

Day- 1

JOHN DAY

S: This is the the 26th day of September, 1988, and I'm visiting John Day at his home in Cutler, Maine. John tells me that this home has been in the family continuously since the original owners, some 130 years.

John and I were together in Korea and he has some remarks about that duty back in 1946, into early '47, and I'm going to ask him to start off with some of his recollections about what he did to contribute to the Korean Coast Guard.

J: Outside of getting there, which was an achievement in itself, remember the tail first landing we made in a T46 and the relief with which we settled down.

S: Everybody applauded and the pilots turned around and acknowledged with a grateful bow.

J: Well, I kicked around Seoul with you and Captain McCabe and Bill Ray for about two months and then it was decided that I would go to Subic Bay in the Philippines and attempt to procure some ships for the Coast Guard. LCIs were the vessels suggested because they had hauled a lot of people and could act as a mobile base for the Coast Guard which we were busy setting up. I arrived in the Philippines in August 1946 and this was two months later.

S: Let me correct- we were in Tokyo on Labor Day; we had that long weekend and then we flew on to Seoul.

J: That long weekend of inoculations. All the way across the Pacific ocean, stop and get a shot. It wasn't a shot of booze either. But I did go to the Philippines, late in September because I was there for about six weeks. My purpose was to scout what ships there were available. They were all in Subic Bay. One of these LCIs was an operating vessel of the

## Day- 2

navy, she carried mail and people and things from sandy point naval air station to Subic Bay. So I immediately nominated her as number one, because she was in operation. Number two had been operated until recently by the Philippine government on an inner island route carrying freight and mail for the Korean government. The other two were up for grabs and they were in a fleet of about two to three dozen LCIs nested on mooring buoys in Subic Bay. The coolies had gone home and the ships were left there with food still on the tables in the mess rooms, the rats and what have you, and evidence of some damage to the equipment by the locals. Gyros were smashed on some of them and stuff like that. I had to inspect these vessels by myself. I looked over them as much as possible to make sure they were seaworthy, the idea being to sail them to South Korea.

After getting four vessels and getting ready to take off with skeleton crews furnished by the Seventh Fleet, about ten men and one officer for each vessel. Various ratings and capabilities for these people, naturally they weren't the best that the seventh fleet had to offer. I was the flag of this particular outfit. The navy added on two more vessels, YMS types to go to the Chinese navy which we were to disband off Shanghai. We took off and at the same time as we left Subic Bay and headed north there happened to be a typhoon on the east coast of the Philippines, unbeknownst to us, and the navy, we didn't have the weather reporting system that we have today. As it turned out, we damn near converged up north of northern Luzon; four flat bottomed vessels with unreliable engines and people aboard to just aid the ship let alone make progress.

In fact, there were two casualties; YMSs were a lot of trouble. One of them got a line fouled in one the the screws and it was bad enough so we needed to tow her, she couldn't make enough time on one screw to get us to our destination. So one of the LCIs took her in tow. Another LCI had problems with fuel contamination, water in the fuel oil and she had to be towed.

Well, I'd never been in Taiwan before, but it was the nearest island in the direction we wanted to go and there was an open road at the southern end called Nanwan in Japanese. I don't know what the Chinese name for it is today, but I do remember the beautiful rice paddies on the side of the hill and the fact that we were able to get the line out of the

## Day- 3

propeller of the YMS and transfer fresh fuel to the LCI. So some time the following day we got underway up the east coast of Taiwan and right in the teeth of a gale left over from the hurricane which zipped on up the north. Winds of about 25-35 knots. Not much for a seagoing vessel, but for an LCI, we were crabbing sideways up the coast trying to make good a course of almost north. We finally did break free from the gale and dropped off the two YMSs north of Taiwan and proceeded on to Shinhai, which was the base of the Coast Guard, Korean Coast Guard in South Korea. This was early November; I think we were underway for about ten days. Not too badly, considering what we had.

S: You were a two striper at the time?

J: I was a lieutenant at the time and a long time after that . Except for yourself and commander McGallon, the rest of us were all lieutenants. And not to forget George McCabe. Do you know if George is still alive?

S: No, he's gone.

J: I did tell you that little story about the bottle of whiskey that I'd been asked to transport by one of his navy friends at Subic Bay? I mixed my signals and he got the wrong bottle when we arrived and unfortunately for me, he received a letter from his friend saying where's my bottle of Canadian Club? I'd given him two bottles of old surplus rye whiskey from the medical stores at Subic Bay Naval Station, so I had some explaining to do.

I took charge of two of the LCIs to train the crews and establish them as floating bases. The first one was at Kunson, that's on the west coast of Korea.

The most serious incident was the towing of a 45 foot navy picket boat to be used for boarding purposes when we reached our destination. We were inhibited somewhat by a 5/8 inch stainless steel wire which stretched for at least a mile across two headlands that some fisherman put up there to hang his seine from. The picket boat fouled her props in the wire. The funniest part of it is that while we were figuring how we were going to cut this, the Korean fisherman was gesticulating wildly

Day- 4

from half a mile away telling us something. In hindsight, I know that that he was offering to let slack in the line if we would only give him time. But we didn't have the time and we cut the line, I'm sure it was a disaster for the local fisheries, and we went on our merry way.

There was a hairy passage there. We passed between an island and the mainland- Washington Strait- and there were low overhead cables. My charts were Japanese and I couldn't read Japanese, either the numerals or the words and I had to guess where we would clear. We managed to, but if we hadn't it wouldn't have made any difference, because the current was running about nine knots in that channel and there was nothing we could do with the LCI. We were going forward whether we wanted to or not. No control of the vessel whatsoever. But we made it. In that little episode coming up from Subic Bay to Korea, one of the ships rolled so badly she snapped the stick right out of her; snapped the mast right off clean.

We had a hard time with communications. We had 25 watt transceivers aboard which we worked both on CW and voice and the navy tried to inform us about the typhon and to advise us to go into Port Lyuwag, which is the northwest coast of Luzon, but not having charts it would have been a real foul up. We were safer staying at sea.

I set up a similar LCI at the Port of Pohang on the east coast, which is where the army made landings during the Korean war. There wasn't anything there except a small fishing village, but en route we passed a broken down Korean fishermen in a sailing vessel. He was a drifter- that terminology applied to vessels that set a net and drifted with the current and the wind, with the net stretched out alongside. He needed help, and we passed him a tow wire, towed him along and dropped him off at his home port. When we pulled in the tow line, we had a codfish the likes of which I had never seen in my fishing days on the Maine coast. At least four feet long and a heavy weight, It was a donation and the crew enjoyed very much.

In attempting to clear this wire from the picket boat, the water in Korea is not warm, not like Maine water but pretty close to it, and we were down to our waists and shoulders trying to kick this thing loose and were unable to do so until we got the hacksaw out. It was under pressure

Day- 5

and then it popped and lucky no one was hurt. I didn't have the education at that point in my Coast Guard career to be more wary of it.

S: Nylon was not yet in use.

J: No, this was stainless steel wire that a Korean lifted from a Japanese mine craft base; a midnight requisition.

S: How long were you at Shinhai?

J: I was in and out of Shinhai for the remainder of my time in Korea- that was November to April. I was supposed to go, but Bill Ray's wife was going to have a baby and Captain McCabe took pity on him and sent him home first, which was fine.

S: Wagner and McGowan elected to stay and they could bring their families if they signed for one or two years.

J: Yes, I talked this over with Priscilla and decided this wasn't any place to bring a young kid, in such rugged living conditions. And having had enough of the war, I didn't see why I should prolong it.

S: You had incidental duty from that time until you went to the Philippines?

J: I went to the Philipines in 1967 as the original squadron commander of Coast Guard Squadron Three. That was kind of a melee at first also because it hadn't been done before. I sailed from New Bedford, picked up the Baratara at Port Yakitat, which had been my command and was joined by Baratara and Halfmoon off New York, proceeded through the canal to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor and was joined by Gresham and Behring Strait, that made a squadron of five ships, all ADPs, which was nice to have the same type under these circumstances. Squadron Three was commissioned at Pearl Harbor and I sailed for Subic Bay. This all took place starting in April of 1966. As soon as I arrived in Subek Bay, for the first and last time all five ships were nested alongside the destroyer tender Jason. I was summoned aboard the Jason to mee t the

Day- 6

commander of the Seventh Fleet and he looked over the Yakitat, took a look at one or two of the other ships and then we went back to the flag cabin on the Jason. He asked me if I would like to be his representative there on Subic Bay? I didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about at the time, but it sounded pretty good to me, against worrying about only five ships. This involved logistic support for the Seventh Fleet through the destroyer force. I would be his representative for services for the Seventh Fleet ships as well as being the task unit commander. There were fourteen deployed DERs, seven in a squadron at the time for Pearl Harbor, so that gave me twelve ships for operational control. All fourteen were navy ships; my five were the only Coast Guard. Only one squadron was deployed at the time.

S: Give your duties in some detail.

J: It mostly amounted to inspection and arranging the operational schedule for the ships. Each squadron had its own commander for readiness inspection. Maintaining the operational schedule was done twice a year for the Seventh Fleet, and it usually went to a place like Ycoska in one case, or Bagioon the Philippines. All the operational people from the Seventh Fleet met there and compiled a sailing schedule for all the vessels of the cruiser destroyer force. That was one of my chief functions. Keeping peace with the naval authorities was another one.

S: The commander who asked you to be his representative, what was his rank?

J: He was a rear admiral and at that time, and I was a captain; I made captain in 1964.

If it hadn't been for the separations, it would have been a very enjoyable job. The navy was great to me and seemed glad to have me there. I'm not trying to pat myself on the back, but there were a lot of details that had to be ironed out when ships came to port, for overhaul, routine maintenance, and procurement problems and all I did was smooth the way. I had a large staff, besides my own Coast Guard people,

Day- 7

which was a lieutenant commander, three enlisted, an a chief warrant officer, I had a navy commander, a couple lieutenants, a JG, and seven enlisted. The navy had to find a place to put us, and they built us a quonset hut for office space and to maintain the spares which were passed from ship to ship, infra red equipment and flap jackets. Every once in a while one of the destroyers would get shot back at, and people did get hurt and killed. The flap jackets were necessary for the topside personnel.

S: Were any of the ADPs damaged?

J: No, not the ADPS, although they did gunfire support. They did it in South Vietnam when the DDSs were up in the northern zone, north of the DMZ. We had DDSs and cruisers both for that operation.

One of the memorable events of my tour up there was a five day trip on the USS Newport News, which was the flagship for the Seventh Fleet. I flew out in a navy cod plane and landed on a carrier, my first and only landing and take-off, and it was quite a thrill. Then I flew by helicopter over to the flagship from there. It was nice because I've always loved gunnery and to see the eight inch guns firing from a range of about eighteen miles and supposedly hitting a target, although it was hard to tell by radar. The assessment was made the next day by aircraft.

That particular night we were after trucks coming down with supplies for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, down that road from North Vietnam along the coast down near Danang. That was a long time ago.

S: Yes, that's one of the reasons why we're recording this now is to get it on the record. Let us not be forgotten.

J: Someone has written a brief history of Coast Guard Squadron Three. I think it's in the headquarters files.

S: How long were you the squadron commander?

Day- 8

J: About fourteen months. I was relieved by Captain Sherman Frick. He probably has a little bit different slant on it.

S: Your wife was able to join you?

J: Yes, she flew out at her own expense and spent several weeks with me at Subic Bay because the navy had recently built an exchange hotel and the roomw were reasonable and there was no law against it. Otherwise it was to be a hardship for me because I'd just come off two years on the Yakitat on weather patrol and had another year tacked on for good measure and was away from home.

S: I was interested to hear that the Admiral was included because I had command in 1953-'54 in Germany.

J: Were you in Germany on the Halfmoon?

S: No.

J: Because at one point I was the merchant marine detail officer in Germany and the cadet squadron came in, plus the two cutters came in. I thought it was Admiral, but it was another New York ship, Brockaway.

S: Chuck Steel had that.

J That's right, remember him very well. I think he was the only one who came in. A youngster had been injured aboard the Eagle and I arranged for his hospitalization and his transportation home. I don't know if he graduated from the Academy after that because he was quite badly hurt.

S: We lost one service junior. You mentioned that the Eagle came to Lubek, a town nearby, will you tell us the purpose and your participation.

J: Bud Boice, your classmate in the class of '36, had a nephew named Peter Boice, I think he's a Maine Maritime Academy graduate. He settled

## Day- 9

in Lubek, some ship chandlery machine shop operation there. His house is in an adjoining town, and he noticed a cemetery in his back yard that had one marker on it. It was of all people a Captain Hopely Eaton, the first commissioned revenue cutter service officer. So he told Bud about it and he got in touch with the proper authorities and over two or three years time, things began to gell. So in 1976, Eagle showed up to pick up Captain Eaton's remains, along with a large contingent of cadets. They packed him aboard Eagle and took him back to New London for reburial. I think the grave is near the Observatory. Admiral Louie Perkins was aboard, Admiral Roland was aboard, they were both retired. And Captain Kelly was the CO of the Eagle at that time. They put on quite an affair for local dignitaries and I was invited to attend, which we did. The Eagle was anchored in Johnson Bay.

S: I haven't learned the local names here, but I was assured at low water last night, if I had wanted to I could walk clear to the far shore. I didn't want to.

J: The Eagle was a little further out. That night she sailed on by the harbor, some folks in town saw her lights as she went by.

S: That was a touching event.

J: Yes it was.

S: Well, you've had an eventful career, both while on active duty and in retirement.

J: I enjoyed my Coast Guard career very much. During my career, I held command at sea five times. The first ship was a little 125 footer, General Green. I was CO on her twice actually. It was one of the most enjoyable times I ever had in the Coast Guard, except that we were quite busy.

S: General Green was for years the flagship of the ice patrol.

Day- 10

J: Right. Doing search and rescue work in the First Coast Guard District and for a time, we were the only one doing it.

S: That would be almost immediately after World War II.

J: Yes, right after I got back from Korea and I stayed on her for the better part of a year. We had 23 tow jobs to Georgia's banks, sometimes towing tandem tows. Fisherman often weren't able to keep engines going during wartime for lack of parts.

S: I have a suspicion that many fisherman decided it was cheaper to have the Coast Guard tow them in then to come in under their own power.

J: They didn't know what it was like to be towed by John Day- I went too fast.

S: You went into the Merchant Marine Safety School?

J: I had been serving as an XL of the Madagora when the usual all coast message went out and they wanted applicants for the Merchant Marine Safety School, so I applied. My skipper was Elmer Comstock at the time and he let me go. Ours was the first organized class in several years. Lambert was one of my classmates, in 1949.

S: Where did you serve in the merchant marines?

J: I was assigned to Baltimore, as hull inspector. During my course of a year there, we had the Korean War and headquarters started screening merchant seamen for subversive affiliations. I was nabbed for that in Washington. David Elger, also a lieutenant, and myself did that for two years at headquarters, reviewing intelligence and FBI reports on merchant seamen. I was glad to get a ship after that.

S: They tell us that headquarters is the place to be.

Day- 11

J: Not when you're there, no way.

Some of my wartime experiences aboard the Mohami. I was aboard the Mohami in 1942, fresh out of the Academy .I got aboard in Nova Scotia. Up until that time, I learned to ride a motorcycle in the Canadian army and fire the bron gun. We did that for fourteen days until the ship came back as part of an escorted convey from Greenland, then I got aboard the ship.

The most eventful thing that happened aboard the ship was the loss of the SS Chow in Bellaisle Strait. She was torpedoed and we were the only escort and saved most of the personnel. She was an army transport. Most of these people were construction workers in Greenland, not army.

The next most eventful thing, other than the ice and the subs, etc. was the loss of the cutter Esconawa, which was in an escort group with us escorting a tanker and a transport. That was closer to the Greenland coast than the Labrador coast. That's something I won't forget in a hurry.

I reported to Campbell as galley officer in 1944 and got off in Mohami in December. At that time the ship was just beginning the mid Atlantic runs from New York and Norfolk to Gibraltar and through the Mediterranean as far as Casablanca.

During one trip, I think it was May, 1944, we had the most phenomenal air attack I think anyone has ever gone through in which over 40 airplanes attacked the convey. We were near the province of Algeria and we were set upon by a company of torpedo bombers, then glide bombers, dropping bombs controlled by radio. Of all these planes, several of which were shot down, there were no casualties, other than their own projectiles. No one was killed. The attack started just after dusk and it was dark before it was over.

S: Who was your CO at that time?

J: Commander Samuel Gray. We were the flagship of the escort squadron. We had a British anti-aircraft cruiser with us called Caladon and a French DE and PC and two mine sweepers converted for jamming

Day- 12

radio controlled bombers. That was plus the two regular divisions of DEs and ourselves helping escort the convey across the Atlantic.

Weather patrol is old hat, so I won't go into that, but I spent a lot of time on weather patrol. I spent three years on the Esconada as a CO in the Atlantic and then I spent two years on the Yakatat in the Atlantic as CO and two years on the Escanawa on the West Coast as lieutenant commander on weather patrol in the Pacific, which wasn't always rosy either.

S: Yes, you had three or four stations to cover.

J: That's right and we went round robin and over to Japan, stopping at two stations on route. Search and rescue in Guam as well. Weather patrol Midway. Weather patrol Guam. Then we shot up through Japan.

S: Thank god for the satellites.

J: And even before satellites, the planes were finding out they could get along perfectly well without us. They could broadcast their position by Loran; we were preceding Loran. We had it aboard, but we weren't getting the reception they were getting.

S: You're thinking now mainly of the November?

J: Mostly the Atlantic ones. In the wintertime, the Atlantic is a nasty time. One case in point, I made a trip as XO on the Duane and it was in February, 1949. I had my orders to Matagora and Captain Guise was the CO of the Duane.

We were hanging on for dear life, which you did all the time out there, watching a moving picture down on the mess deck when security watch came back and reported fire in the paint locker. We were all engrossed in the movie and in not getting bashed in by running into a bulkhead.

I went up there with several of the petty officers and proceeded to investigate this fire. Not using my head, as I should have, I went down to the paint locker and there was no fire there. There was a faint haze in overhead like something had happened. So I started to leave by way of

Day- 13

the ladder, which is quite a climb, and almost didn't make it up the ladder. The place was full of CO2. The rolling of the ship had triggered the bottle in the paint locker and I don't know how many pounds were down there but enough to snuff me out.

S: 1949 is also the time you started merchant marine school.

J: I started that in the fall. We recommissioned the Matagora right after that and I went to sea on her on a weather patrol. On that weather patrol we made Foxtrot, station Fox between Bermuda and the Azores. One of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen at sea. The German four-masted bark Pasat sailed on by at full sail and we followed her for about half a day. She had merchant marine cadets aboard, having come from Australia and bound for England.

I have one more story, concerning the Denmark which was the training ship of the Royal Danish Merchant Marine. She was loaned to the Coast Guard for training purposes during World War II, this all happened in the fall of 1941. I, among nine cadets and two officers were sent to Florida to help bring her back up to New London.

S: The two officers were who?

J: Chris Nap and Miles Emlay. They were both instructors at the Academy.

S: Do you remember who the other cadets were?

J: I wish I could. I had a terrible cold on route and the Danish doctor was feeding me sulfa which was a new drug back then and I wasn't feeling so good.

Anyway, we sailed all the way from the mouth of the St. John River to New London and we came in through a funnel cloud. Having left the Gulf Stream and the nice warm conditions, we hit cold New England weather very suddenly, the wind picked up from the northwest and we had to beat to get into New London. We furled sails and came along under power.

Day- 14

There was a skeleton Danish crew aboard this vessel, some former cadets and officers and Lanavail, who later became the commander of the Denmark in peacetime after World War II.

S: There was some question in your mind about the loyalties of the Danish crew?

J: I think that was running pretty strong in the minds of the Coast Guard officials. In order to cement our relationship a chest of small arms was taken aboard and the two officers instructed the cadets what to do in case of emergencies. We could use them if we found we were going to the wrong destination.

One of the most memorable events of that trip was New Year's Eve we were at sea and Captain Hanson, the commanding officer, invited all of the cadets down to the saloon for a bottle of Carlbrough beer. This all occurred during regular cadet Christmas leave in 1941, but I had an epic cruise instead.

S: Sometimes you're afterwards happy that you had that exchange, at the time, it could be a hardship.

J: That was my only square rigger experience.

S: Well, John, you've really searched your memory and I appreciate it.