

George Miller (29)  
RADM (Ret.)  
Naples, FL  
Monday, April 24, 1989

[Sam] I have found George Miller (29) at home late in the afternoon and I was fortunate because George is planning to take a little trip tomorrow and I have him here. Now, George, I don't think I should waste any more time.

[George] Well as I understand it, you would like to know something about my time at the academy. I graduated in 1929 and my first assignment was the *Champlain* stationed at Staten Island. We used to go out on rum patrol on the *Champlain*, which was a cutter. One of my classmates was on it too, Carl Bowman (29).

[Sam] That was a 250 was it not, a classic cutter?

[George] Yes, I was on that for almost a year and went from there up to Boston to the *Jewitt* in the so-called Coast Guard destroyer force at that time and I stayed on the *Jewitt* for about a year and a half. When the *Jewitt* was put out of commission, we went to the *Wilkes*.

[Sam] Was that another destroyer?

[George] Yes, another destroyer and a larger destroyer in the same Boston group of destroyers and that had a little more history in the way of athletics. We won just about everything. We held the baseball championships for all the few years that I was on it, we won basketball championship. We also won in 1931, I believe, the all-Coast Guard surf boat rowing contest held at New London and we walked away with that in 1931. And I was always athletic officer and I remained athletic officer as long as I was on any ship as a junior officer. From there, I was assigned to the captain of the port's office in New York which was a very interesting job and I enjoyed it very much. In those days, people crossed the Atlantic on the ocean liners and I suspect that I boarded and enrolled every great ocean liner from this country and Great Britain and Italy and France and Germany. All of the ocean liners that ever came into the port of New York. Up from the Battery. Up from the Battery Narrows to their docking in Manhattan Island.

[Sam] And you boarded with a pilot is that correct?

[George] No, we went down and went aboard. My job was to go down and expedite any dignitaries that were coming down on the big liners, expedite them through customs and immigration. Which was a lot of fun riding up with the newspaper men which all climbed aboard the cutter, the small cutters we had at the barge office. We also arranged, I did, for most of the work of the entrance of the fleet. It must have been the year 1934 or thereabouts when Roosevelt reviewed the Atlantic fleet and we had to make arrangements for breaks in the show for ferries and other ocean liners to make transit in the area and that was part of my job at the time.

[Sam] The cadet practice squadron came down from New London for that occasion and went on there.

[George] Yes, right. From that job, which lasted for three and a half years, I went to just across the river there to the Navy yard to get aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Spencer* one of the new 327 foot cutters which just went in commission. I was navigator and we went from New York around through the canal up the west coast to Alaska and we berthed at what is known, pretty well

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known today as the Prince William Sound based at Cordova. And I was up there two years and got to know Alaska real well.

[Sam] You made Bering Sea patrol did you not?

[George] Yes, I made Bering Sea patrol, but what was interesting about that on today up there in Alaska was at that time, there were no aids to navigation. We used a depth finder going in and out of ports we weren't familiar with. The charts were very questionable that we had of Alaska. They hadn't done any wire dragging, but it was a very interesting two years. The first Commanding Officer that I had there was Iceberg Eddie Smith and he was relieved subsequently with a very fine officer named, assistant superintendent at the academy Zeusler. I was with him then for about a year and enjoyed the two years that I spent in Alaska at that time. And we cruised all over Alaska, Yakutat, too and up to the Bering Sea and up to Nome, St. Lawrence Island, King Island, and they even had a basketball team there that played at the Alaskan fur rendezvous at Anchorage, Alaska. The fur rendezvous and we went over, the ship, put us off at Seward and we took the train up which was a very enjoyable ride on the train up to Anchorage, Alaska and were there for the fur rendezvous. It was a ship's team, but I was a coach player and we had a very good time up there probably a better time than we did playing basketball. Well, from that tour of duty in Alaska.

[Sam] In 1938 you were on the Bering Sea patrol on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with Alger and he was the Bering Sea patrol commander. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July you participated in the boat race. Frankie Helmer was the coxswain of your boat. I have movies of that.

[George] Yes, but there was against some associate primarily from Washington, the state of Washington came up there.

[Sam] *Shoshone* from Oakland was up there and we were at the dock across from the *Spencer* and during the days prior to this race, Frankie was out there with a crew that just couldn't row worth a damn and they had ship cooks and firemen and then when the race came at the finish line, there was only one boat in my camera. You can't see number two boat and I think there were three racing. And I do have a picture of some of your shipmates, Johnny Wagline, Archie Burton, and you are in this picture standing there on the dock big, happy grin covering every bet. That was costly.

[George] Right, it was quite different than when we won the thing in 1931. We would have bet everybody in the destroyer force and it came pretty healthy at that time. From there, I went to Oregon on the...

[Sam] On *Onondaga*, at Astoria?

[George] In Astoria, yes. And I was only there a short time. On the morning when I got there, Captain Higbee decided he was going to take leave and so I had command of the thing for a few weeks. But I felt that I had been isolated long enough and I asked that port to let me get set some place close to the main stems of civilization. Anyway, I went to the East Coast and was assigned to the Hoffman Island in the training of Merchant Marine recruits.

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[Sam] This would be 1940?

[George] No before that 1939

[Sam] Just before the war broke out in Europe.

[George] And that thing broke up and the Coast Guard gave it up for some reason or another and they were having a lot of trouble with the unions. They were objecting to us taking the Merchant Marine and I went as Executive Officer on the. I can't think of the name of it. The *Onondaga* or something like that. No, not the *Onondaga*. It was a 250 Coast Guard Cutter (13) (NORTHLAND) stationed in Boston and Captain VonPaulson (13) had command and we were going up to Ivigtut sailing out of Boston and that was in 1939. We had gone up to Greenland to check out the cryolite mines and to protect Americans' interest in the Greenland area. It was very interesting cruising. When I came back from there and I was there until about 1940 and I now was given command of a Coast Guard cutter 165-foot *Thetis* which was then moved and the station was sent to Key West where we were making live runs on U.S. submarines out of Key West. And the people we were taking onto live runs were those who were involved in going to sonar school in Key West.

[Sam] Did you have your sonar gear in 1940 or was this 1941?

[George] 1941.

[Sam] In 1940 all of these ships were sent to Jacksonville to have the equipment installed.

[George] Right, right and I went to Jacksonville with the *Thetis* to have the sonar equipment. And then in 1941, well it was early 1941 because we were there a whole year and doing this until shortly after the war was declared. Of course, Pearl Harbor happened December 7, 1941 and then in 1942 I left and was transferred from commander of the *Thetis* to the first lieutenant on the *Samuel Chase* which was getting ready for the African invasion.

[Sam] Now that was an AK or an AP?

[George] It was an AP an attack transport. We went over and were involved and landed at Algiers when we attacked, when American forces attacked North Africa.

[Sam] Who was your Commanding Officer?

[George] Roger Himer (18) I was the first lieutenant and Hogan (28) was the Executive Officer.

[Sam] Wild Bill.

[George] We only made that once close, we came back and most of us left after the invasion, came back to the United States. Although, we had a very interesting incident besides the landing at Algiers. When we were on our way north, back up to England, right behind us, the big aircraft, right immediately behind us in formation was an aircraft carrier *Avengo* [phonetic] which was hit by a submarine and this thing just went up in a ball of flame. It must have been hit in the magazine and it went up in a ball of flame. We felt very happy about the fact that we didn't get

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[Sam] Had you relieved Carl Bowman (29)?

[George] No, I relieved Roland (29).

[Sam] Oh Eddie Roland. Okay Bowman (29) must have been even earlier.

[George] I relieved Roland and Synon (32) relieved me when I went to Charleston, South Carolina as Group Commander. I spent three very pleasant years, three and a half years at Charleston where we were involved that time. My job was at the base and the main inspection people and the buoy tenders. But the big thing at that time that they were worried about was Texas City had had the great explosion from the dolomite fertilizer and as a result, they wouldn't let these ships carrying the fertilizer. There weren't any ports, but there was a big deal that they could have one in the Port at Charleston, but not in the Port itself, it had to go quite a ways up the Cooper River which was well out of town. For a while, the city and the shipping people were unhappy about, but they realized we had done them a real favor, when we asked the mayor "do you want to see the City of Charleston blow up?" he said, "heavens no, put it up there." So you have the best of two worlds. You have no chance of anything happening to the City of Charleston and you are the only port on the East Coast who can have the fertilizer vessel at its immediate entrance. After three and a half years at Charleston, which was a very interesting tour of duty, I suddenly went from a nice sunny climate to Juneau, Alaska and I thought for heavens sake, what am I going up there again for. But that turned out to be a very pleasant two years. I took my whole family by that time. I had three children and one on the way. The one on the way, is my youngest Eddie, he was born in Juneau, Alaska when Alaska was still a territory. He is quite proud of that. I went up there as operation officer and became chief of staff and then left to go to Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C. as chief of floating units.

[Sam] H. Sloop Berdine (24) was District Commander.

[George] H. Sloop Berdine (24) was District Commander while I was there, but he left and he went up on a project in Alaska and James Tyler (26) took his job and James Tyler (26) was still with me, I was still with James Tyler (26) for a few months after he arrived there.

[Sam] Weren't you there when James died?

[George] No, I had left. James Tyler (26) was still in command of the district when I left for Washington in charge of floating units under Frank Kenner (24) and then Ira Eskridge (26), Chief of Operations. And I spent two years there having to get my watchman tour of duty in and from there, I went to Cleveland, Ohio as chief of staff and remained there for five years which was to be my last assignment. And I was selected for flag in 1960. I went up there in 1959 and was selected for flag the following year in 1960 and Admiral Cannons [phonetic] was the district commander when I arrived there and I took over as district commander when he went back to Washington as chief of operations. Then I retired, the Cleveland District was a very interesting district. Many, many things happened there that I can't enumerate all of them that were good and enjoyable and productive for the Coast Guard, but I then retired on board the *Mackinaw*. We called the *Mackinaw* to Cleveland. I was relieved by Captain Bender at that time, I guess Rear Admiral Bender (36) by that time and I took my family and we went to Spain for a year. We

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went over on the *Constitution* and a cruise of the Azores to Casablanca to Gibraltar to Majorca to Naples, Italy to another port in Italy and then up to Cannes and then we got off the ship in Cannes and my car was on the ship too and we drove over, down cross Pyrenees down into Spain to Barcelona. And I put my two girls into their Maramont International School in their so-called school in Barcelona. Then went on to Madrid with my two boys and they both went to American Schools in Madrid. And we had the advantage while we lived in Madrid up on Generalísimo Boulevard of not being entirely dependent on the Spanish economy because we had the Torrejón Air Force Base close by and we spent many, many happy hours living partly on the American economy. That ended after a year when we had to come back to the United States because my youngsters, one of them started in college. At Rollins College in Florida and we came to Naples through having heard a great deal about Naples from Archie Burton (28) and Archie found me my house and we have been here in Naples ever since and watched Naples grow like topsie. And

~~Covers~~ I think that colors my whole Coast Guard career.

[Sam] Who was it that relieved you in Juneau as chief of staff?