

Captain Norbert W. Muench
217 Fernwood Circle
Largo, FL 33777-4868

9 September 2004

Ahoy Captain Muench,

I hope you have survived the recent onslaughts and that this finds you and your family well and safe.

Thank you for sending us your reminiscences about attending the other, often forgotten, part of the Academy during WW II. Your experiences on both active duty and in the very active Reserve will be preserved for future historians to ponder in their search for what really happened. You have contributed significantly to preserving our heritage. For that I thank you.

We can use many more such contributions. Tell your friends they can have their life stories preserved as well.

Memoria Semper (Always Remember)

Fred Herzberg
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard, Ret
Founder and Executive Director
Foundation for Coast Guard History



23 July 2007

Based on VADIM Sargent's letter to the editor in The "Reservist" and the recommendation of RADM W. S. Schwob, my 30 years in the USCG Reserve is submitted for inclusion in your records. As a member of the Pterodactyls, have visited the CG Museum (York) west and viewed other artifacts from the "Onondaga."

Thank you,
N. W. Muench
CG Aviator #192



In reading the April 1994, copy of "The Bulletin," I was attracted to your article, "WW II Reserve Officer Training at the Coast Guard Academy." This was splendidly written from the viewpoint of members of the Academy staff who had administered the program. It has occurred to me that you might be interested in the viewpoint and experiences from "the other side of the story" by a Candidate for Reserve Commission (CRC) who had the privilege of benefiting from the program.

It so happened that my military calling began on December 8, 1941 at the Navy recruiting station in Lancaster, Pa. on the day after Pearl Harbor. It was 8 a.m. as I waited impatiently for the office to open. I must have exhibited this since the CPO when he finally arrived said, "Look son, the war will wait for you." As it turned out, my career with the Navy was brief. The high point was appearing with the Midshipmans' glee club aboard the PRAIRIE STATE at the Hudson River in New York City to sing on a program with Marlene Dietrich. One of the songs we sang was "I ain't got long to stay here." The next day the U.S. Navy presented me with a discharge as being physically unqualified for sea or aviation duty. Fortunately for me, I did visit the U.S. Coast Guard recruiting station before leaving from New York City. The doctor there did not agree with the Navy findings and passed me for entrance into the Coast Guard reserve program at the Academy.

It was a hot summer day when I reported at New London. I still remember cadets chanting, "You'll be sorry" from the open windows overlooking the driveway at the Academy as we CRCs individually walked our way to report for training. For my part, I was most appreciative of the Coast Guard for giving me a chance to prove that I was physically qualified for sea duty. However, this introduction was not all that encouraging.

As stated in the article the training was very intensive. I still remember being given guard duty along the fences of the Academy in the middle of the night. We never did quite figure out what we were guarding against, but it did give us experience replete with passwords and other procedures. In the fourth month, I was part of the antisubmarine group. We were assigned to "83 footers." We had an excellent opportunity for training since we were able to conduct coordinated exercises on Long Island Sound with submarines from their training base at New London. Our sonar gear was rather rudimentary, but we were able to make contacts which made for satisfaction as to our ability to detect them.

Our major undertaking in seamanship was a cruise into the Atlantic off Long Island Sound. Unfortunately for us, we managed to catch the tail end of a hurricane. With rough seas, everyone on board became seasick. As it turned out, it was great training for future sea duty. In the middle of the night while on watch, I suddenly sighted through the phosphorescence of the water what appeared to be a torpedo aimed directly at us. There was no time in which to give an alarm. As it disappeared under the boat, I finally realized that it was a porpoise. It gave me a real scare. We did make it back into Fort Pond Bay at Montauk Point where we were able to take sanctuary from the storm. In a way, I have always regretted that I was not assigned to the DANMARK since it would be much more exotic to say that I had served aboard a full rigged ship which could be considered the mark of a real sailor.

One of our advantages was that we were given quarters in Chase Hall. With only one roommate, this was comparative luxury to the barracks living of our first three months. My roommate was a Harvard graduate from a distinguished Boston family. We hit it off well and decided that we would

volunteer for what seemed to be the most adventurous duty available, namely in Alaska. When we received our orders, I was assigned to the USCGC ONONDAGA in the Aleutians while he was retained at the Academy as an instructor. He was disappointed.

Before leaving the Academy, we purchased new uniforms. I still remember debating whether or not to order a bridge coat, a magnificent looking garment. However, I hesitated since I did not know for sure where I would be assigned. By the time I received my orders to the Aleutians, it was too late. However, in my train trip across the country, I did have the opportunity to purchase one in Chicago. I did have visions of myself strutting the bridge in great style. I again hesitated since they were expensive. My decision proved to be correct since at no time did anyone aboard the ONONDAGA wear a bridge coat. Closet space was at a premium.

My first assignment was reached via Juneau, Alaska where I was able to have a final fling at the Bubble Room of the Baranoff Hotel which is renowned for having been the place where the "short snorter," autographed \$1 bills, originated. I have long since lost mine. I still remember having a delicious salmon steak dinner for the same amount. It was a fitting farewell to civilization as I began my adventures at sea.

It so happened that I reported aboard the ONONDAGA shortly after she had experienced the Japanese attack at Dutch Harbor as a prelude to the Battle of Midway. I was able to receive first hand a vivid description of that historic event. Most of the officers were Academy graduates. I was the first CRC to be assigned. They were most helpful in providing me indoctrination to my duties as a deck officer and having charge of damage control. Also, I became treasurer of the wardroom which was mainly a challenge at keeping the assessment under \$10 per month.

The areas in which we operated from the Ice Straits to Kodiak and Dutch

Harbor were as stormy as anywhere in the world. The seas were mountainous, towering over the ship, and so rough that our seats at the wardroom mess were hooked to the table with compartments to hold the plates on the table. The weather was the main factor of combat.

Because of her construction as an icebreaker, the ship had no roll preventers. Therefore, the normal roll was through a 90 degree arc. At one point she rolled so far that both lifeboats filled with water and broke both strongbacks. The one major fear was ice on the superstructure, the weight from which could make the ship top heavy with the danger of rolling over and capsizing. A redeeming factor was her broad bow which made it possible to maintain speed into heavy seas whereas the Navy ships would have to substantially reduce speed to prevent the bow from cutting into a "green" sea. The one experience that we had with that flipped the heavy sea directly into the superstructure like hitting a solid wall. It almost wiped out the bridge. As a result, it was like the "tortoise and the hare" as we were able to outdistance the speedy destroyers since on average two out of every three days were stormy. As a result, we were sent out into stormy weather while they remained in port. I well remember being sent out to pick up a derelict barge that had been abandoned at sea. We found it fully submerged and towed it back at the clipped speed of 1 knot through heavy seas into Kodiak.

As stated, the weather was our principal adversary. With no radar on board and the foggy Aleutians making celestial navigation all but impossible, it was no wonder that so many ships went aground in the area of Scotch Cap at the entrance into the Bering Sea. We went to the rescue of one, "The Adventurer," but she had been abandoned and was already being pounded into oblivion by the heavy seas. Another hazard was the williwaw winds which would come in sudden unpredictable gusts at velocities over 100 mph. In so

called protected waters, we were hit with a gust that blew the ship like a feather in the breeze dragging both anchors. We were tied up to the dock at Kodiak when a williwaw hit a pile of Quonset Hut siding scattering them like shingles which hit and killed two seamen on the spot. We, also, became a fireboat when a dockside warehouse went up in flames. It was on a foggy night at Kodiak that we were trying with a Navy tug to free a freighter from the beach where she had gone aground. Suddenly the tug loomed out of the night fog and hit us putting a clean hole amidships. This necessitated a return to Seattle for overhaul. To make life interesting, we towed the decommissioned cutter ALGONQUIN from Kodiak to Seattle on what had to be one of the longest tows in Coast Guard history.

After overhaul, the culmination of my seagoing experience came at the invasion and recapture of Attu. We were with the North Pacific Fleet at Adak. With battleships and cruisers in the harbor, there were no antisubmarine nets; so the night before the attack we were given the assignment of a "dog" patrol to guard against the incursion of submarines. As we crossed from point to point in the usual Aleutian fog, I found that Navy minesweepers were operating along the channel directly in our course. Due to the fog, the only way that we could tell where they were was by looking for the phosphorescence in the water caused by their paravanes. Suddenly, I noticed what appeared to be the silhouette of a submarine with only the phosphorescence of its wake to indicate its presence. With the danger of attack imminent and knowing we had an icebreaking bow, my immediate reaction was to order full speed ahead and ram her amidships. However, a note of caution echoed in my mind, and I decided to take a sounding. That quickly proved that what I was about to ram was a reef. I always considered this to be a bad mark until after the war I saw a Japanese documentary titled

"Retreat from Kiska." In that film, the Japanese fleet mistook a reef for an American naval vessel and opened up with guns and torpedoes. It only proves that the Aleutians are treacherous and natural deception is prevalent. This was the end of my seagoing career since, having passed a Navy physical, I was accepted for flight training. It was a relatively simple transition for me because I had acquired a private pilot's license at college.

After flight training at Pensacola and operational training at Biloxi adventure again beckoned. We were given the opportunity to volunteer for PBM training at NAS Banana River with subsequent orders to the South Pacific. We received excellent training especially in night water landings. However, the SP orders were cancelled, and we returned to Biloxi. Again volunteers were asked for VP6 in Greenland. Thus it was that I was designated Patrol Plane Commander for the Biloxi plane and crew. As preparation for this, I was given instrument training at the FAA Flight Standardization Center in Houston. This was great experience, and I did manage to become only the 2nd Coast Guard Aviator to pass the FAA instrument rating flight test.

Adventures we did have with VP6. Flying out of Blue West 1, one never knew whether we would get back in because of a minimum altitude for instrument flying of 12,000 feet with the airfield at sea level. One day, for instance, we took off behind an Air Force C-47. We flew over fifty miles to the end of the fjord, took one look at the weather and returned to base. The C-47 continued on and shortly afterward we received word that it had disappeared. We then had to go out to search for the crew. Unfortunately, they had hit a "stuffed cloud," a mountain, with fatal results. Another time we were at 12,000 feet when we iced up, losing all of our radio antennae. We had to descend when the heated air speed indicator clogged with ice and showed zero. Fortunately, we broke out in the clear. A week later in the

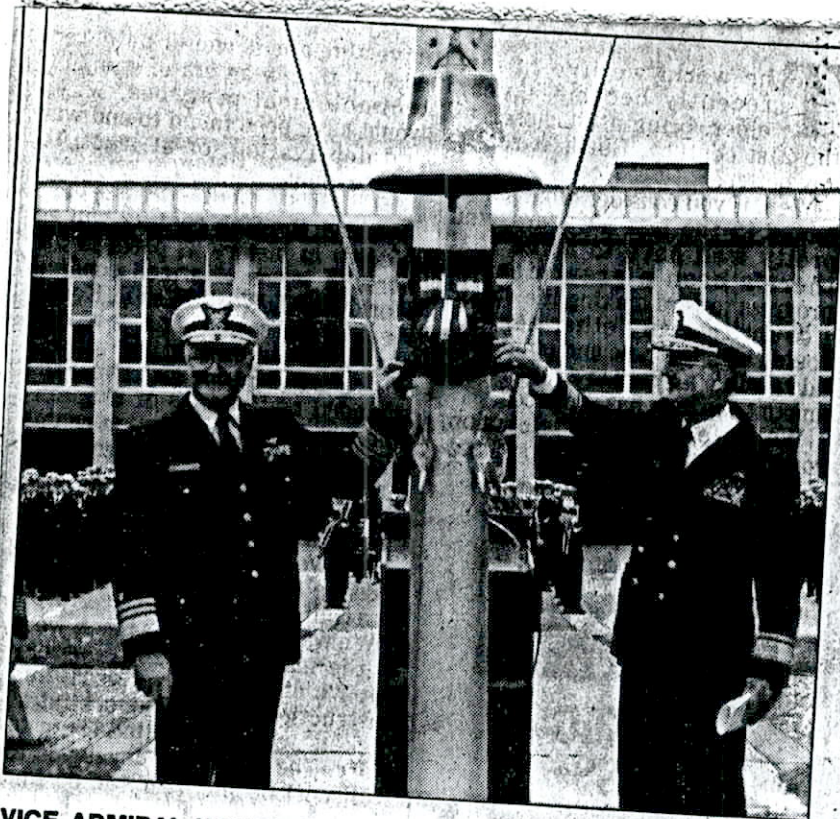
the Loran station at Battle Harbour, Labrador. Thirty years later, in 1976, I was to discover through an article in the "Wall Street Journal" that this was the first flight of the International Ice Patrol. As PPC, a CRC was involved in this historic event.

After WWII there was no reserve program for several years. However, in 1953 I received orders to Naval Reserve flight training. Since I flew out of NAS New York as an instrument training instructor, I was able to have close contact with the Coast Guard Air Station at Floyd Bennett Field. The high point of this duty for me was to fly as PPC a PB4Y2, Privateer, for duty with the 6th fleet in the Mediterranean. In so doing, we retraced the flight route of the NC-4 which was piloted by Coast Aviator #1, Elmer Stone in the first crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. To this day, I have displayed in my office a picture of our plane on the the runway at the Rock of Gibraltar. Coincidentally, as we took off from Nice, France for our return, we flew over the Andrea Doria which was about to make her last voyage. It added further proof to me that flying is safer than seagoing.

In 1959, I was offered the command of the first Rescue Coordination Center reserve unit (ORTUR) to be formed for the Third District. Although I did not like to give up my flying, I was attracted by an experiment with an operational concept in which a reserve unit would work alongside the regular RCC. With the full cooperation of the RCC we built up a unit which took over the responsibility of the Atlantic Area on weekends. Never, in my opinion, has a C.O. been blessed with a more capable group of individuals who exhibited complete dedication to their duties. As runners up for the Canfield Trophy as outstanding reserve unit for two years, our proudest moment was when the Eastern Area inspectors stated in their report that this was truly an operational unit. Subsequently this experiment became known as

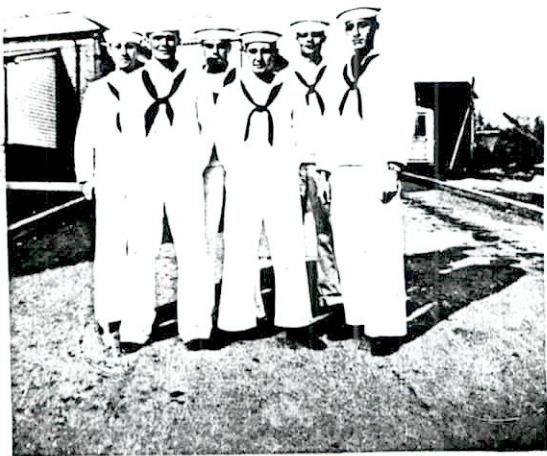
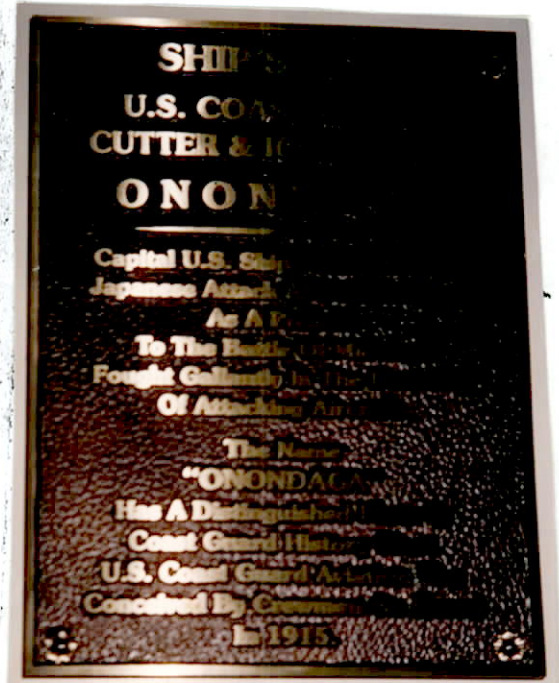
officer of the ONONDAGA, ADM Chiswell, was nominated for inclusion in the Aviation Hall of Fame at Mobil. This has been accomplished, but the ONONDAGA still goes unrecognized and forgotten.

NORBERT W MUENCH
 CAPT USCGR
 217 FERNWOOD CIR
 LARGO FL 33777-4868



File photo
VICE ADMIRAL HOWARD THORSEN, left, commander of the Coast Guard's Eastern Area, and Rear Admiral Floyd Miller, president of the SUNY Maritime College at Fort Schuyler, present a plaque commemorating the ship's bell from the bridge of the U.S.S. Onondaga. The bell was placed on the school's flagpole.

Coast Guard's Eastern Area Command

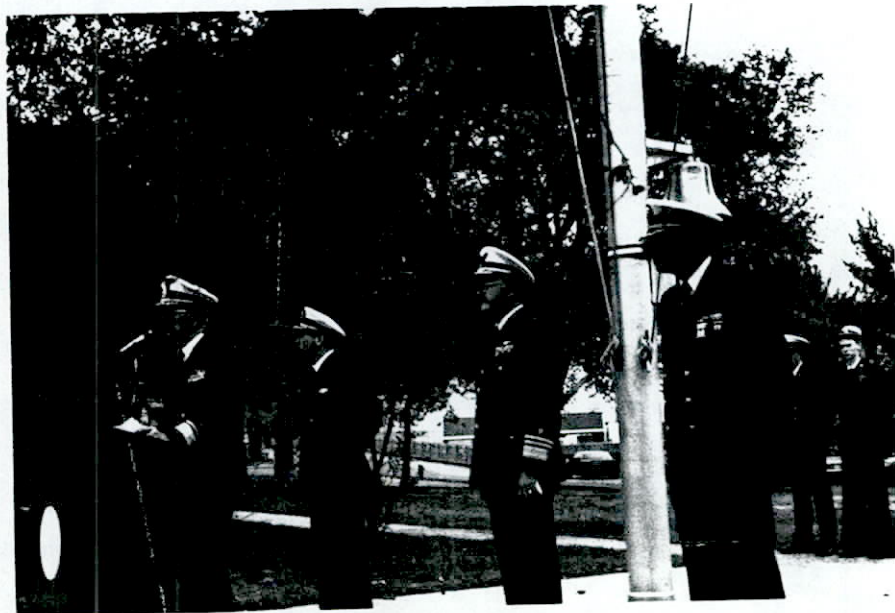
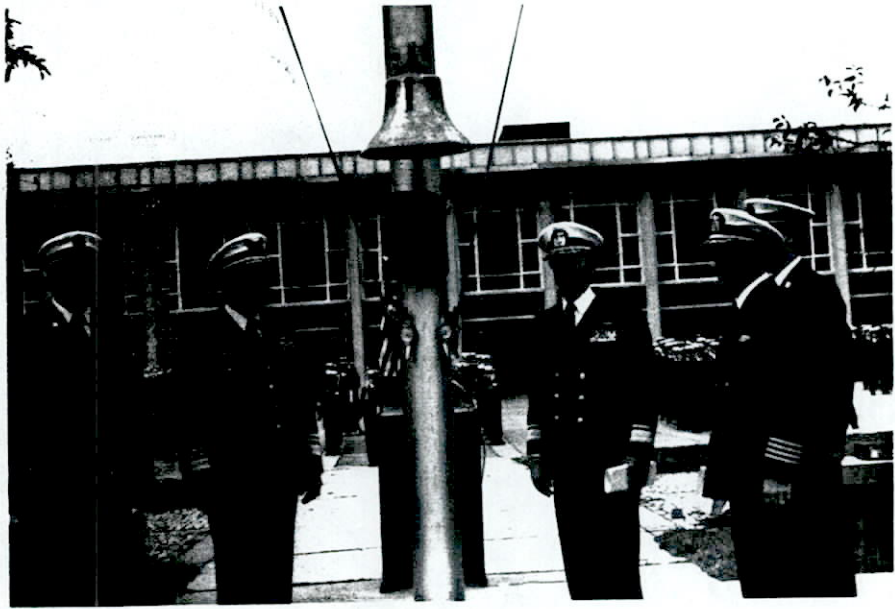
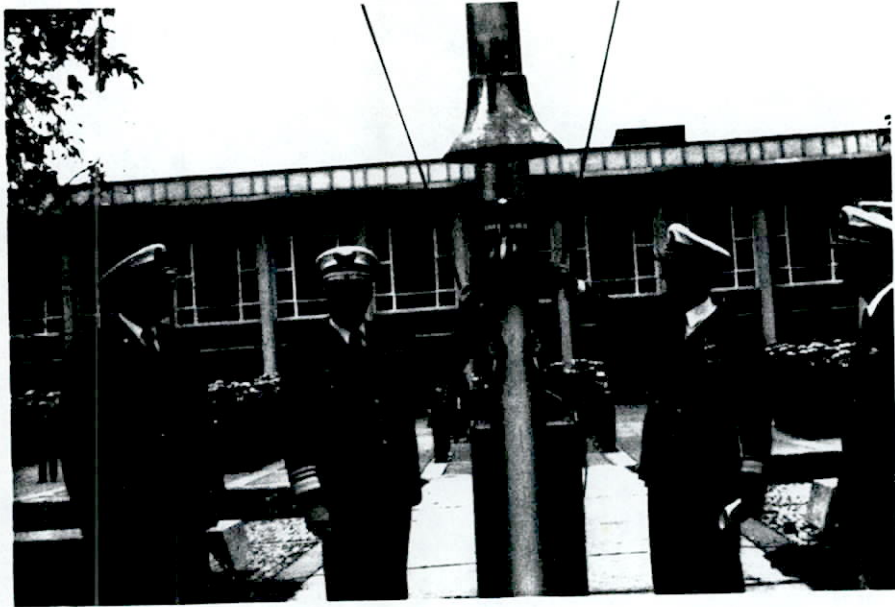


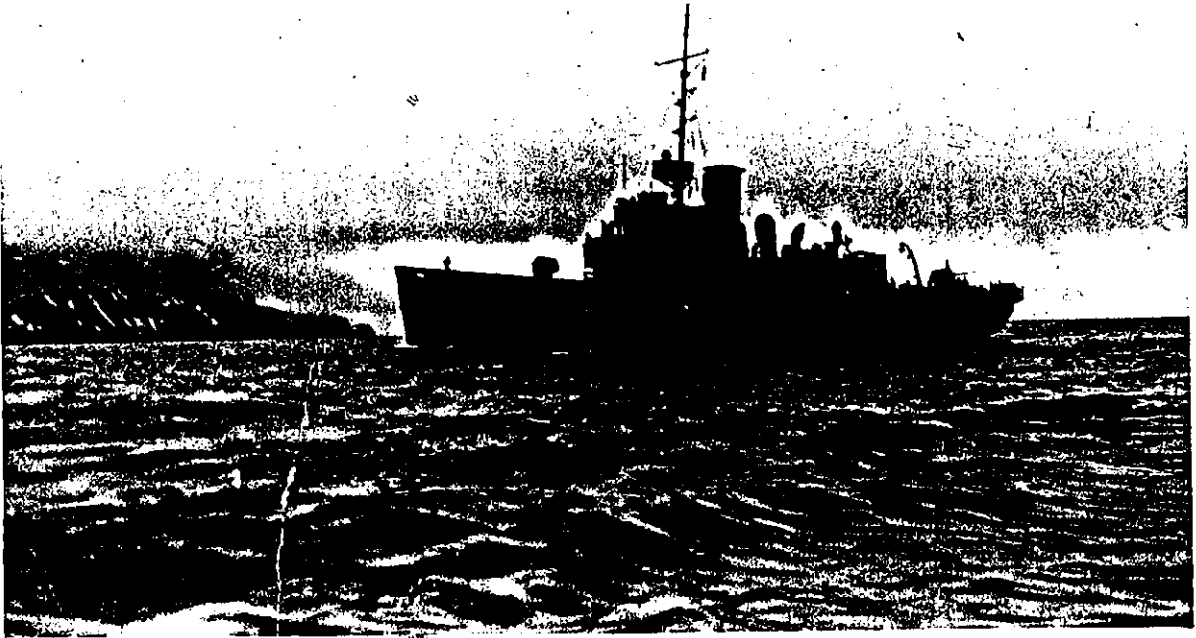
CRCs Coast Guard Academy
 1942

SHIP'S BELL
U.S. COAST GUARD
CUTTER & ICEBREAKER
ONONDAGA

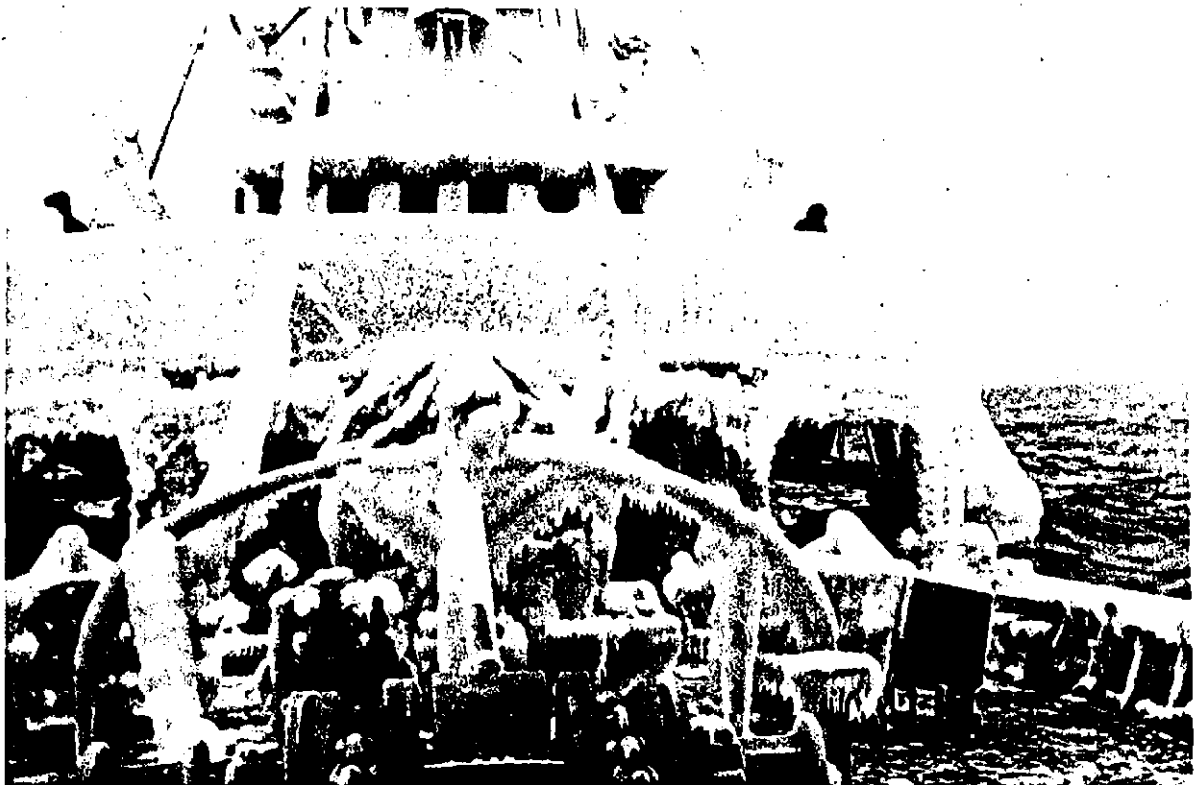
**Capital U.S. Ship Present During
Japanese Attack At Dutch Harbor
As A Prelude
To The Battle Of Midway.
Fought Gallantly In The Downing
Of Attacking Aircraft.**

**The Name
"ONONDAGA"
Has A Distinguished Place In
Coast Guard History Since
U.S. Coast Guard Aviation Was
Conceived By Crewmen On Board
In 1915.**





IN FOG NEAR DUTCH HARBOR BERING SEA
USCG CUTTER & ICEBREAKER "ONONDAGA"
IN ICE NEAR ICY STRAIT GULF OF ALASKA





FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE
ONONDAGA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

1987.28

Pictured with the Coast Guard Cutter ONONDAGA's mascot goat are from left, standing, 3d Lieutenant Elmer F. Stone, 1st Lieutenant James F. Hottel, and 2nd Lieutenant William J. Keester. Identities of the two seated officers holding the goat are uncertain. (The names of these two were penciled on the back of the original photo but are not legible and appear to be nicknames.)

Stone's first assignment after graduating from the Academy in June 1913, was to study the steam propelled machinery on board the Revenue Cutter ONONDAGA, based at Norfolk, Va. A few months later he became a line officer in that vessel. After a temporary assignment on board the training Cutter ITASCA from October 1914 to February 1915, he returned to the ONONDAGA where he remained until spring of 1916 when he put in for flight training.

Copied from a photo in the personal effects of the late CDR Elmer F. Stone, USCG, first U. S. Coast Guard Aviator, and the pilot of the NC-4 that made the first successful trans-Atlantic flight in May 1919.

U. S. COAST GUARD PHOTOGRAPH NO. G-APA-10-15-73 (16)
Public Affairs Division
U. S. Coast Guard Headquarters
Washington, D. C. 20590



TREASURY DEPARTMENT

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

COAST GUARD CUTTER

ONONDAGA

Potomac River, April 18, 1916.

My dear Hunniwell:

If practicable, please mail me as soon as convenient plans, specifications and blue prints of a type of motor surfboat which you may regard as best adapted to the following:

Mr. Glenn H. Curtiss, at luncheon with Mr. Newton on the ONONDAGA last Sunday, suggested that it might be practicable to convert a surfboat into a flying boat with wings and motor so arranged that they could be quickly eliminated when the boat lighted on the water and within a few minutes it would be, instead of a flying boat, an ordinary motor surfboat. If the lifeboat is better adapted, send lifeboat. He promised to think about it and I am going to try to encourage him.

If it is possible to perfect something of that kind I believe it would be the biggest find for the Coast Guard of the century and might be the means of saving hundreds of lives.

Maybe if you could hear them say nonchalantly that they are now building machines capable of lifting 20 tons, you would not be quite so skeptical as I ~~know~~^{believe} you to be at present.

Sincerely,



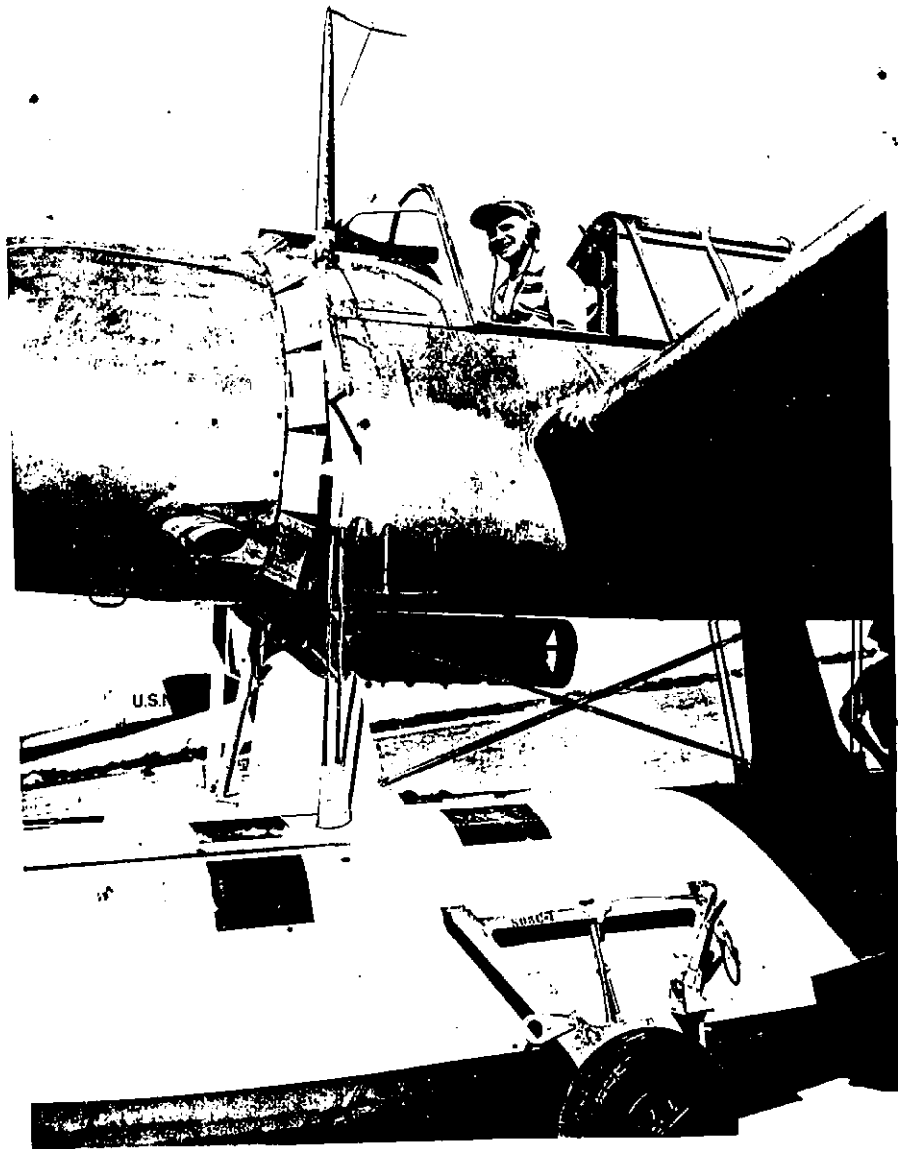
THIS LETTER CONTAINS THE GERM FROM WHICH COAST GUARD AVIATION SPRUNG.

USCGC ONONDAGA RESOLUTION

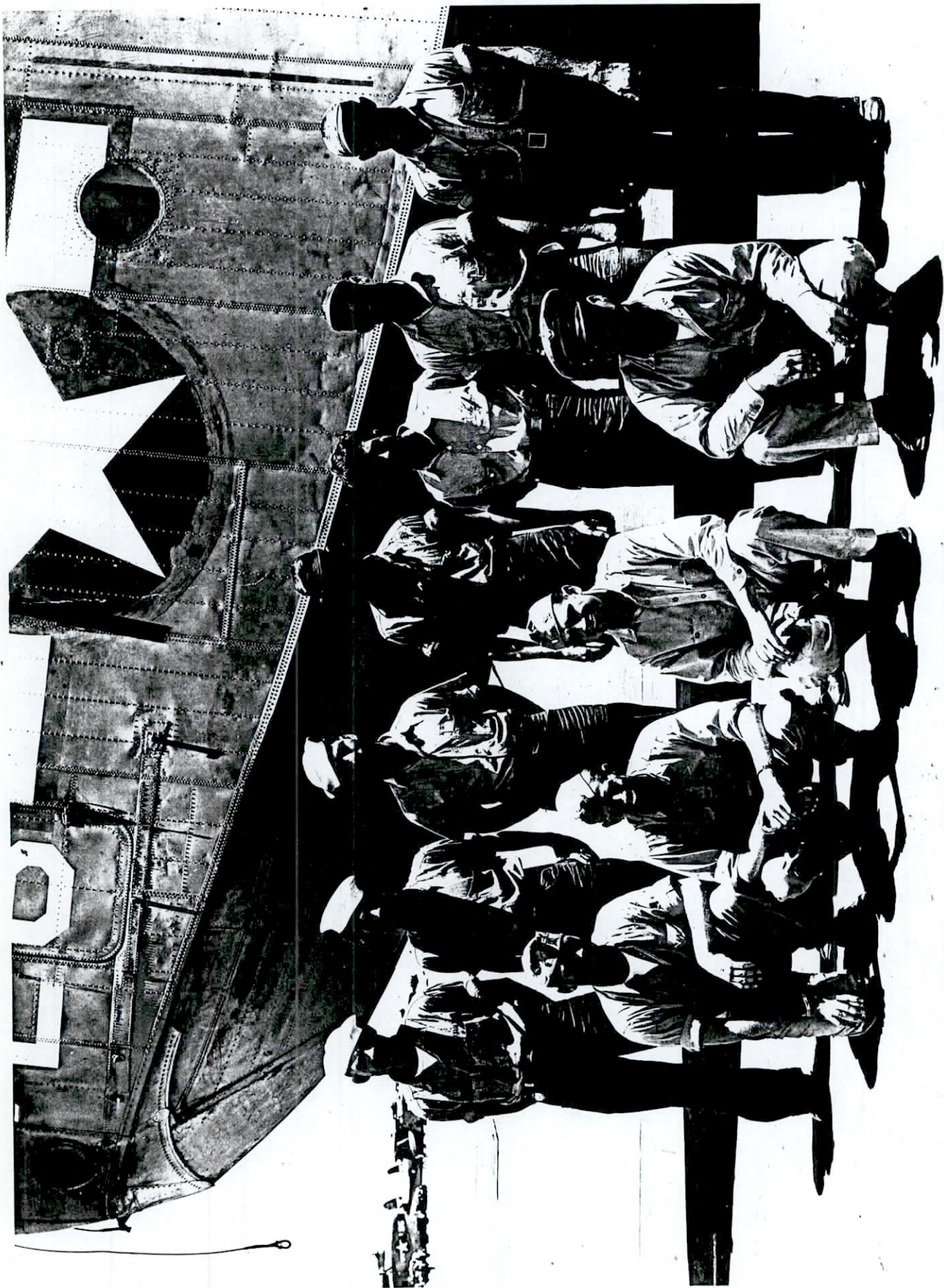
The name ONONDAGA has a distinguished place in U.S. Coast Guard history. The Cutter USS ONONDAGA was the birthplace of Coast Guard Aviation. The USCGC and Icebreaker ONONDAGA actively participated in the Aleutians Campaign during World War II and fought gallantly in repelling the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor as a prelude to the Battle of Midway.

The members of THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THE PTERODACTYL meeting on this 6th day of October 1991 at Pensacola to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of U.S. Coast Guard Aviation and mindful that this is also the 50th Anniversary Year of the entry of the United States into World War II adopt a resolution as follows:

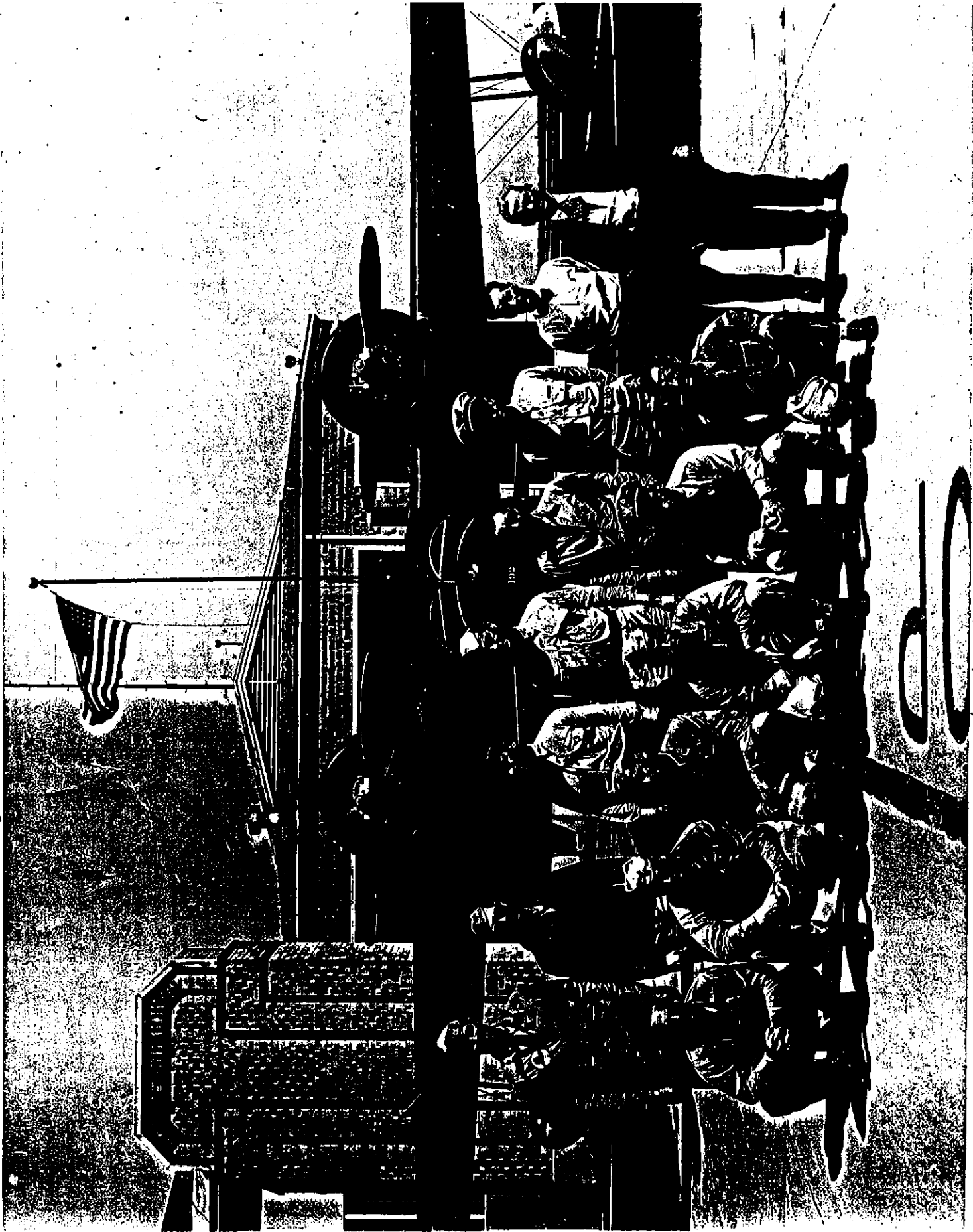
BE IT RESOLVED THAT BECAUSE OF THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME "ONONDAGA" IN U.S. COAST GUARD HISTORY, THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THE PTERODACTYL RECOMMENDS TO COAST GUARD HEADQUARTERS THAT AN APPROPRIATE FUTURE CUTTER BE CONSTRUCTED AND CHRISTENED ONONDAGA.



0520 Kingfisher
Biloxi 1944



Biloxi PBIM Crew
17th Banana River 1944
WHO CLAIMS IT?



FAA Flight Standardization - Houston 1945



BW-1 Greenland 1945

RCC Custom House NYC 1959



X. 0
81

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO:
COMMANDANT
U.S. COAST GUARD
HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.



CR-3
A23
Serial 429OCR
• 7 March 1962

From: Commandant
To: Commanding Officer, ORTUR 03-392, U.S. Custom House, New York 4, N.Y.
Via: Commander, Third Coast Guard District (dcr)

Subj: Eastern Inspector's report of 13 February 1962; comments concerning

1. The contents of subject report of inspection have been noted with pleasure.
2. It is gratifying to note the evaluation of EXCELLENT awarded your unit for Organization, Personnel, and Operational Readiness. It was also noted that the percentage of personnel passing the 1961 service-wide examinations was considerably above the general average.
3. You and your unit officers and men are to be commended for achieving this high degree of proficiency.

E. S. KERR, Jr.
Assistant Chief of Staff (Reserve)

dcr
A23
15 March 1962

FIRST ENDORSEMENT on COMDT's ltr Serial 429OCR of 7 March 1962

From: Commander, Third Coast Guard District
To: Commanding Officer, ORTUR 03-392, U.S. Custom House, New York 4, NY

1. Forwarded with pleasure.

J. D. CRAIK
Acting

Tracking 'Bergs'

A local businessman was on the first Coast Guard aerial reconnaissance flight in search of those floating disasters, icebergs

The April 8 edition of the "Wall Street Journal" held cherished memories and a surprise for a Syracuse businessman.

His eye was caught by a story on the International Ice Patrol, a branch of the U.S. Coast Guard which flies surveillance missions daily from February through July locating icebergs in the treacherous icy waters of the North Atlantic.

The icebergs which drift south of the 48th parallel into the shipping lanes are the targets for the patrols, which began in 1914 in response to the tragic sinking of the "Titanic" two years earlier.

After World War Two, the boat patrols were replaced by aerial reconnaissance, and Norbert Muench, now executive vice-president of Jay B. Rudolph Inc., realized that made him something of a pioneer: As Lt. Muench, he had been the Patrol Plane Commander on that first flight on Feb. 6, 1946.

"We didn't realize it then, of course," he recalled from his swivel chair in his South Salina Street office. "It was after the war, and we were mainly flying diplomatic pouches to the U.S. consulate in Greenland. We had just finished a pick up, and were sent right back out to check for icebergs. Even during the war, when we were on anti-submarine patrols, it was usually described as 'hours of utter boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror.'"

Those patrols were of primary importance to boats in the heavily traveled shipping lanes. Much of the North Atlantic, especially around the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, often is shrouded in dense fog, prone to sudden violent storms and crowded with cargo shipping and fishing trawlers harvesting the rich

ocean bounty. The patrol looks for icebergs which have drifted into the lanes and reports their location back to Ice Patrol headquarters on Governor's Island, off the southern tip of Manhattan.

There, the location, plus data on currents, wind velocity and water temperature is fed into computers. The digested information is then transmitted to ships at sea twice a day.

Lt. Muench flew only two or three more such missions on the old PBY-5A, a military

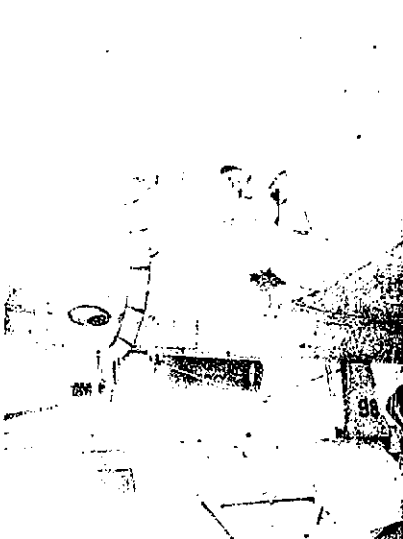
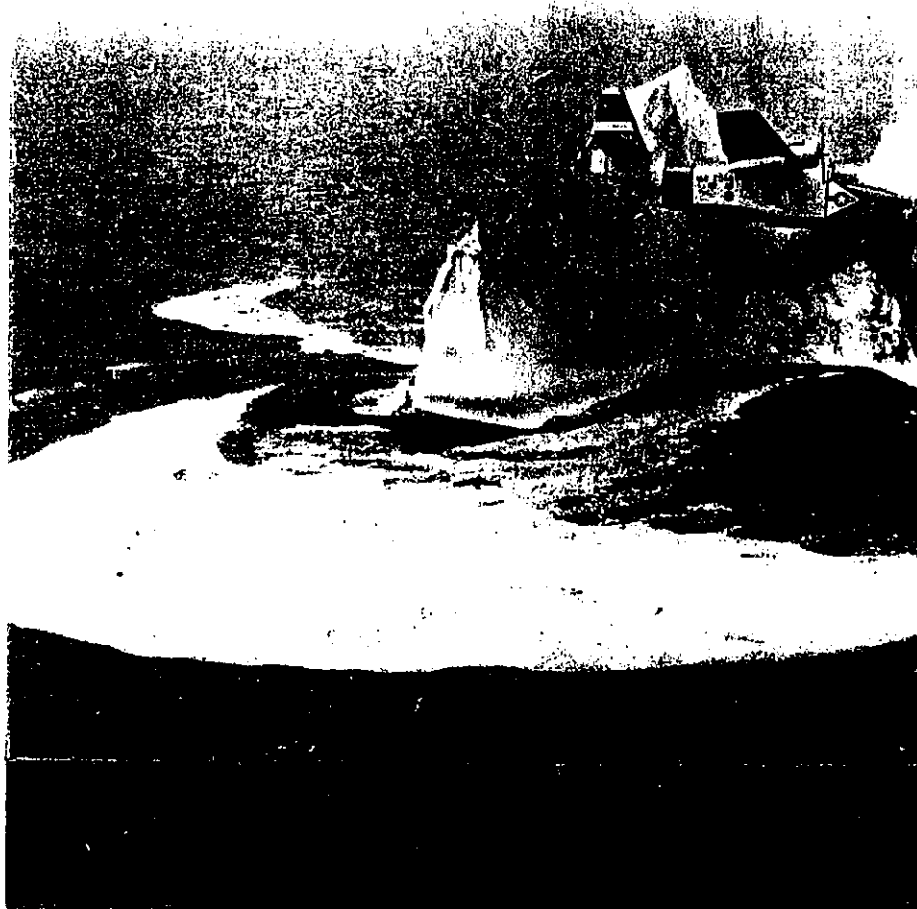


NORBERT W. MUENCH

amphibian, before he went off active duty.

But his affair with the Coast Guard continued until 1972, when he retired after 30 years service. His Reserve duty at Naval Air Stations in Niagara Falls and New York City included founding of the Rescue Coordination Center, which handles all Coast Guard rescue operations for the eastern seaboard.

Muench joined the Guard in 1942, and served on the U.S.S. Onondaga as an ensign during the Aleutians campaign in Alaska from 1942 to 1943. Ironically, his son, William A., is now an ensign in the Navy on the U.S.S. Mobile, an attack transport which has just been assigned to Alaska.



Lt. Muench is shown in 1943 in the cockpit of an OS2U Kingfisher, flown off Coast Guard ice breakers in the Aleutians.

