McCrady leaned over the windbreaker on the flying bridge and when the lines were free, put his engines in reverse and let the sea swing him clear of the dock. To anyone but Barney, it was a pleasure to watch the chief maneuver of the old *six-bitter*. Once clear, McCrady put his engines ahead and started in a graceful arc toward the breakwater light. The crowd sent up a cheer—that suddenly went sour.

**I**T WAS evident even to Barney that something was radically wrong, for although the engines were purring like a tickled cat, 803 began to chase her own stern.

"What's the matter!" shouted McCrady. "Aren't those docklines off?"

Joe Bunch ran up the deck. "All off, sir. How about the rudder?"

The Chief spun the wheel first to starboard, then to port. "She's not fouled! Here take the wheel." He jangled the engineroom signals to stop and stalked aft. There was again that metallic glint in his eye as he noticed several hundred people watching his plight with varying shades of bewilderment and amusement. Oleson had his head out of the engineroom hatch. His face hardened.

"They're both turnin' over okay."

McCrady stuck his head down and looked at the tachometers himself. They

verified the engineer's assertion. Satisfied that the engines were doing their bit, and that all lines were free of the dock, McCrady checked to see if some fool had cast out an anchor. All the hooks rested snugly in their chocks. He took a quick glance at 803's position. The tide was taking them into shoal water.

Just then Barney remembered what he had tried to remember before. He peered around the wheelhouse, took one long look at the line taut from the stanchion and ducked up to the flying bridge where a worried Joe Bunch stood at the wheel.

"Hey, Joe," gasped Barney.

"Beat it!" grated Joe. He couldn't stand Barney right now.

"The pail," persisted Barney, "it's trailing. See!" He pointed down to the deck.

Joe glanced over his shoulder to see where the Chief was, then he yanked a knife out of his pocket.

"Look, kid, take this an' cut that line. Just cut it an' then duck out of sight. Sink with the bucket would be better. Scram!"

Barney took the knife and fled. He severed the line and simultaneously Joe Bunch rang for speed. 803 straightened like a hound unleashed and lay on her course. Barney pulled himself to his feet and turned to find McCrady surveying him with a jaundiced eye.

Barney forced a grin. "I guess I forgot the bucket." He couldn't think of anything else to say with the Chief staring at him like that. How was he, Barney, to know that a dragging pail would pull a big tub like 803 off her course? "I'm sorry," he added.

McCrady didn't say anything. He smiled. It wasn't a warm smile; it was like a crack in a block of ice. Then he went up on the bridge and took the wheel from his mate.

"Keep him away from me, Joe," McCrady muttered. "Just keep him out of my sight until we get back. Then I'm going to kick the tar out of him and transfer the remains. I'm licked, Joe. After twenty years I pick a dud like him. . . ."

But Joe Bunch had fled.

Barney was clinging to the after-hatch, enjoying a touch of seasickness when Joe found him.

"Get below," the mate ordered.

"I quit," moaned Barney. "I want a transfer."

"You're gettin' it," Joe said grimly. "You're no good to us." He left Barney and went below. He climbed into his oil-skins, put on a sou'wester, picked up McCrady's slicker and took it onto the bridge.

THE patrol-boat was rounding the island and as she nosed into the bay, they got a sample of the weather. The sea was running against the tide kicking up a short chop that slopped aboard; at this speed 803 was a wet boat. Joe took the wheel so McCrady could climb into his slicker.

"This call," said the Chief, "is for a cruiser stalled in the Gut."

Joe squinted at the angry sky. "I'm glad it's not outside. Couldn't tow much in this weather." He watched a big wave slap the starboard bow and fume aboard, and he ducked so as to take the spray on the top of his sou'wester.

They picked up the cruiser in another ten minutes. She was holding her nose into them, stubbornly, but without enough power to buck the blockade of wind and the tide.

McCrady had changed his course toward her, when Leary ducked out of the wheelhouse and swung himself onto the bridge.

"Radio message, Chief," he shouted. "There's a lumber schooner in trouble off Montauk with all hands aboard. A cutter is leaving New London an' the *Annapolis* is somewhere north of her."

"Did they give her position?"

"Not exact. She was reported about forty miles southwest of Montauk at nine this morning."

"Tell 'em we'll take it."

Leary looked at the dripping face of Joe Bunch, then he said: "Yes, sir," and went back to the wheelhouse.

Joe didn't say anything either, but he studied the sky and the water, and he gauged the wind with his cheek. He felt the steady vibrations of the big engines against the bottoms of his feet, and he took a fresh hold on the rail as the Chief turned abeam the sea and eased within hailing distance of the cruiser.

"What's the trouble?" McCrady belled through his megaphone.

A fat man in white flannels and enough gold braid on his cap to be an admiral clung to the rail of the cruiser. "We haven't enough power to buck this current!" he shouted.

"Of course you haven't," the Chief told him. "Stop fighting it and run in close to shore. You'll find a back-eddy there that'll carry you safely around the point. Get it?"

"I guess so."

"Oil and gas okay?"

"Yes," yelled the fat man, and hurried in out of the weather.

McCrady set his legs farther apart and put the wheel over. 803 canted sharply into the trough, wallowed heavily, then put her nose through a short sea and came up, tossing it back like a mane.

"Better check up, Joe."

Bunch made a gesture of assent and turned away without speaking. Watching the seas, he ducked aft and stuck his head into the engineroom.

"We're goin' outside, Swede," he shouted.

Oleson waved that he understood, and Joe took a deep breath. The engineroom was warm with the sweetish smell of hot oil. The steady explosions of the big engines became something you could feel right in your bones. Joe sighed and when he backed outside again the wind nearly tore his hat off. He met Leary coming out of the galley.

"Everything's snug below. I made a pot of coffee—just in case."

Joe nodded and hung to the rail a moment, getting his bearings. They were butting their way through a crazy cross-sea that almost amounted to surf. The shore-

line was painfully close but Joe knew there was a current in here that would save time, and McCrady was shaving the minutes. Then Joe Bunch remembered Barney.

HE FOUND Barney wedged into his bunk, his face green. Joe started to say something sharp, then he remembered the first time he had gone outside in a gale like this one. That was a long, long time ago, but Joe still remembered how he felt that night. So he braced himself between the bunk and the bulkhead above the boy and shouted to make himself heard against the numbing combination of engines and storm.

"Look, kid—we're goin' outside!"

Barney rolled his head. A sea spilled him out of his bunk and the mate helped him climb back in.

Joe yelled in Barney's ear. "This is your last trip, kid. The Chief's transferrin' you when we come back. So get up an' take it for once."

Barney pulled himself to a sitting position. "Maybe we won't come back."

"Look—there's a schooner out there someplace with men aboard. We got to go out—that's our job. It don't say nothin' about comin' back." Joe turned and swung up the companionway. When he opened the hatch, a wave sloshing over foamed down on Barney. Then he was gone, leaving Barney alone.

He clung to the berth, watching water seep down the steps and zigzag across the red linoleum floor-covering leaving a graphic chart of the boat's roll. The constant crash of seas against the hull drove him out of the bunk.

No man-made thing could stand such a beating, he told himself. He crawled into his oilskins, tied himself into a life jacket, and pawed his way to the deck.

The wind sucked at him and a boarding graybeard poured over him, flooding down his neck and up his sleeves. When it seethed past, he waited until the last of it boiled out the scuppers, then he ran for the bridge.

McCrady was driving her hard, and old

803 seemed to Barney about as substantial as a flimsy surfboard. She flinched under each crushing impact, but kept boring ahead like a terrier. Barney went over and stood beside Joe Bunch.

The Chief glanced sideways once and saw him there, but made no comment. If McCrady was worried, he didn't show it. His features showed no expression at all, save once he smiled when Joe misjudged his dodging, and took a dirty sea across the face. McCrady seemed to suddenly have grown in stature; he seemed big and strong and capable to Barney who felt small and futile.

Leary came up. "The cutter's turning back," he reported. "No trace of the schooner. They think she's gone down."

McCrady nodded and kept his eyes ahead. Leary waited a while, then looked questioningly at Bunch. The mate waved him away, and 803 held her course.

A squall boiled by, and then it was dark. Leary came up again.

"New London wants our position, an' what we're goin' to do."

McCrady said: "Approximately sixty miles southwest of Montauk."

"They want to know . . ." began Leary.

"We'll keep going," said McCrady. Later when Disher crawled up to the flying bridge and reported that the gas was down to the halfway mark, McCrady said: "We're buckin' the sea now; we won't need so much going back."

Another half hour and the *Annapolis* reported she was abandoning the search. The wind increased. The black seas rolled and heaved in torment and when their jagged crests broke white, the wind ripped them off into driving spume. Above, a wan moon appeared in the sullen sky like a pale beacon for the racing clouds.

The scene was indelibly etched on Barney's mind. The dark gray foredeck of the little seventy-five-footer tossing the white plumed seas over her shoulder; the driving spume ripping across the top of the windbreaker of the flying bridge where McCrady stood so stolidly at the wheel; the pale light of the binnacle illumining his



wet face from below, giving it a strange saturnic cast. Above, the commission pennant streamed aft as though of steel; a tattered battleflag still flying. And then the afterdeck shimmering in the uneasy moonlight, to the stern which lay a silver zipper across the angry sea.

**A**T TEN o'clock McCrady shouted: "Look! A light!" And he pointed northward. Five minutes passed before the others saw it—a timid flickering. The course was altered and 803 really began to roll. She dove into troughs that seemed without bottom. Barney clung there, sure they would keep on going down, down, and then she would corkscrew to the top of the next sea and slide down the other side.

Joe Bunch ripped the canvas cover off the big floodlight, and they found the schooner.

She looked like a dead whale, lying there on her beam end. They saw her in glimpses, between the lather of tortured foam. Barney thrust his head over the windbreak and tried to see. But the spume stung his eyes shut until he made a lattice of his fingers and peered between them. Then the schooner mounted a crest full in the beam of light and Barney saw the men.

They were tied to the rigging where it met the rail. Nine tiny twisted figures; four on the main rigging, five on the fore. Then a savage comber broke over the derelict, shaking her like Barney's old hound used to kill a coon. When the schooner heaved clear again, there were only four men on each set of shrouds.

Barney gasped. He counted them again. He could not believe the sea had murdered a man before his eyes. He clutched at McCrady's arm.

"One's gone!" he cried.

McCrady nodded without turning his head. A spout of water drained off the visor of his cap and in the reflected light, his face was hard.

Making a megaphone of one hand, the mate bawled: "She's breakin' up fast, Mac. She's trailin' a lot of gear. Look out!"

The Coast Guard boat fought her way around in a great circle. Leary was suddenly up beside Barney, hanging grimly on.

"We can't do a thing," he yelled in Barney's ear, "only maybe watch 'em drown. Can't launch a boat in this sea."

Barney could see that. He didn't say anything, just hung there with his head bent into it. His eyes pained and he knew they were swelling fast. But he couldn't tear himself away.

"Any use radioin' the *Annapolis*?" shouted the mate.

McCrady shook his head. "She won't last. Get out the line-throwing gun."

Leary took the light while the mate broke out the gun. Joe braced himself until the chief put the patrol boat above the schooner, then he shot his line so it fell directly amidships between the two groups of men. Joe took back the floodlight and held it on the hull.

A seaman left the mainshrouds and began to inch along the slippery hull towards the precious line. Barney found himself crying, maybe praying a little; he wasn't sure what he was doing.

Beside him McCrady was watching, too, turning the big brass wheel to keep clear of the wreckage and give the line enough scope. Barney could hear the jangle of the engineroom controls, and feel the boat shudder as the engines were reversed, then slammed ahead. He was soaked and chilled to the bone, but his palms around the brass rail were sweating.

Again and again furry white fingers of foam clawed the seaman edging along the wreck, but he fought them off until he reached the rope. Bunch led a spontaneous cheer when the man wormed back with the line. The men on the wreck waved enthusiastically. Then hope died as a heavy sea swept the ships apart and the line broke.

Bunch turned to Barney. "Get another line below!"

Barney ducked around in the lee of the bridge, waited until a sea washed out the scuppers, then dove down the forward

hatch. It was black below, but Barney didn't need light. He knew where that line would be, where it should be. He learned in ten seconds what McCrady and Bunch had tried for five months to teach him. A place for everything.

Back on deck with the line. Joe shot it again.

"I'm going closer this time," McCrady bawled.

Closer! Gear and wreckage trailing to windward; debris and cargo sprawling in the lee. If one line caught around their propeller . . . ! No need to talk of it; the guardsmen knew.

"Break out the life raft!" ordered McCrady.

**B**ARNEY and Leary tore loose the doughnut-shaped raft. To the end of the thin whipline Joe had shot aboard the wreck, they secured an inch-thick rope and signaled the survivors on the hull to haul it over. The raft was fastened to this inch rope and pulled over to the wreck, but not until the boys had secured another rope for the purpose of hauling it back to the patrol boat.

The sea let them get it almost over, then again she swept the boats apart, and the raft was lost.

"We're licked, Mac!" yelled the mate. "She's goin' to pieces!"

Eight men, prayed Barney, eight men lined up like clay pigeons!

McCrady ordered: "Get Swede and Disher up here!" and when the engineroom crew climbed up beside him, he swung around.

"Any ideas?"

Nobody said anything. Then the Chief told them: "There's one chance—if it will work. She's coming apart, but if we could hold our nose against her keel just long enough . . ." He paused with a shrug.

They all knew what that meant, even Barney.

He stared across at the derelict. She was nearly three times the size of 803, and she was coming to pieces. He watched a massive timber whip loose and lash end

from end in an orgy of freedom. A timber like that would stave through the patrol-boat as though she were an egg shell. *Hold our nose against the keel!* A keel that heaved and squirmed. A keel that might slew sideways and slide over them, or shave the topsides out of 803.

It couldn't be done!

McCrady was jockeying her around to the lee, waiting for their comment. Oleson, the big Swede, wiped the foam and sweat from his viking features. "It might work," he boomed. "I stand by my engines." And he was gone.

McCrady rang for full ahead and scudded downwind, then rolled around and started up in the lee.

"Get out some lines," the mate told Barney and Leary.

"Let's go, sailor," yelled the cook.

Barney hesitated. Then the light caught those eight men, and he plunged sobbing after the cook. The lifeline burned his palms as he worked forward, huddling in terror every time a sea washed over him. He tore off a hatch cover and pulled out a line.

"Tie it around your waist!" advised Leary.

Barney looked up and screamed in fear. The vast hull of the schooner loomed out of the storm before them. He wrapped his arms around a stanchion and looked back. The floodlight almost blinded him, but beneath it he could distinguish the white cap of McCrady, his blue features lighted from below.

The schooner rose and fell with each churning sea, bigger and more menacing. McCrady kept coming closer. Barney could tell each move he made by the shudder of the engines. Ahead, now full ahead! Stop engines! Half ahead. Stop! Astern, full astern!

**B**ARNEY fought himself up into the bow and got a line around his waist and tied himself to the one-pounder. He took every sea now across the face, but it no longer mattered. McCrady was cutting down the distance. Thirty feet, twenty

feet . . . A sea picked up the wreck, lifted it high, higher.

Barney was looking up. It was coming over them, going to drop right smack on the deck of the little Coast Guard boat. He saw it in the brilliant light. Every detail! The green whiskers, the warts of barnacles smothered in foam.

He felt the engines under him shuddering in full reverse. Then the sea suddenly dropped the derelict as though she were too heavy to carry, and when she fell level, McCrady pushed ahead and with a solid bump, the seventy-five footer pushed against the wreck.

The schooner lay across their bow like the top bar of a T. She had to stay like that. If she slewed either way there would be no second attempt. Barney saw a man's head over the sleek bottom. He tossed the weighted end of his line and the man caught it. Barney started to pull, but the man jerked for more scope and Barney paid it out through his free hand. When he felt another jerk, he began to haul in.

The hull was below him when he began pulling, then it started to heave upward. The keel came clear of the water, sawing up the stem of 803. Barney reeled in frantically until he felt the line grow taut and he knew he had a human being on the other end of it. One hand for the ship, the other for himself! But he could not pull in a man with one hand!

He forgot rules, forgot everything, save that living man he could not yet see. He braced himself against the gun and pulled.

He found himself shouting and then Leary was helping him. The wreck towered above them for a moment, then sank back. When they saw the man's head even with the deck, Barney snubbed his end of the line and crawled forward. A wave helped them by washing the man aboard, nearly taking him over again. Barney clung to him and they sloshed down the deck.

The man could not stand, so Barney dragged him to the pilothouse. Disher evolved out of the storm and helped.

Back again to the bow. Leary had cast again. Another man.

Seven men . . .

"The skipper," sobbed the seventh man "His arms are broke!"

Barney slammed out of the wheelhouse and bent double to claw his way along the life line. He heard a hail and turning saw the mate leaning over the windbreak.

"Hurry!" Joe bawled. "We can't hold much longer!"

"There's one more!"

Barney slid his raw palms along the line. Sometimes he had to hold himself back when the deck abruptly fell away before him, then it would rise and become a slippery hill. He reached the gun where Leary had tied himself.

The wreck sawed down the stem of the patrol-boat and they glimpsed the schooner captain tied to his rigging.

In the floodlight his face was cold and set, and he slumped heavily against the rope around his chest. He shook his head—nodding for them to sheer away and save themselves. Barney looked at those limp-hanging arms, and then back to the firm resolute face.

The man on the wreck looked strangely ordinary, like any other man, like a hundred men Barney had seen. Then the face changed and became Barney's own face, and Barney's heart told him what that skipper was feeling.

The man was nodding them away again. McCrady would have courage like that; cold and dispassionate, without heroics. So would be Joe Bunch, and Oleson, even Leary.

"Hurry!" came Joe's hail.

Barney was hurrying. He whipped a line around his chest under the shoulders, and passed the other end to Leary. "I'm going over!"

"You won't make it!" the cook shouted, but he didn't try to stop Barney. He took the line, snapped a bight around the bitt, and braced himself.

**B**ARNEY crawled out on the nose between the chocks. He waited until the sea brought the wreck level with his deck, then he leaped. His feet hit the slime of the bottom and shot from under him,

but his groping hands found the rail and he pulled himself up. He inched along it, hooking his foot in a scupper as a sea tried to shake him off.

The man in the rigging grinned, and wagged his head. There was no use attempting talk. Barney hauled up beside him. He took slack in on his own safety line and made a loop in it. Through that he rove the line with which the seaman was lashed to the shrouds.

Then Barney tried to haul the seaman along the rail towards the stem, but halfway over he knew he would never make it. There wasn't time, and his strength was going fast. He turned his face up into the flood and saw the silhouettes of Leary and Disher outlined on the patrol-boat. Then the shadow of Bunch was there too.

"Jump!" he heard someone shout.

He shook his head. He couldn't jump into that cauldron of foam.

"Cut me loose, boy!" the crippled captain yelled in his ear. "You can't make it!"

A sea began to lift the schooner and turn her over. Barney screamed: "Wrap your legs around me!" Then he scrambled to the slippery edge of the hull and slid down the lee side.

The water closed over his head and he knew they were spinning on the end of the line. He felt the man's legs scissor around his own, and he held on tight. He had no sensation of pull, but soon the water fell away and he could breathe again, and then hands were hauling at them and they were on deck.

"Hang here until we get clear!" the mate shouted in his ear. Barney nodded and lay flat, hugging the stanchions. He felt the engines vibrating in full reverse.

The hull lurched in pursuit as McCrady fought to keep his own boat backing straight. Keeping that T formation. Barney saw the timbers churning out of the wreck and tumbling after them. Then the engines changed and the boat trembled in her length as she went ahead.

Barney tried to close out the sight, but he couldn't. The wreck rushed down on

them, broaching around their quarter. It was close, closer, and then there was nothing ahead but wind and sea and storm. Barney crawled around in the shelter of the forward hatch and crouched there alone. There was a sharp pain in his side. He began to laugh, and then he cried.

Nobody bothered him. Once Leary crawled past him and went down in the galley. After a while he came back up with coffee.

"Come on into the wheelhouse, kid. The schooner captain wants to see you."

"Later," said Barney, "maybe."

"You're all right, sailor," Leary said, and ducked for the wheelhouse.

Barney stood and moved aft. He paused, holding onto the life line and looked into the wheelhouse. In the dim light, he saw the seamen sprawled around on the deck where Joe and Disher were helping make them comfortable. Barney couldn't go in there yet, not until he was sure of himself. He climbed up on the bridge.

The storm was still blowing the same, but it didn't seem so bad now, and it was howling from the stern. McCrady was alone at the wheel. He looked at Barney and grinned, but he made no comment of any kind. Barney moved up closer and looked down over the windbreak. The moon had taken fresh courage and he could see the full length of 803.

Behind, following seas tried to come aboard, but the nimble patrol-boat kept ahead. Barney suddenly understood. Always ready, for anything. He leaned over.

"Say, Chief. About that transfer. I . . ."

McCrady gave that quick smile. "What transfer is that, Barney?"

"Nothing, I guess. Only if it's all the same to you, sir, I'd like to work for my white ticket aboard this boat."

The Chief kept his eyes on the course. He could see the Montauk light now. "I can still pick 'em," he said aloud.

"What's that, sir?"

McCrady grinned. "I said it's okay with me, kid."



The pain in his chest, he realized, was nothing more or less than a prodding rifle

# Sheep Dog

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "White Lady," "Fugitives Three," etc.

In twenty-nine years Woody Sanderson had never missed a fugitive, had never known fear, and had never felt the touch of Death on his shoulder. Then all that was changed, on one snowy night when the ice was too thin and the hunted man too clever

**W**OODY SANDERSON had been sheriff of Talbot County for twenty-nine years. That proved two things—or should have: First, that he was probably the only sheriff in the state who had held office that length of time and was therefore a competent officer; and second, that he was too old to start out on

a manhunt with winter only a few hours away.

People were often fooled by Woody Sanderson, particularly strangers. He did not look at all like the sheriffs you see in the movies, and not much like the ones you read about in books and magazines. Perhaps that was another reason why he had held office for so long.

He shaved only twice a week, with the result that about two-thirds of the time his heavy-jowled face was covered by a thick scrub of hair. Once, he had grown a beard but his political opponents had seized upon it as proof that anyone who looked so much like Santa Claus couldn't make a good sheriff, so he had promptly reverted to his old schedule of shaving each Wednesday and Sunday morning.