

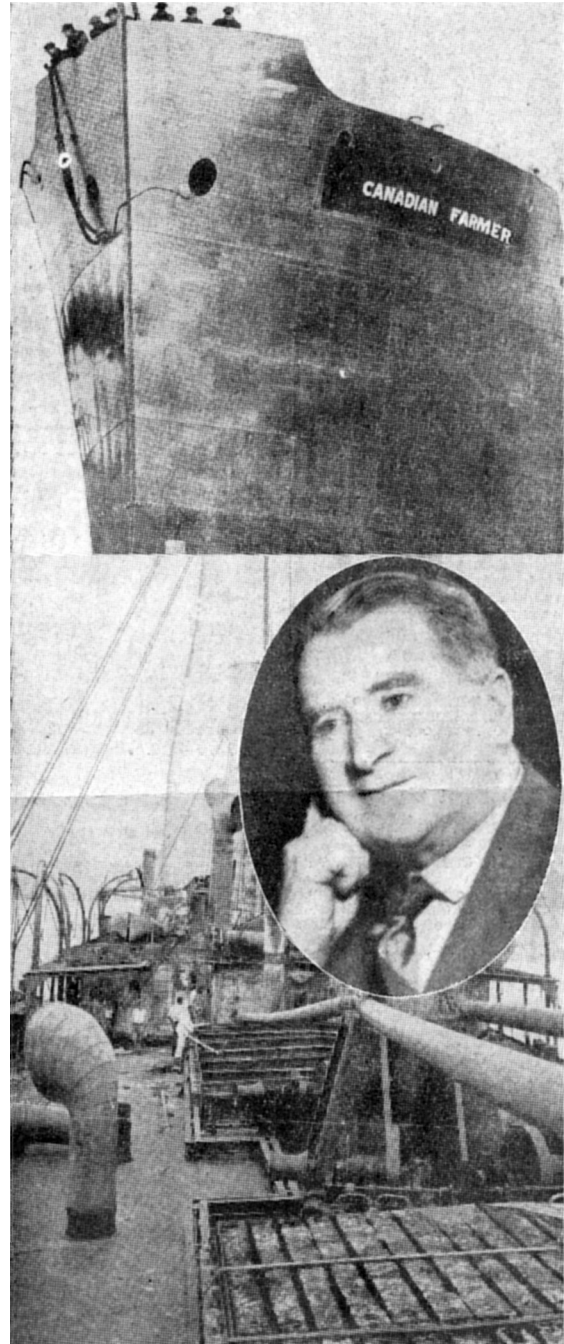
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By C.H.J. Snider

FIGHTING FIRE WITH A HAYSTACK

It was intended to tell about Defiance herself today, in succession to Defiance's granddaughter of last week, but something better presented itself, and Defiance has until next Saturday to powder her nose. But we hasten to reassure Mr. Fred Kirk and his many friends that he is still alive and kicking – quite properly, too, because the impression was given that he, the last master of the Defiance had, died in the last year. Mr. Kirk was the Defiance's last master, but it was his brother Albert who died of pneumonia on active service just before the Armistice. He was with the Canadian Highland unit of which a member was crucified by the Germans against a barn door. Mr. Roland Kirk, a third brother, and owner of the Night Hawk, Defiance's granddaughter, was misunderstood when he spoke of his brother Albert's death. There were six Kirk brothers and two of them were in the last war, Albert and Wilfrid. Like his big brother Fred, Wilfrid also survives.

EVERY working sailor dreams of a nice bit of salvage, just as every landlubber used to dream of winning the Irish Sweep. Salvage to the sailor is not junk collecting but cash collecting, reaping the reward allowed by law for saving ship and cargo from destruction.

Captain W. Larmour, jovial master mariner suggesting Winston Churchill without his cigar or Maxim Litvinoff with one, is a member of the Shellbacks Club. After the weekly toasts to "The King" and "the Fighting Force" had been quaffed, Captain Larmour told how his salvage dream came true after twenty years and then six more.



Capt. W. Larmour - himself, the bow of his "floating carton" and the deck of the "ZACA" after he put the fire out.

He was in command of the *Canadian Farmer*, which might have been named the Canadian Haystack without offense. She sat so high out of the water when the cargo was out of her that he nicknamed her the Floating Carton. A last war job, built high to get cargo space on a keel limited by the length of the St. Lawrence canal locks.

HOT TIME IN PORT OF SPAIN

Captain Larmour got her down to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and was threatened with the loss of her when the big American merchantman *Zaca*, loaded with 10,000 tons of coal and a lot of fuel oil, took fire. She was lying ahead of the *Farmer*, and Capt. Larmour's first task was to get his haystack clear of her.

She burned furiously all night, and in the morning the commander of a British cruiser offered to put her out of mischief by sinking her by shellfire. That meant spreading the harbor with burning oil, which is not good for the health of floating cartons so Capt. Larmour offered to tow the torch to a beach where she could incinerate in seclusion. The navy man and Lloyd's agent agreed with alacrity and Capt Larmour succeeded in getting a line on the *Zaca's* forecastle head, which was free from flame, and tried to turn her around.

He had never done any towing, which is separate branch of steam-boating, as he soon found. If you tied a carton at one end of a wharf with a long line and tried to move the wharf away by getting the carton in motion you know what would happen; the box would move until the rope drew tight, and then it would swing in to the wharf on the radius of the rope.

That is what happened to the *Canadian Farmer*. She only measured 3,400 tons, and the cargo was out of her. When the strain came she slowly turned around and charged the burning *Zaca*. Capt Larmour slipped his line and missed the stern of the wreck by a split second.

HAY STACK AS FIRE ENGINE

But his "Wharf" was now slightly in motion, her lines having been cast off from the shore, and trade-wind and tide doing a little work, so he tried again, and after several awkward effort, got her at least clear of the harbor shipping when his tow line parted. Then he told Lloyds' man that he was through. If he did anything else it would be an attempt at salvage, on his own account, not an effort to remove a menace.

"Go to it," said Lloyd's.

The *Haystack* got alongside, the weather side, of course, to keep clear of the flames. Murphy, a Liverpool Irishman, was chief in the *Farmer*, and the captain told him what he was going to try to do. Murphy sang McAndrews Hymn to the black gang, and they rigged every piece of hose there was in the ship, and played it on the flames. It swept off the surface burning, and what ran below formed great clouds of steam on the red hot plates and choked down the fire in the hold. But still the flames shot up through the open skylights and ventilators.

RED HOT IRISHMAN

They rigged Murphy in a double suit of oilskins and swung him aboard on a cargo boom,

with a hose line in his hands and more hoses playing on him, following him up as he stumbled from skylight to ventilator. He closed all the skylights and turned all the ventilators away from the wind, and came back burnt like a grilled herring, but still full of fight.

They thought they had her beaten but the oil down below, boiling in its steel tank, burst like a geyser, and the battle had to be fought all over again.

Above the roar of the flames Capt. Larmour was conscious of another roar, the *Farmer's* own exhaust pouring Heaven knows how many hundred of gallons a minute into the sea. Idea! Pump out a couple of ballast tanks on the side next *Zaco* and list the *Farmer* over until that exhaust spills on board the wreck! Thank Heaven she WAS as high as a haystack!

In a very short time the *Zaco* was flooded with water two feet deep on deck and nothing but steam was coming up from below. The oil fires were completely smothered, the coal kept on smouldering as it would till it was dug out. Then the *Farmer* inched the wreck in towards the beach, and when the tide rose inched her in farther, and left her sitting on the bottom, safe for stevedores to work at.

Capt. Larmour then filed a marine "protest" to protect the *Farmer's* rights, and went on his way. There were no facilities in Port of Spain at the time for communicating with the owners as to a salvage action, but when he got back to Montreal they got the best legal talent they could and slapped in a writ for \$600,000 salvage. After the Great War shipping prices were phenomenally high and coal in Trinidad was about worth its weight in platinum.

SIX YEARS MORE FIGHTING

It took six years to settle that suit. There were all sort of bear-traps, pitfalls and landslides to avoid. The *Zaco* was owned by the United States Shipping Board. Care had to be taken to avoid suing a government, or between governments, for governments just don't pay salvage. To give them credit they seldom try to collect for it, and in that way the coast-guard service is sometimes abused. But the bottom had fallen out of ship values when the case came to trial, and it became difficult to prove that the salvaged *Zaco* was worth anything. Capt. Larmour, Chief Murphy, and others made a half a dozen trips to New York and as his pay went on and he had a full expense account he didn't mind that, and as it turned out he gave full value for his expenses plus.

He wondered what a show he would make in the witness box, but junior counsel for his company, a smart young lawyer who knew the sea like a book, put him at his ease with this advice: "You know the sea. You know your job. These people against us don't know either." So opposing counsel's questions proved boomerangs.

WHITTLING DOWN

Finally the court decided that the *Zaco* and cargo had been salvaged to the extent of 55 per cent of value. Capt. Larmour had heard that an offer of \$125,000, had been made for the wreck as she lay on the beach, and by use of this knowledge his own counsel pinned down the

admission that she did have some value. The court fixed \$33,000 salvage award and defense and plaintiff counsel and witnesses all went to lunch together as genially as if they were all splitting it. But the shipping corporation appealed this, and a new trial found a loophole for the cargo. It had not been “libelled” separately at the time in Trinidad. It had been consigned to the government of Argentina and of many owners, only one or two small ones could be found. So the award shrank to \$15,000 for the *Zaco* herself.

Of this, \$10,000 went to the corporation owning the *Farmer*, which seemed very lucky for them, but was fair enough, for no *Farmer*, no salvage. Five thousand dollars was divided among the crew who took the risks and did the work. Capt. Larmour got \$1700 – besides his numerous enjoyable trips to New York. Chief Murphy and his Second a bonus of six month’s pay and the crew of the *Farmer* a month’s extra pay per man. Everybody seemed satisfied with the way the golden jackpot at the end of the rainbow shelled out.