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THE SCOUT IN WAR-TIME.

THE BURGESS HILL TROOP UNDER THE RED ENSIGN.

The broad white road has dwindled to a lane, and after a mile or so of thirsty existence expires in a rough field, and here, with the sea a couple of hundred yards away, is our station.

A row of trim whitewashed cottages, gardens where chrysanthemums flourish, clothes lines tight and Navy fashion on scraped and varnished poles, and, on the western side, the big semaphore mast where flies "The Flag." Here, on a lonely wind-swept coast, we are helping the coastguard to keep watch and ward over our English shores.

All along the foreshore, for miles, a bank has been thrown up and planted with tamarisk, to protect, in some measure, the fields and their crops. Everywhere are evidences of the power of the off-sea winds, stunted trees leaning tipsily toward the north-east, hedges a beaten mass of "gnarled and withen thorn," and on the western shore great wooden skeletons of ancient groynes, for the sea encroaches here, nibbling a bit here and there every year, the only Power that can take a yard of our well-held island.

Eastward are the bungalows on Selsey Bill. South-west are the dim heights of the Isle of Wight spoken of here as "The Island"; westward the broad channel between "The Island" and the mainland, leading to Portsmouth Harbour, where lies the nest and cradle of our Navy—docks and repairing slips, reserve ships and coal, guns and magazines, which it is our duty and honour to guard.

We patrol day and night in our turns, with a coastguard, six hours at a stretch, over shingle and wet sand: our orders—to watch and report on everything that is seen. Is it a bit of floating wreckage? Out come the glasses. It may be a periscope. Is it a full-rigged ship beating up Channel, then her rig is noted and her direction taken. Sometimes, as happened the other day, an aeroplane comes buzzing out of Portsmouth, then the Scout, having noted her floats, trots in two miles to the Chief Officers' Watch Room with the written message, "Seaplane going east passed here at two o'clock," and when after a steep dive the plane comes down and sits pitching like a wounded duck on the sea our Scout repeats his journey with a new message.

Our coastguards are a fine lot, heavy of body and hairy throated, all good specimens of our Navy men. They are clad in blue "jumper," with canvas cross belt which sustains a leather case with the rocket flare for night use, a holster with a big Navy revolver, and little pouches from which peep the venomous leaden tips of the cartridges. On our beat is an ancient watch tower a hundred feet high, and during the day a part of our six hours is spent on its six-foot square leaded roof, which is reached by a rickety spiral staircase. From here we get a grand view with our telescopes, but it is a cold and draughty spot in November. Out at sea can be seen the long grey shapes of the destroyers that patrol the Channel; they go tearing along on all sorts of delightfully mysterious errands, day and night keeping their part with us in watch and ward; and when you think of our Navy and boast of our island security, give a thought to our men these rough nights, for, even here in these comparatively sheltered seas, when the gales blow the seas break completely over these little warships. Literally all that can be seen is the mast and superstructure forward: the rest is a smother of white foam. Life must be a succession of almost unendurable discomforts at sea at this time of year, and they must keep station in all weathers.

At dusk the coastwise lights begin to blink, three blinks and then three seconds eclipse: that is the Nab lightship. Three sharp flashes like a signal lantern, then a couple of seconds' darkness, that is either the Warner or the light on Bembridge Point. Then one of the Portsmouth Harbour forts lights up the grandest light that surely man ever lit; we are twelve miles away, but we can see its golden path right across the Harbour. This is a fixed light, and looks like a low-hung sun. Then the searchlights begin to work—long white fingers poking and prying into the innermost heavens in search of the enemy's aircraft. They swing to and fro and up and down, shewing up little clouds and drifts of vapour that look like feathers. At times they will appear to find an object and remain at rest, and instantly two or three wandering fingers will concentrate on one spot. Then one will give a derisive little waggle, and away they fly to resume their march across the sky. Then the big searchlight that sweeps the sea swings slowly round, lighting up the windows in the bungalows and flooding the coast; nearer it swings, and then we stand lit by a golden glare, the shadows velvet black, the feathery tamarisks edged with light, then away, and we are left blinking and dazzled as the great light goes searching coast and sea.

Sometimes if you are watching you will see, out to seaward, a little white spurt of flame, and a second or so after will come the boom of a gun. The first gun heard in war-time makes the heart stand still a beat. Suppose it should be the first of a thunderous broadside let loose on an enemy's ship! But it is only the destroyer patrol firing a gun to warn some straying merchantman to stop and be inspected, for Portsmouth takes no chances in war-time.

Our quarters are a four-roomed cottage, our table where we feed a couple of planks, our tablecloth is newspaper, but we eat, oh! how we eat! Our food is cooked by one of us, no matter who, we all take turns, and our amateur efforts are not scorned after six hours by the open sea. We sleep wrapped in our blankets on the floor, and, though at first it was hard to our hip-bones, after a night or two, when at midnight the patrol returns, the sleeper, whose turn it is to relieve the incomer wants a lot of raising, but rubs his eyes and goes out into the wind-swept night to his duty.

At nine o'clock in the morning the Chief hands to the Scout on duty at the Watch Room a bundle rolled up and loosely knotted: this is "The Flag." The Scout then clips it to the halyard and at the word hoists it to the truck on the sixty-foot mast. A pull on the halyard, the knot is released, and out flies the old . . . Ensign—the white flag with the red cross with the Jack in the corner—the symbol of our power on the seas. A salute from the Scout, and another day has begun.

There are no grumblers and no room for slackers and whiners in the Burgess Hill Troop in war-time. We are doing our little bit. *What are you doing?*