

pilgrims on the "rock"

by fred nabkey
"no. one pilgrim"



Wrapped up in the ashpile dumping ground where thousands of our parents once crossed the threshold to this America is a history, partly comic at that, that should shed new darts of light on the unsung drama of war as viewed from the Broadway side of Manhattan.

The Rock, really a misnomer unless you consider clinkers as being rocks, has a genuine earthy history that in part is one of the major spokes of this country. But it is not a Charles and Mary Beard history that interests us at this point. This tome is a report of what happened when the first Coast Guardsman stepped aboard to the first pungent odor of creosole and the pre-shortage butter of the Island's caterer.

The "pilgrim," he's the first Coast Guardsman who didn't like the looks of the Island, was transferred there because someone at headquarters thought that this would be a good place to let the future sailors air their gripes in the tranquility of New York Harbor's sewage and coal-burning tugs' whistles. That someone was correct.

His presumption was a stroke of genius. The first "pilgrims" ate topside with the immigrants and learned how to gripe in forty different languages. Where else on earth could such a thing happen, excepting where the Bronx kisses Queens on the borderline?

The "pilgrims" worked hard during the day and looked for their turkeys in the hinterlands of Central Park at night. Pilgrims just got to have turkey.

Soon the island prospered. New cots were purchased for the men. Time flew on and the

water bugs added their newest hash mark. New coffee urns (that should be spelled some other way) were put into hasty use. Someone decided to make cooks out of the Water Tenders and the boys began getting messes that were really something. In fact, the colitis ward has several interesting case histories on hand.

At first raw material poured in—raw material poured right out. Things had to be done in a hurry. Some men were without adequate uniforms and were forced to go on liberty in civilian clothes. How they hated it.

Training was inadequate due to lack of Training Personnel, and some of the boys learned semaphore from the girls in the Battery. How to handle a line (lead or otherwise) was also learned in the Battery.

It was about this time that certain of the opposite sex were beginning to lim on to names according to the branch of service they adored—i.e., Coast Guard Mary, Dogface Peggy, Navy Sal, and USO Liz—she couldn't make up her mind.

Also a band was formed. Incidentally, this first group was banished to a mud flat in Louisiana and for a very good reason. They didn't sound so good, but the cajuns couldn't tell the difference.

After the Boatswain Mates had lashed the men into doing all the work, it was decided by headquarters to send a C.O. on the job to line up training for thousands of new guardsmen. . . . By that time, all the pilgrims, but me, had left for bigger and better hunting—at sea.