



# The Cutter

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## **EDWIN EMERY- RENAISSANCE MAN AN INSPIRATION TO EARLY CADETS - AND TO ALL OF US**

“Pardon me. I have grown not only old and gray in the service of our country, but now nearly blind as well.”

### **Edwin Emory**



The quote is from George Washington. These words came as Washington reached into his pocket for his eyeglasses as he delivered remarks in March 1783 known as the Newburgh Address. The rest of the address was probably not even necessary, because once Washington pulled out those spectacles his listeners were too ashamed to continue on their intended track. His audience included many of the officers with whom he had served throughout the Revolutionary War; but the trouble was, by then the war was almost over, and many American soldiers had not been paid for a

very long time, and they were quite vexed at Congress. Washington was addressing them because he had heard rumblings that some of the officers were suggesting that the army should, in effect, flex its muscles, by way of suggesting that Congress make satisfying the army’s grievances a higher priority than all the other problems the country faced.

Washington’s gentle reminder to those present that his own sacrifices for their country were at least as significant as their own put to rest a very early threat to what are now long-established precedents for the civilian control of the military and the neutral and apolitical stance of the military in relation to the running of the country.

(Continued on page 2)

We should note that Washington at Newburgh was not only reminding his listeners of his own contributions during the Revolution; he was also in effect reminding them of another, older precedent: that of Cincinnatus, a Roman general who was called out of the field, away from his plow, to take charge of the armies of Rome to defeat an enemy and save the country. The important thing about Cincinnatus is that after he fought the war and saved the country, he immediately and voluntarily gave up the power he had wielded, went right back to his field and his plow, and resumed the ordinary business of his civilian life. Washington knew the power of using a historical example to remind people of their present responsibilities, to hold up a model to remind us of our priorities.

From jumping back from Washington to Cincinnatus let us now jump forward from Washington to a certain soldier fighting for the Union in the Civil War. This is a jump of fully eighty years – but there is a connection.

This particular Civil War soldier hailed from Sanford, Maine. He went to local schools, then graduated from Bowdoin College in 1861. He started out teaching school, but then enlisted in the army the summer of 1863, went through basic training in Portland, joined the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine Regiment in Virginia, and embarked on army life in the fall. There was a lot to get used to, from basic camp life, to life on the march, to bayonet drill, to picket duty. He went through some bracing early skirmishes before winter set in, hearing for the first time bullets whistling past his ears, and seeing some of his comrades fall around him, wounded and killed. But our soldier learned fast, and was promoted from private directly to sergeant, so that by the beginning of the next campaign season in the spring of 1864 he was serving as one of the color bearers for the regiment.

This was an era when the color bearer served as a crucial focus for the unit. Communications were difficult in the midst of battle, especially at close quarters, when the din of

the fighting prevented hearing bugle calls or drum rolls, and the heavy smoke of all the firing required some very visible symbol, so that men could literally rally round the flag. This of course meant that the color bearer was often deliberately the target of the fighters on the other side, so the attrition rate for color bearers was high.

That spring the Army of the Potomac was newly under the overall command of Ulysses S. Grant, who meant to hit the other side hard and keep the pressure on without release. A week's worth of battles served to press the Confederates through and out of what was called the Wilderness; this was fighting conducted hand-to-hand on the most difficult, broken and densely-wooded ground, so that men from the same squad could barely see each other or coordinate their movements with the regiment, much less have any idea what the enemy was doing. Having fought their way

**Why should we listen to yet one more story of a common Civil War soldier?**

through the Wilderness, the men of the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine and the Army of the Potomac were pressed onward by Grant to try to overtake and pin down Lee's forces. The next clash is known as the Battle of Spottsylvania Courthouse. The ground was more open, but the Confederates had enough time to build considerable fortifications: log, stone and earth walls from which to fight behind. In one area these fortifications bulged out into the shape of a "Mule Shoe"; and where this mule shoe curved at an outward corner it became known as the "Bloody Angle." Because this is where, in May of 1864, a considerable part of the Union Army of the Potomac attacked the Confederate defenders, beginning a battle that went on at the fiercest rate for nearly a solid day. In the van was the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine, and our color bearer was of course at the very front.

(Continued on page 3)

The fighting here was so heavy that sometimes soldiers were on opposite sides of the same log wall, firing through the chinks and stabbing through at each other with bayonets. Men would try to climb over from one side or the other, only to be shot, stabbed or clubbed back. The firing was so heavy that one tree in the vicinity with an 18 inch diameter was cut off by the volume of musket balls and was felled during the battle.

And our color bearer fell as well. At one point he was in advance of almost any others, took a musket ball in the thigh, passed his flag to a comrade, and ended up on the ground. The tide of battle swept over him, with first Union forces moving past him, then Confederate soldiers driving to take back the ground on which he lay. At some point he was shot again, in the neck. Finally he was left in no-man's-land, wounded, thirsty, still endangered, lying through the night and into the next morning, before he was finally reached by skirmishers and able to crawl back to his own lines.

**A man of wide-ranging interests; a man very conscious of his duty.**

He went to a hospital; was eventually sent home to recuperate; returned to Virginia in January 1865 and was promoted to Lieutenant for his bravery; and, due to his lingering limp, spent the rest of the war serving in the Ambulance Corps, trying to serve other soldiers wounded as he had been.

After the war our soldier went back to New England and resumed his teaching career, spending the next twelve years serving as principal at six high schools in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. At the end of his career he was serving as an insurance agent, before his death in 1895 at age 59.

All very nice, you say; but, however interesting his tale, why should we listen to yet one more story of a common Civil War soldier? Because in 1877 that soldier was chosen by Sumner Kimball, head of the Revenue Cutter Service and a Bowdoin grad himself, to form the faculty of the Revenue Cutter School of Instruc-

tion, the forerunner of the U. S. Coast Guard Academy. Our Union soldier was named Edwin Emery, and in my opinion we should all know more about him than we do.

A few relevant characteristics.

#1: Edwin Emery was a man of catholic interests. He was called upon to teach every academic subject to the cadets of that era. The Academy at that time was located on training ships homeported in New Bedford, MA, first the DOBBIN, then the CHASE. The ships officers provided training in the professional subjects such as navigation and shiphandling, but Emery taught them everything else: from Composition and Rhetoric to History to Philosophy to International Law; and from Algebra to Geometry to Trigonometry to Steam Engineering. Every Revenue Cutter Service cadet of every class from 1877 to 1890 received his whole college education, barring professional training, from this one man.

#2: Edwin Emery was a man very conscious of his duty. Given the service's small size at the time, the cadets he taught went on to form the bulk of the service's leadership through the critical period when the Academy was temporarily disestablished by Congress from 1890-95, then re-established. Those cadets included a future Commandant, Ellsworth P. Bertholf, who would almost single-handedly fend off attempts by the Navy and Congress to do away with the service entirely, both before and after it emerged as the Coast Guard in 1915. I would assume that the influence of their single college instructor, Edwin Emery, on those cadets extended not only to his academic contributions but also to the leadership example he set for them, along with the ship's officers. For Edwin Emery was not drafted into the army for the Civil War; in fact, he volunteered to go as a substitute for a college acquaintance who was drafted. He began as a private, but agreed to be promoted over longer-serving men, despite their resentment, because he understood that was

how he could contribute the most. He accepted his flag and bore it into battle despite knowing that doing so radically increased his likelihood of death. And after recovery he returned to service -- although it would have been easy, given his serious wounds, to simply wait out the end of the war -- because he considered it his duty to help finish the job.

#3: Edwin Emery was a life-long learner, and a teacher dedicated to passing along his knowledge to all who would learn. Phi Beta Kappa at Bowdoin as an undergraduate, he took the opportunity during his recuperation from his wounds to take his Master of Arts degree from his alma mater. During the war -- as if fighting battles, standing duty and learning to perform the duties of each new position to which he was promoted was not enough -- Emery kept a daily journal and also wrote newspaper columns for two newspapers in Maine, to educate the folks back home on the soldiers' experiences. Immediately after the war, while working as a clerk in D.C., he taught Sunday School to recently freed slaves, and was willing to go south for the Freedmen's Bureau to bring broader educational opportunities to the many African Americans who had been denied them so long. His twelve years as principal and instructor in six high schools in three states made him well qualified for his teaching position at the School of Instruction. In addition to his teaching of the cadets, Emery visited classrooms in the local New Bedford schools to help the teachers there encourage their students. And he gave public lectures in the evenings on a variety of topics for the benefit of the general citizenry.

#4: Edwin Emery was a man who kept his aesthetic sense alive. The period of Emery's army service is particularly instructive in this area. Army life could be brutal, degrading, having a coarsening effect on even the best men. A great deal of drinking, swearing, gambling, and, when the opportunity presented itself, fornicating went on. However we may chuckle at this,

the fact is that the contrast with their previous lives made this a profoundly wrenching and disorienting experience for many of the men. It was all too easy to entirely lose one's bearings, one's connections to the higher aspects of life, and simply become a dirty, lousy, grunting, profane fighting animal. But in his journal, in letters to friends and family, in poetry that he sent home for his scrapbook, and in his newspaper columns we see how hard Edwin Emery fought to keep that link to a finer sensitivity.

**Edwin Emery was a life-long learner; a man who kept his aesthetic sense alive.**

Here is Emery writing in February of 1864:

"This is a most lovely day. The sun is shining brightly, not a cloud can be seen, the air is still, only now and then a soft, gentle breeze sways the tops of the evergreen pines, or rustles the decayed leaves of their deciduous neighbors; and, though it is mid-winter, I am very comfortable writing without my overcoat. The cawing of crows, the occasional 'peck' of the woodpecker, the chirping of other smaller birds that I see hopping about in the branches above, the few patches of snow not yet melted, and this clear sunlight and mild air, remind me forcibly of the days of our Northern spring, when the pelting of our wintry storms, or the chill of our March winds, have been succeeded by April showers, and Nature begins to smile beneath the life-giving rays of the sun."

Those are not the words of a man who has given up the fight for continued decency despite the most brutal challenges.

(Concluded on page 5)

From Cincinnatus, to George Washington, to Edwin Emery -- to you. Let us remember Washington's twin principles: to look back to history for models for the type of people we should be, and how we should behave, today; and that selfless devotion to duty is a particular example that should never go out of fashion. So, along with Edwin Emery: be interested in everything; try to keep learning as much as you can, and pass it on to others when appropriate; stay open to your finer aesthetic sensibilities; and never forget that fulfilling your duty to something larger than yourself is what characterizes the Great Soul.

Captain R. C. Ayer, USCG

Adapted from keynote address on the occasion of the installation of new members into the Alpha Lambda Delta freshman honor society, USCGA Chapter, 6 Dec 2005.

Captain Ayer is a member of the Permanent Commissioned Teaching Staff in the Humanities Department at the United States Coast Guard Academy.

Research about Edwin Amery was funded in part by The Foundation for Coast Guard History and by you, our members and contributors.

### WORLD WAR I CLAIM

From verbal and written sources, I had always believed that the Coast Guard had the largest percentage of deaths in WW I. I thought I'd check the facts. Using data from several sources, it turns out not to be true. The Marines had the greatest casualty rate. People forget they were fighting in the trenches with the Army. The following table proves the point.

	Total	Deaths	Percent
Army	4,057,101	50,510	1.24%
Navy	599,051	431	0.07%
USMC	78,839	2,461	3.12%
USCG	8,835	111	1.26%

So where did the belief come from? Early Navy Department figures included the Marines. Then the Coast Guard would have the long believed claim . By Captain Gene Davis.

### MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

From time to time we are asked about our membership, how many and where do they live. We are very careful not to divulge any personal information nor do we market our membership list as is the case with so many organizations. However to provide you our members with an overview, below are the membership statistics state-by-state including two territories:

Alabama	16	Alaska	12
Arizona	6	California	42
Colorado	3	Connecticut	23
Delaware	1	District Columbia	1
Florida	43	Georgia	5
Hawaii	3	Idaho	1
Illinois	1	Indiana	1
Kansas	1	Louisiana	2
Maryland	16	Massachusetts	30
Maine	2	Michigan	7
Minnesota	2	Missouri	1
Nevada	1	New Jersey	9
New Mexico	2	New York	14
North Carolina	21	Ohio	9
Oregon	18	Pennsylvania	7
Puerto Rico	1	Rhode Island	4
South Carolina	3	Tennessee	4
Texas	13	Vermont	1
Virginia	43	Virgin Islands	1
Washington	45	Wisconsin	1

Thus there are 37 states represented by 416 individuals. This success has been achieved solely through all of you acting like members of the Beach Patrol, passing the word to your friends.

In the membership listed above, there are 64 who have become life members and another 31 who have committed to become life members by paying \$100 per year for 5 years.

Our gratitude goes to each of you. Your confidence in our efforts is deeply appreciated. Together we are making a difference

## **LIFE AND DEATH ON THE GREENLAND PATROL 1942**

**By Thaddeus D Novak**

**Edited by P.J.Capelotti**

**University Press of Florida**

I take you back to the week in 1942. The cutters NANOK, NATSEK, and BLUEBIRD are laboring in the heavy seas and blizzard conditions of a violent North Atlantic storm as they struggle across the Labrador Sea in hope of making it back to Boston in time for Christmas. NANOK and NATSEK are two of the ten sturdy wooden fishing trawlers hastily converted to Arctic combat cutter by RADM Edward "Iceberg" Smith to meet the arduous demands of the "Greenland Patrol." These husky little vessels with their ice resistant hulls and proven ability to shoulder the harsh weather of the high latitudes became early stalwarts of the rapidly expanding efforts to keep Greenland out of enemy hands during WWII. Their hull shape and functional lines quickly earned them the nickname "wooden shoe."

Back to our story. NANOK and NATSEK were completing a six month plus deployments to Greenland and were battling their way home for a much deserved rest and refit. Their voyage was to take them from Narsarsuaq, Greenland to Boston through the Straits of Belle Isle. Their transit was challenged by heavy weather, blinding snow, high seas, and icebergs. In an interview after war, the CO of NANOK, Magnus G. Magnusson, recalls his young crew fighting "cold weather, ice, fog, snowstorms...[at times] standing in water up to their armpits...water that had a temperature of 34 degrees...I saw them hang on with one hand and break ice with the other, 20 out of 24 hours, in a 65-mile-per-hour gale, with the ship on her beam ends...." In the early morning hours of 17 December, the little cutters and their tired crews closed on the Straits of Belle Isle as the heavy snow fall reduced visibility to near zero. NANOK and NATSEK were pitching violently and their crews

were in the seventeenth hour of chipping ice and shouldering the sea. Radio antennas had long been swept away or iced over and communication was reduced to signal light or shouting over the roar of the gale. Before leading the small squadrons through the Straits of Belle Isle. NANOK gave two blasts on her horn. The call was answered by a single flash of a white light from NATSEK. This would be the last anyone would ever see of the NATSEK and her crew...this December morning would bring the death of a wooden shoe...her crew would not be home for Christmas.

Because of the Coast Guard Festival in Grand Haven, most of us who stand guard on the North Coast are familiar with the tragic loss of the cutter ESCANABA and her exploits with the Greenland Patrol. While NATSEK's sinking would not be the impetus for a lasting memorial of the magnitude of the Coast Guard Festival, she is remembered on a plaque in the Bertholf Plaza at the United States Coast Guard Academy along with the many other units of Greenland Patrol. However, NATSEK's tragic end also has a unique Great Lakes connection. We know many of the details of that fateful night because of an illegal diary kept by a young seaman from Detroit named Thaddeus Nowakowski. I say illegal, because diaries were strictly forbidden during the war in fear that information they contained might help the enemy if the vessel was sunk or captured...Seaman Nowakowski, "missed the memo." Fortunately, this breach of OPSEC has given us a marvelous glimpse into life on the Greenland Patrol through the eyes of young, scared, lonely, non-rate.

This review provided by Captain Robert L. Desh, USCG. Royalties from the sale of this book will be provided to the Foundation for Coast Guard History. We are indebted to P.J. Capelotti for his generosity.

## **THE 1954 HISTORIC ARCTIC ADVENTURE OF THE NORTHWIND.**

**By Phil Jaffe**

**Third Millennium Publishing**

**Tempe, AZ**

**ISBN1-929381-30-1**

This is the personal story of a young Coast-Guardsman on his first trip to a land seen by few until then. It is also the historical account of traversing a Northwest Passage sought by great explorers for centuries. Phil Jaffe provides us with both emotion and history in the details he provides of his experience. The volume contains dozens of color photographs never before published and many maps and charts accurately depicting the areas of greatest interest. The exploration, scientific studies and new charts provided by this adventure were critical in later passages by icebreakers and submarines. This is another must-read in the evolving chronicle of Coast Guard history.

## **SEARCH FOR INFORMATION -SARWET-**

In 1971 at the San Francisco Air Station, a new concept was born, SARWET, the forerunner of today's rescue swimmers. CDR Eugene Baumann is looking for photos, clippings, certificates, anything related to the program. He can be reached at 35739 Coy Creek Road, Gold Beach, OR 97444. The material will be collated and forwarded to the CG Historian.

## **MOVING ?**

On page 5 we have shown the geographic distribution of our membership. There have been many more but we don't know where they are today. By the very nature of the Coast Guard, many people are transferred at frequent intervals. After they retire many cannot get out of the habit of moving every two years, so they pack up and go to another new experience. To the Foundation they are lost. We don't know where they are because they haven't told us. Don't be a lost soul, When you move tell us.

## **Grosse Ile U. S. Customs Border Patrol Memories**

**By Joel R. Swanson**

It was a typical midsummer Sunday afternoon in 1943 with clear skies and a brisk breeze blowing from the northwest, when the phone rang. When my mother picked up the phone to say "Hello," the caller immediately started talking.

"He's done it again!" she said. "My son capsized his sailboat again and needs to be rescued!" Verifying who had capsized and that the boat was located a few hundred yards off of Grosse Ile light, my mother informed my dad that he was needed for yet another rescue of Robert Taylor. This was of no surprise to my dad, as he knew that Robert was not the best of sailors, but then, who didn't capsize a few times while learning to sail.

Why did Mrs. Taylor call our house for help? Because my father was a U. S. Customs Border Patrol officer and we lived in the Grosse Ile Customs Patrol house at 19757 Park Lane. The 38foot picket boat that my dad used for patrolling was docked in front of the Lancaster's home next to our house. So if my dad was available, he was expected to assist the islanders that ran into trouble on the water.

Being Sunday, a day that my dad might not normally be out on patrol, my sister and I volunteered to help, as it was normally a two-man job handling the 38 foot picket boat. Down at the dock we untied the boat, dad maneuvered it out of the slip, and we headed up the river the quarter mile or so to the lighthouse. There we found the sailboat on its side with Robert swimming next to it in the water. As we approached the capsized sailboat, I took over the helm and my dad and sister went up to the bow to rescue Robert and to secure a line onto the sailboat to tow it back to a dock. It was a flawless operation as we secured the towline to a cleat, until it was time to get Robert aboard. The problem was, he refused

**E-MAIL OR POSTAL SERVICE?**

We have been trying to provide each of you a hard copy of *The Cutter*. Recent increases in mail rates, increases in membership, more people having access to the internet, have all shown the benefit of e-mail where possible. If you want digital, send an e-mail to fred@fcgh.org with the subject "e-mail". We will do the rest. Hard copies will continue to the remainder of you.

**DIGITAL OR HARD COPY?**

to climb aboard. It seemed that, in good survival technique, he had taken off his dungaree pants and did not want my teen-age sister to see him in his skivvies. We all had a good laugh, and resolved the problem by having my sister go below in the cabin and turn her back until he was aboard and had donned rain gear that my dad had aboard the boat. My sister made full use of the experience by telling everyone in school that she saw Robert Taylor in his underpants. Of course, they all assumed she was referring to the movie actor.

**The U. S. Customs Service**

The history of the U. S. Customs Service dates to the founding of our country. After declaring its independence in 1776, our struggling young nation found itself on the brink of bankruptcy. Responding to the urgent need for revenue, the First Congress passed and President George Washington signed the Tariff Act of July 4, 1789, which authorized the collection of duties on imported goods. It was called "the second Declaration of Independence" by the news media of that era. Four weeks later, on July 31, the fifth act of Congress established Customs and its ports of entry.

For nearly 125 years Customs funded virtually the entire government, and paid for the nation's early growth and infrastructure. The territories of Louisiana, Oregon, Florida and Alaska were purchased; the National Road from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, West Virginia, was constructed; and the Transcontinental Railroad stretched from sea-to-sea. Customs collections built the nation's lighthouses, the U.S. military and naval academies, the City of Washington and much more. The new nation that once teetered on the edge of

bankruptcy was now solvent. By 1835, Customs revenues alone had reduced the national debt to zero.

Did you know the U.S. Customs Service was the parent or forerunner to many other agencies? In the early days, Customs officers administered military pensions (Department of Veterans Affairs); collected import and export statistics (Bureau of Census); and supervised revenue cutters (U.S. Coast Guard). (I served in the U. S. Coast Guard from 1951 until 1959 and didn't know until researching this article that it had originally been established as part of the U. S. Customs). Customs also collected hospital dues to help sick and disabled seamen (Public Health Service); and, established standard weights and measures (National Bureau of Standards).

**U. S. Customs Patrol**

After the establishment of the Customs, it was only logical to establish the Patrol branch to cover the many miles between our new country and Canada to the north. (It was not necessary until far later in the history of our country for a Customs Patrol to be established and later renamed the Border Patrol along the Mexican border.) Once Michigan became a territory (part of the Northwest Territory established by the Northwest Ordinance in 1787) trade began with our neighbors to the north (south if you are in Detroit). Since people and primarily goods were required to pass through Customs entry at preset border crossings it became necessary to extend the Customs reach to include a Patrol branch to eliminate the smuggling of items across the border by private boats. As many residents of Grosse Ile know, the early route for the railroad from Buffalo to Detroit was to Amherst burg, then



by barge across the river to Stony Island, where the railroad picked up again to cross the Island and onto Slocum's Island (Elizabeth Park) and into Trenton where it joined the Lake Shore and Southern railroad. The Customhouse on Grosse Ile Parkway (it was only a railroad at that time) was built as an entry point and to provide for the collection of tariffs from the rail line.

The Michigan Unit of the Northeast Patrol District was headquartered in Detroit at the foot of Orleans Street. It was responsible for the border from Cleveland to the south, through the Detroit waterway, all the way to Isle Royale to the north. Joseph A. O'Rourke captained this unit from 1927 until the Patrol was abolished in 1947 (more on that later).

### **Prohibition and the Customs Patrol**

This unit was established long before 1927 but I have not yet been able to find any detailed information. I do know that it was in full swing at the time Prohibition was enacted in Michigan in 1917, repealed in 1919, and then reenacted nationwide in 1919 as the Volstead act. With the Detroit River being less than a mile across in some places, and 28 miles long with thousands of coves and hiding places along the shore and among the islands, it was a smuggler's dream. Along with Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River, these waterways carried 75% of the liquor supplied to the United States during Prohibition. Because of the market for liquor by the citizens of the United States, it became an ideal occupation for the underworld to pursue. Some of the known mobs that were involved in bootlegging were the "Purple Gang" and the "Eastside Gang." Ingenuity was the name of the day. Cargo was dragged beneath boats, old underground tunnels from boathouse to house were reopened, sunken houseboats hid underwater cable delivery systems, and even a pipeline was built. Between Peche Island and the foot

of Alter Road, an electrically controlled cable hauled metal cylinders filled with up to 50 gallons of booze. Captain O'Rourke, as well as my father, had many memories of brushes with rumrunners and aliens during Prohibition before its repeal in 1933.

Assisting Captain O'Rourke in the Detroit area was Lt. Charles B. Dommer, who was directly responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Detroit local unit. Out of the Orleans street headquarters 38-foot picket boats and speedboats patrolled the northern part of the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River. The border from the Rouge River south to Cleveland was later (1933) assigned to the Patrol unit stationed on Grosse Ile.

### **A Keepers House Becomes a Customs Patrol House**

My father joined the Customs Patrol in December 1929 and served out of the Orleans street headquarters until June 1934 when he transferred to Philadelphia, and was stationed there for one year with the regular Customs. Upon his return to Detroit in May 1935 he was assigned to work out of the Grosse Ile office as part of a staff of six. In March of 1939 the staff was reduced to two and my family moved into the Grosse Ile Customs Patrol house. From 1939 until the Customs Patrol was abolished in 1947 my dad was officer in charge working with one partner.

The Customs Patrol house was built in the early 1900s at 1757 Parke Lane and was built on the site of the second range lighthouse for the leg of the Detroit River just north of Grosse Ile. I can now state with assurance that the second range light and its keeper's house became the Customs patrol house. The structure had barely changed by 1933 when the Customs Patrol obtained it from the U. S. Coast Guard. The first lighthouse in the range

is still in existence, located about a quarter mile south of the north entrance to Thoroughfare Cut and is now referred to as "The Grosse Ile Light.

My dad's office was located in the front of the first floor, followed by the living room (where the alcove protrudes on the south side) and the large eat-in kitchen was in the rear. Upstairs were three bedrooms and a bath. Heating for the house was a large hot air furnace that burned 13 tons of coke a year. When we moved into the house the only cooking was done on an old fashioned wood stove in the kitchen. My parents had the house wired for an electric stove. One March in the early 1940s we had a severe ice storm such that power was out for days. My grandmother usually stayed the winters with us, having come south from Duluth, Minnesota. On this occasion, she took over the cooking as she normally used a wood stove for cooking at her home in Duluth. She even made a birthday cake for my sister's March 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.

On the north side of the property was the Lancaster home (the owner of the Lancaster chain of theaters) and to their north was the Pinkerton home. On the other side of the Customhouse was the James Verner estate, with the caretaker/gardeners home directly behind the Customhouse. Behind that home was the Guest House, which fronted on the river. To the south of the Guest House was the Main Family Home, also fronting on the river. Behind it and next to the Customhouse was the Chauffeurs House situated over the five-car garage with an attached indoor full size swimming pool.

Of course none of the Verners lived in any of the homes during the time that we lived in the Customhouse, but one of the daughters, Mrs. Leonard, lived a few houses to the south of the family home on the corner of Horse Mill road and East River road. When it was trick-or-treat time at Halloween we always adjusted our itinerary to be halfway finished when we

got to her house as she would always invite all the children into her kitchen and serve them ginger ale (Verner's, of course). We were refreshed and ready to go on after a stop at her home.

One of the most influential of neighbors that we had was H. C. L. Jackson (the *Detroit News* columnist) who lived on the corner of Parke Lane and Horse Mill Road. It was from this house that he wrote in 1937 his memorable story entitled "The Little Girl in the Yellow Dress." The *Detroit News* repeats this story each year at Christmas time. Some time later, he also wrote a not so memorable column in the paper about me. It seems that a couple of my friends and I had gotten into a little trouble. You know the kind of mischief trouble all boys seem at one time or another to find. In this case Mr. Jackson heard about our mischief and wrote a column about us. It started out: "A boy is a boy, two boys are half a boy, and three boys are no boy at all." How prophetic and understanding this statement was from so great a man. I wish now that my parents had saved the column.

### **Life along the River**

Not long after we moved into the house we found ourselves without a newspaper, as the newsboy went on to college. One day my dad spotted the *Detroit News* delivery truck going by and waved him down. He asked the truck driver if he would drop off a paper for us as he went by. Unfortunately the answer was that ten papers was the minimum that could be delivered. Thus started my paper route. I canvassed the neighbors and got my first ten customers. I continued with the paper route, adding many more customers until 1947 when the Customs Patrol was abolished and we moved out of the house. Since my paper route extended from Dr. Cohen's house to the north to Mrs. Upsdale's house to the south on East River Road (one house past Mr. Pepke of the Pepke Coal Co.), I had most of the homes in

our neighborhood as customers and I remember many of their names and homes.

As I said earlier, the 38 foot picket boat was docked in front of the Lancaster home for patrol use from shortly after the spring thaw until late fall when ice flows began coming down the river. During winter, patrolling was done via car along the various waterfront areas in Ecorse, Wyandotte, Gibraltar and of course the Island. Once the river jammed solid and froze over, it offered an opportunity for smugglers to travel across via car and the Customs Officers had to be more diligent in their patrols. My father told me many times, as a reinforcement of the caution needed when on the river ice, of the time that he and Lt. Dommer were pursuing rumrunners on the river. (During Prohibition at times there were caravans of up to 75 cars spotted crossing the frozen river.) It was not difficult as they patrolled along the shore to spot the lights of a car crossing over from Canada. Then it was hot pursuit onto the ice after the perpetrators in hopes of catching them before they reached the shore. One time, while in hot pursuit, their car ran over a soft spot in the ice and broke through. My dad was first out of the vehicle and he pulled Lt. Dommer to safety. Needless to say they lost the vehicle and the rumrunners.

Many years later, I was ice-skating with the neighbor's boy, Dick Goff. We had taken our skates off and were walking back up river on the ice along East River Drive near Horse Mill Road, when Dick, who was walking ahead of me, walked onto a soft spot and fell through the ice. Because he was carrying his skates by the blades, the inertia of the heavy skates helped him spread his arms and stopped him from going completely under. I was able to get close enough to him to pull him out. From then on we stayed away from that spot where the sewer drain from Horse Mill Road empties into the river.

After Prohibition and until the Second World War the need for the patrol was reduced because of the friendly relationship between

the two countries. But still there were people who thought they could circumvent the law and not pay duty on their imports by not passing through normal Customs. It was then that the Patrol was most useful. During the Second World War one of the main items smuggled over from Canada was meat. Because of the rationing in the United States and the abundance of meat in Canada, the smugglers again found it lucrative to travel across the river with their contraband, hoping of course not to be caught. Also, because of the concern for war-time security, it was necessary for the Patrol to be vigilant and pursue all suspicious vessels.

Most of the time the patrols on the river were uneventful, if not boring (if one can call riding up and down the river in a power boat a boring event.) My dad and his partner would vary their schedule, some times patrolling from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and other times patrolling from 4:00 p.m. to midnight. When my dad's partner would take his two-week vacation during the summer, usually my sister or I would go along with my dad so that he could have someone to talk to. This is when we both learned our boat handling skills that became useful in the many rescues of Robert Taylor.

On one such summer evening I was accompanying my dad on the 4:00 p.m. to midnight shift when a tornado raced through parts of the Detroit area and on over into Canada. At the time of the tornado we were not far from Bob-Lo Island, drifting downriver and looking through the binoculars at the beautiful cloud formations in our area (and, of course, also watching for smugglers on the river.) It was our intention to motor upriver to the Orleans street headquarters in Detroit to refuel the boat later that evening. About 8:00 p.m. we started up the river but the further north we traveled the worse the weather became, with numerous lightning strikes and rain. After getting up to about Ecorse, my Dad decided it would be better to call it a night and head back to the dock and finish the evening patrol by

car. It wasn't until we got home that we found out about the tornado and the extensive damage done. My mother was extremely concerned, as she knew we had planned to go up river for re-fueling. We finished the patrol by car that night.

Since the river was the narrowest part of the patrol area responsible to be covered by my dad and his partner, most of the time the area patrolled was between the Rouge River and the Detroit River light at the south end of Livingston channel. One concern for the coal carrying ships heading upriver was the depth of water in the channel through Livingston cut and upriver past the Island. Since some of the ships would be loaded to within a foot of the river bottom, they could not head upriver if the water level was too low. This usually occurred when a west-southwest wind persisted for many days over Lake Erie. With the long fetch for the wind, it was literally possible to blow some of the water toward the northeast end of the lake and over Niagara Falls. When this happened, the river level would drop below minimum, and the ships would have to wait in Lake Erie for the weather to change. At some times, there were as many as a dozen ships waiting for the river to rise. As a guide there was a depth gauge at the Detroit River Light with a powerful spotlight on it for night viewing and river depth verification. Many a night, my dad would observe numerous fishermen on the river near the light catching fish attracted to the light on the depth gauge. It wasn't until after World War II that the channel was dredged deeper to eliminate this concern.

In addition to the coal carriers heading upriver, there were the ore carriers heading down river, and my two favorite ships, the City of Detroit and the City of Buffalo. These two side paddle wheel passenger ships were a sight to see as one or the other would head downriver about 5:30 p.m. each day. My friend Dick Goff and I would usually be at the water's edge in front of his house each day to watch the water level at the shore first go down and out as the

ship would pass by in the channel and then come back in with the waves. After the war, when Dick had an outboard boat, we would sometimes head out in his boat to buck the waves as they rolled back in.

The training that my sister and I received while accompanying my dad was also helpful in another undesirable aspect of the patrol duties, retrieving the bodies of drowning victims. Once the Ambassador Bridge was built in 1929 it became a magnet for suicide jumpers. Usually two to three days later their bodies would surface somewhere near the Island and when spotted my dad would get a call. If my dad was at home it would be necessary for my sister or I or both of us to assist him in the recovery. He would stand on the bow and direct us at the helm to maneuver the boat into a position so he could retrieve the remains, usually with a grappling hook. One time, when we went around Henepin point to the west shore of the Island near the toll bridge, we found that the grappling hook was of no use as the body had been in the water too long. We maneuvered the boat to one of the docks near the bridge and my dad went ashore to the home and borrowed a bushel basket. Back out onto the water we went and retrieved the body. It was an unpleasant but necessary duty.

### **Sailing, Catboats & Landing Vehicles**

During WW II, with gas rationing being what it was and the fact that my dad walked to work (the dock where the picket boat was moored), we learned to sail as a means of getting around on the river. My earliest exposure to sailing was at the house of Din Rooney. Din and his brother lived in a large home near the northern end of Parke Lane. While Din's brother worked, Din was the "house person" taking care of the home and yard. Din helped many of the downriver boys learn to sail with his modified rowboat. He had added a knife centerboard and a gaff

rigged mast through one of the seats and used an oar as a tiller. It worked and we learned the basics of sailing.

In addition, a friend of the family had a 16-foot Catboat and they would take us out sailing a lot. They lived in the first house north of Thoroughfare Cut and moored the boat near the Parke Lane Bridge. In the spring after they had put the boat in the water and it had swelled up sealing all the leaks in the planking, we would help set the mast by carrying it from their yard up onto the bridge and then lower it into the boat. We would hold it steady while the stays were attached and tightened. We spent many days sailing with them, even sailing around the Island at times.

Occasionally on a Sunday we would sail across the river to Canada to tie up at a marina with a restaurant so that we could have an excellent meat dinner before returning home. My dad always said it was not smuggling if we were carrying it in our stomachs. Another time while sailing with these friends we went downriver under a strong brisk north-west wind to Sugar Island for an afternoon picnic. After a relaxing time on the island and an enjoyable picnic, it was time to head back upriver. Well, after an hour of sailing, beating to windward and against the current, we had not progressed beyond the Grosse Ile Yacht Club. Suddenly there was a twang heard by all as one of the stays on the mast let go. We immediately came about and realizing that we could not make it back to the northern end of the Island we limped into the Yacht Club. My dad and I bummed a ride from someone at the Yacht Club to take us home. We then went down to the dock, backed the 38-foot Picket boat out and motored down to the Yacht Club to take the catboat in tow home. It was not often that my dad was called upon to rescue himself. This friend later said "If you can't hold the sheet in your hand, then the wind is too strong and it is time to reef the sail."

Early in WW II, I was visiting with my classmate Hank Smoke at his home near

Henepin point not too far north of where Din Rooney and his brother lived, when we spotted an unusual watercraft maneuvering in the river. We could see that it was a tracked vehicle of some kind and that it was coming onto shore in the vicinity of Harbor Point Drive. We hopped onto our bikes and went to investigate. It seemed a Landing Vehicle Tracked (Mark I) was being tested for maneuvers and was in the process of taking the development people out to demonstrate its capabilities. After watching a few trips out and back to shore, we noticed that it stopped moving in the water even though the engines were revved up full and the tracks were spinning in the water and throwing up lots of spray. It was apparent that they were somehow stuck. Knowing that my dad was at home and not scheduled to go out on patrol until later that day, I hopped on my bike and pedaled home to advise him of the vehicle's predicament. Not being able to describe this unknown vessel too well, I was able to convince him that there was someone who needed help. So together we cruised upriver to the distressed vessel. They were located in an area of several abandoned docks and apparently they were lodged on top of a submerged piling in the river. We carefully maneuvered close enough through the pilings to toss them a towline and began, with their assistance, to ease them off the piling. Of course the concern was to not cause a rupture of their hull as they sat low in the water with very little freeboard. Once freed of the piling they were able to continue their testing program, but stayed away from the piling area. (Interestingly, years later when I was Commanding Officer of a Loran Station in Alaska, I had three of these war surplus LVT vehicles which we used to bring ashore supplies from the Coast Guard Cutters that supplied our base.)

### **The Border Patrol Ends**

After the end of WW II, and with the friendly relations established with our neighbors to the north, Congress made the de-

termination that patrolling the border was no longer necessary and decided to abolish just the Patrol branch of the U. S. Customs along the entire Canadian border. Apparently it was assumed that the loss of revenue attributable to the small quantity of smuggling done by boats crossing the waterway separating the United States from Canada would be less than the cost of continuing funding the Customs Patrol. And so it was that on Friday June 30, 1947 that the U. S. Customs patrol agency in Detroit was abolished.

At that time I remember my dad anguishing over what would become of him as well as the other Patrol officers. There was discussion on transferring to the Regular Customs at the Bridge or Tunnel or possibly being reassigned to the Customs Patrol along the Mexican border. I remember my parents discussing the possibility of moving to Brownsville, Texas. As it turned out, my dad and most of the other Patrol officers were able to transfer to the Regular Customs in Detroit where he completed the remainder of his 40 years of service in the Customs. In the later years he was stationed at the Detroit International Airport handling customs entry for the numerous international flights arriving from overseas. We moved out of the Customhouse on Grosse Ile during the summer of 1947, living the next five years in Trenton. After my graduation from Slocum-Truax High School (Trenton High School) and while I was away at College, my parents moved to Lincoln Park so that the commute to Detroit or the Airport would be shorter for my dad.

Many years after his retirement, I returned for a visit. My dad, sister, her daughter, and I made a trip to tour the Fisher Mansion in Detroit at 383 Lenox Ave., on the banks of the river. After tagging along with the tour group viewing the various rooms and furnishings we entered the enclosed boat basin under the house with the tiled catwalk around three sides. My dad immediately commented that he had been here many years before during prohibition, having followed a suspicious boat across the river and into the basin area.

He never told us whether there was anything smuggled on board. Another time, years before the Bob-Lo boat ferry service was terminated, he accompanied my sister and I as well as the grandchildren on the ride downriver to Bob-Lo Island reminiscing about his years of patrolling the area - Grassy Island, Fighting Island, Stoney Island, Livingston Channel, etc. We even talked about the occasional trip that the Bob-Lo boat would take to the east of Fighting Island. Now the only way to tour this area is on Diamond Jack's river tours out of Wyandotte. Sometime in the near future I plan to make this cruise reminiscing about life and adventures along the Detroit River.

### **2005 U. S. Coast Guard Accomplishments**

The following is an excerpt from the Department of Homeland Security message of January 23, 2006.

For the U. S. Coast Guard, 2005 will likely be remembered as the year of Hurricane Katrina. The Coast Guard responded to an unprecedented natural disaster with an unprecedented response by rescuing more than 33,544 lives in a two week period after hurricane Katrina made landfall last August. These numbers equate to more than six years worth of Coast Guard rescues compressed into just 14 days.

In addition to its incredible response to Hurricane Katrina, the Coast Guard reached new milestones in securing the maritime border last year, seizing a record-breaking 337,750 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard also interdicted 9,455 undocumented illegal migrants at sea last year, the second highest for any average year in the past 20 years.

By any measure, "Upward and Onward"

### ***National Geographic, December 2005***

The December 2005 issue of *National Geographic* contained a series of major articles on reactions to disasters. The focus is on financial relief and how the pledges deteriorate over time. However—the piece on Katrina depicts ineptitude everywhere except perhaps in the New Orleans Fire Department. As we all know the first responders and by a large measure the most responsible responders were members of the U.S. Coast Guard. In response to the article, and in complete consonance with the *Time* magazine article of 24 October 2005 “How the Coast Guard Gets It Right”, your Chairman of the Board, Vice Admiral Howard Thorsen, Retired, wrote the following to the editors of *National Geographic*:

“The coverage of Katrina, “*Hope in Hell-Part One*”, in the December issue has one consistent theme...with the exception of the New Orleans Fire Department, there was no effective ‘first responder’ activity by “government emergency managers”. The Coast Guard officer responsible for emergency response in New Orleans, RADM Robert Duncan, had positioned helicopters and cutters away from Katrina’s path and expected landfall, so they could ‘follow’ the storm and be on scene as soon as possible after the highest winds abated somewhat. In fact, the first rescue by a Coast Guard helicopter occurred at 8:45 PM on August 29th and as more helos and boats arrived in the area immediately thereafter, the greatest storm-related rescue operation in Coast Guard history was underway. Coast Guard assets (helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, cutters and small boats) plus additional men and women to augment the crews in ‘round the clock operations poured into the area, dispatched from as far away as Alaska, Hawaii, Minnesota and Maine. In all more than 6,000 aircraft sorties and 12,000 surface sorties. The results: 33,544 people rescued, 12,535 by helos, 11,600 by boat and 9,409 relocated from hospitals along the Gulf Coast.

“The ability to ‘first respond’ in such an impressive fashion is the result of the Coast Guard’s unique status, authority and experience in working with state, local and other federal organizations. As a military, multi-mission organization primarily charged with maritime related scenarios, such as search and rescue, oil spills and interdiction of smugglers of drugs or illegal immigrants, Coast Guard doctrine is heavily focused on individual initiative on the part of crews when confronted with emergency situations. In the case of Katrina, only organizations so constituted with that culture are capable of immediately responding and then extending operations for as long as necessary, despite personal hardships of many of the rescuers themselves. (Families of Coast Guardsmen had been moved out of the area in anticipation of the storm, but more than 575 of their homes were made uninhabitable by the storm.)

Even though the reporter arrived four days after Katrina struck on 29 August, surely he had heard reports of the Herculean efforts of the United States Coast Guard. With such a glaring error of omission, his report falls far short of providing a balanced picture of emergency response to the horrific devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina.”

Look for this letter in a near future issue of *National Geographic*.

We reproduce this letter to let you know that our focus is not only on old history but on current history. It is our objective to set the story right, whenever it happens. Your contributions and membership make this possible.

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