

My Recollections of my Years in the United States Coast Guard
1947 Through 1963
George Cheney 273-397

- 1 Enlistment in Boston, March 13, 1947
Next day boarded train for Jacksonville FL. Arrive at boot camp, Mayport FL. March 15. Seaman Second Class.

- 2 Boot Camp, Mayport, FL, March - May, 1947
Start basic training, send civilian clothes home. Learn to assemble a sea bag. Stencil all clothing. Roll all items of clothing, secure with clothes stops. Learn to row a Monomoy surf boat, 20 men pulling and a cox n with the sweep oar, and calling the stroke cadence. Spent 2 days on the firing range, learned to field strip an M1, but never fired the weapon. The rifle range weapons were 22 caliber long rifles. As for the pistol range we learned to field strip the 1911 45 caliber pistol but again never fired the weapon. We used a 22 caliber pistol on the 1911 pistol frame, and were only allowed 20 shots to qualify. The Guard was short of money. I had one week of KP duty, and spent one day in the engine room of the cutter Argo, moored to the dock. The Argo was a 165 footer, and had two Winton diesel engines. We also went through many hours of aptitude testing, and a 2 hour lecture by the Chaplin. And a movie on VD. We had no liberty in boot camp. We were allowed one week leave en route to our next duty station. Seaman First Class.

- 3 Motor Machinist Mate School. Groton CT, May - September 1947
Early in May, waiting for the next class to form and the Motor Machinist Mate Class to start, I worked with the grounds crew for a few days. The course was 16 weeks with hands on engine work and lots of class work. The most popular engine was the Buda Lanova diesel. I did not see a GM 6-71 until the first duty station. There were several Hall Scott engines that were set up with clutch and reduction gear to drive a propeller in a test tank. There were many classes on refrigeration and cooling, lubrication and cooling. The Motor Machinist Mate course completed in September and I was rated as Motor Machinist Mate 3rd Class. On graduation, I was transferred to the Cutter Dexter at Curtis Bay, MD, with 1 week leave en route to Baltimore, MD.

- 4 First duty Station, USCG Dexter, Curtis Bay, MD
The Dexter was just completing a major overhaul, and went on sea trials after about a week, running around Chesapeake Bay.

- 5 First time at sea, Shake Down in Chesapeake Bay
These were not the best of times, not being able to fight the sea sickness, this, tied together with diesel oil and smoke, and trying to keep up with the lube oil leakage from the main engines (they were V16 direct reversible, 4 cycles, General Motors engines), 2 engines in each engine room, driving 2 screws, through fluid couplings and reduction gear in each engine room. The after engine room also had the main boiler and the evaporator, a solo shell, double effect unit with a capacity of 50 gallons per hour. One of the continuing jobs was cleaning the centrifuge used to clean the diesel fuel. This was a required twice per 4 hour underway watch.
- 6 Leave Newport, VA, for Boston, September, 1947
This was an uneventful trip to Boston, we were very busy getting ready for our cruise to Weather Station Able.
- 7 First Cruise, Weather Station Able, September - November 1947
This was a trip that was. Bouncing around on a 10 mile square station. I had never seen the ocean so rough. The ground swell must have been about 60 feet. When maintaining position, the bridge would pipe down, Prepare to Come About, and then Come About, there were times no one was allowed out on deck. They had rigged extra man lines around the main deck. The mess deck tables had dividers attached so the mess trays would not go flying, as it was, some did get away. The mess deck was always a MESS. And of course, this was the first time that the quality of the food was really poor. All the other stations the food was excellent. But on station, we had powdered milk, powdered eggs and spam. The noon meal was not much to write home about. I had a continuing problem with sea sickness, along with the fact that you had to wear foul weather gear in the engine room, it was really cold even with the boiler and evaporator running. The Skipper was also called to move off station to assist a freighter that had problems. We could only stand by for a few days until other assistance was available. Then our relief was allowed to have Thanksgiving at Home. That required that we would be on station for about 45 days.
- 8 From Dexter to Brighton Marine Hospital
When we finally got back to Boston, I was transferred to The Brighton Marine Hospital. I had lost about 19 pounds over the time at sea. I spent 2 weeks in the hospital and was transferred to the General Greene in Gloucester MA.

9 USCG General Greene, December, 1947 - March, 1948

The General Greene was a one hundred and a quarter, that was quite old in the 40s and 50s, it was built for the North Atlantic Ice Patrol, built in 1917. During WWII they installed new engines, 8-268As. These are very noisy engines. They were also used as main engines on some of the diesel subs.

At the time I was on the Greene, there was no attempt to assign hearing protection (nothing was available). The normal steaming watch was a one man operation, answering bells, running the engines, and keeping the engine room log up to date. The duty was not too bad, 24 on and 24 off, in normal weather, while moored, but it was moved to 4 hour or 2 hour return as the weather forecasts worsened. For the most part, I was able to take the train home to Malden with the normal liberty schedule, but when on two or four hour standby, you had to leave a phone number in case of an emergency, and stay in Gloucester. The watches were the normal 4 on and 8 off underway. The problem was after 4 hours in the engine room, you were essentially deaf during your 8 hours off.

The food on the Green was great. We had a Big, Black, CS, Booker T. Little, and could that man cook! One of the bonuses for towing-in a fishing boat, is that we would get a good supply of fresh fish to supplement the money the District sent for the food purchases. The food was purchased at local grocery stores. What was best when we hauled in a scallop dragger, is that we got a good size portion of fresh scallops. Were they good! The way rescued vessels were handled was different then. Instead of handing off the tow as we approached the harbor, we would bring the tow all the way to the dock. Many of the times the tow would either have line fouled in the screws or they would run out of fuel. After a while, I put in for a transfer to the Seventeenth District and it came in February. The CG opted to travel by train to the west coast. I arrived in Seattle for transfer to Kodiak. A group of Coasties were flown in an R4D to Kodiak where I was transferred to the air facility Kodiak, for transfer to St. Paul Island.

10 USCG Flight Kodiak To St. Paul Island, April, 1948 - March, 1950

The flight from Kodiak to St. Paul was a long and arduous trip, it was only supposed to take 2 or 3 days, but ended up taking about 30 days. The first leg of the journey was an overnight stop at Dutch Harbor, and then from Dutch to St. Paul the next day. That didn't work. The next morning while getting ready for the next leg of the trip, the PBY had a magneto problem. They flew a mag out to us, and we were off the next morning to St. Paul. As we neared St. Paul the fog was so heavy we could not land. We detoured back to Cold Bay, and landed in a snow storm. About 7 days later we shoveled out the plane and got ready to go. One of the facts I have not

mentioned was, at engine start up, I had to climb up to the top of the wing between the engines with a fire extinguisher in case of a manifold fire, which never happened. Getting down off of the wing and into the waist bubble was fun when it was slippery. As we headed out of Cold Bay, we were called back to Seward to pick up an injured sailor, and bring him back to Kodiak. At Seward we made a water landing. It was exciting! From Kodiak, a day or two later with a planned return to Dutch Harbor, we were detoured to Adak Naval Air Station. I was dropped off there to wait for the PBY to return to Adak, that was 2 weeks of waiting. When the plane finally returned, we made it to St. Paul in one step. There was some interesting sightseeing on that flight. We passed the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, and passed by Shishaldin Volcano. It was really beautiful.

St. Paul, Loran, was a Loran A station. My job was to keep the generators running so we could stay in sync. We had two Catapillar diesels rated at 34 KW to supply power to the transmitters and timers. We also had 2 Hill Diesels rated at 35 KW for the station power, and a Jeep auxiliary in case of problems with the diesel fuel. Thank God I never had to use it for the station. On my arrival, there were many times during the first few days that we lost power, due to water in the fuel. I had to find a way of draining off the water from the day-tank, and keep the water out of the system. That was the major power problem that I had. The Cat Diesels were great engines. They had a small 2 cylinder gasoline engine for cranking and starting, that could be started like an outboard motor with a pull rope, in case of battery failure. The Hill Diesels had a 24 volt battery for starting. The Hill engines were a far poorer quality than the Cats. I had to keep a Cat and a Hill running all the time. On a weekly schedule, I would switch over to the other set of engines, change the oil and filters, and get ready for the next week's run.

The station facilities were nothing to write home about. As the weather worsened, and winter set in, the water lines from the water tank house would freeze, and had to be disconnected, and we had to carry all the water we used on the station for cooking, washing and laundry, and bathing of course. With the water shut off, we had to use an outhouse in back of the station. The outhouse was not heated of course. It was sort of a contest to see who could hold it until someone had to go in order to warm the seat, then the procession to the outhouse would continue. Bathing and clothes washing were done in 5 gallon buckets. Everyone had to carry their own water except the cook. The night fire-watch had to bring in about 15 gallons and heat it on the galley stove. The fire-watch also had to light the galley range about 6AM, so the coffee would be ready for breakfast. We were living in a series of Quonset huts that were tied down with dead men to keep the roofs from blowing off. All the buildings were tied down,

including the tank house, that had 2 - 50,000 gallon water tanks, these tanks kept us going through the winter. The water was pumped up from a spring about a 1/4 mile away from the station, the water tanks were kept topped off, during the warmer months and pumped under pressure to the station living quarters. The supply of fuel oil was kept in strategically placed oil drums and three Chevrolet fuel trucks to pump the oil from the drums to the high tanks that supplied oil for the oil heaters in each of the Quonset huts. The generator hut had a 5,000 gallon tank for supply to the day tank in the generator hut. It was a weekly job for the oil king to transfer the fuel from drums to high tanks. We also had a fire pump in one of the commissary huts with a 3,000 gallon tank, and enough hose to reach most of the station. We had outside lights and man ropes to keep anyone from wandering off of the station on the long winter nights. The walk from the galley hut to the transmitter hut was a very long walk, say probably about 1/4 mile. With the way the wind and snow were usually blowing, one could easily get disoriented. The Quonset huts were all connected, except the generator hut and the transmitter hut. The galley hut had two walk-in freezers, the galley and eating area. There was one table in the galley, the skipper sat at the head of the table, and the crew sat along the sides, the Exec was an EN1 and sat at the foot of the table. The cook, David Winship, arrived as I did on the same plane. Dave had to learn to bake bread in a hurry! He had not done it before. He caught on soon. One time I had to go into town to scrounge some parts for the Hill Diesels. The road was not passable, so I decided to ski into town, about 13 miles. I made it into town, but ended in the Fish and Wild Life Hospital for several days. When it was time to get back to the station, the skipper and 2 other men, drove into town to pick me up. The Jeep was towed by the Alyce-Chalmers bulldozer. The Jeep engine was kept running to provide heat in the Jeep. A plywood enclosure had been built to provide shelter in the vehicle. The life on the station was pleasant, the food was reasonable, and therefore, I volunteered to stay until it was to be shut down late in February. Leaving the station is not remembered well, I recall ending up in Kodiak, and then being transferred to a Navy troop transport, headed for Seattle, then home on leave, by train cross country.

11 Home on Leave, March through May, 1950

Home finally. Stayed at home. Jeanne McFarland wanted to get married and go back to Alaska with me. When I was home I had Dr. Merrill Straw in Everett, do repair work on my teeth, and make a partial plate for my missing teeth. I paid for the dental work out of my pocket.

We were married on April 20, 1950. After we were married, we packed up and went to Seattle by train again.

It should be noted here that I had saved all my money and had additional

sea pay and extra leave, because of my stay at St. Paul Island, for a year and a half. As a result of the duty I had just completed, I had my choice of duty anywhere in the Seventeenth District. I chose Sentinel Island Light Station, because of its closeness to Juneau. I was to take over as the Petty Officer In Charge (POIC), when the civilian keeper, Mr. Truman Cook was to retire. It did not work out that way. Jeanne did not like the idea of that type of isolation and was supposed to prepare the menus, order the food, and cook for the military personnel on the station, as pay for her living at the station. Jeanne refused and stayed up in her room. Because of this I had to prepare the food for everyone, along with directing the military duties on the station. As leading Petty officer I had the day watch, the other two had the evening and night watch. There was a two man work party from the district doing repair work, along with the other two station personnel. The station was a show place for the district. The day watch had to listen to radio traffic from the district and relay messages further up the Lynn Canal. We also had a fog signal and a radio direction transmitting system. The light, fog signal and the RDF signal were all keyed by an electro-mechanical timer, so all signals were simultaneous. There was a period of fog where the fog signal kept going for about 40 days. We had a 110 VDC electric system, for light and power in the buildings. (With a battery floating on the line.)

Because Jeanne did not like the idea of being on the station, and of the work that was expected of her, I had to charter a plane from Juneau to take her off of the island. Things went downhill from there. She raised so much hell at the District that I was taken off the island and was transferred to the Storis in Juneau. Life on the Storis was as before. When the ship started bouncing around the seasickness was back in force. There were not too many trips supplying the different stations, but an Engineman Chief (ENC) took me in hand and helped me through the tough times. I will never forget his kindness. The reason I had chosen light station duty rather than a ship, was because of sea sickness. Shore duty had suited me well. The Light station was not that far from Juneau. We had ferry service every other day.

12 Leave Sentinel Island Via the Cutter Storis September, 1950

In Juneau, Jeanne met up with Gus George, who owned a food market and supplied the islands with food as ordered. Gus helped Jeanne find an apartment in Juneau. It was a very comfortable apartment. We even had a telephone. The phone was run by the Army Signal Corps. I think our phone number was blue 45. It was quite a walk to the ship from the apartment, but it was OK.

The food that was ordered from Gus George was put on the ferry and

delivered to the different islands along the way to Skagway every other day. So actually Sentinel island was not that isolated. We also had radio and land line communications with Juneau on the island.

13 February, 1951, Eileen Cheney Born In Juneau, AK

Eileen was born in St Elizabeth Hospital in Juneau. The doctor that delivered Eileen was well known throughout the area as being available at any time day or night. It is interesting that the cost of the delivery was not covered by the Coast Guard.

When Claire and I went to Alaska in 2002 , I inquired around in Juneau about the doctor and found many people remembered him most fondly. He was also the town Veterinarian!

14 Transferred to Seattle, WA, 13th District office for Discharge, March 13, 1951

Early on in March, I was transferred to Seattle for discharge. We were booked passage by the District , on the old Alaska Steam Ship Lines, Denalie, to Seattle.

In Seattle, I was discharged and was involuntary reenlisted in the Reserves, due to the conflicts in North Korea and in Vietnam. I was assigned to the First District. I reenlisted 3 times (12 years) in the Reserves. I enjoyed the duty, and it fell into my work very well.

1. Assigned to Anti Submarine warfare unit at the district office, Boston. The monthly meetings were at the attack teacher at Constitution Wharf. The summer cruises were to Bermuda, we to the Ship down and they flew us back to Boston , on both trips.
2. Later I was transfered to a Port Security unit in Boston ens each summer duty I was assigned to the 40 foot patrol boats keeping watch on the ship movements in the inner and outer harbor. Some of the monthly meetings and one summer tour I was excused form duty because I was working at the Arsenal at Watertown and was involved with projects that the Army though it was more important to be at the Arsenal.
3. I was finally discharged from the Reserve March 1963