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The Retirement of a Queen

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A Coast Guard cutter operating in the Bering Sea depends on clockwork functionality for success. The machinery of a ship includes not only the engine room, but also the engineer. It includes everyone from deck hands and cooks, to the captain observing confidently from the bridge. Every person knows their place and purpose. Coast Guard Cutter *Storis* is no exception, and this clockwork operation has kept the *Storis* running for 65 years.

The rhythm of the ship is in everything, and insures that crew members can adapt to the trying environment they inhabit. Watch will be relieved at the exact same time, meals taken on schedule. Qualification requirements will be reached by deadlines, and maintenance procedures will be adhered to inflexibly. Everyone is held accountable

for performing their duty equally, and the weight of responsibility is thereby evenly distributed throughout the crew.



CGC *Storis* (Nov. 10, 2006) Crewmen of the *Storis* stand poised during a special sea detail. USCG photo by PA3 Eric Chandler.



CGC Storis (Nov. 10, 2006) Crewmen of the Storis stand poised during a special sea detail. USCG photo by PA3 Eric Chandler.

In some ways efficiency improves with time as systems evolve, and incorporate any situation that has been encountered, but over the years the inevitable happens and experience succumbs to age. No longer do manufactured parts have to be machined, or technological obstacles overcome. Sentimentality is slowly subdued by practicality.

Crews that have served aboard the Storis share a common bond in their striving to fulfill an indescribable desire. Some would rather silently observe the sea passing by than hear the stories and conversation of others. These are service members content to serve their country at the

fringe of society, with an evident confidence possibly born in the knowledge that they have operated in one of the worlds most inhospitable climates.

The Coast Guard Cutter Storis visited the Aleutian Island village of Atka for the last time on November 16, 2006. Five members of the ships command went ashore to assess what assistance could be provided to the Aleut Unangax people native to Atka.

Work began the next morning in an environment of levity, and the diversity of the crew's skills was immediately apparent. Damage control specialists and crewmembers began restoring water supplies, while work was done elsewhere in an effort to repair the tsunami early warning system, computers and dock lights. Movies were played through a projector in the school gym for appreciative families.



JUNEAU, Alaska (Oct. 27, 2006) -- The Coast Guard Cutter Storis transits the Gastineau Channel during a farewell visit to Juneau. USCG photo by Lt. Anthony Owens.

Machinery technicians began the arduous task of overhauling the village's disabled fire truck. After hours of labor the town's only method of extinguishing a large fire was restored, and the fire truck was proudly paraded through the small village.

A Russian Orthodox Chaplain, Capt. Carl (Jerome) Cwiklinski, and Lt. Col. Les Williams, a dental officer from Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, performed their services for the local people. Cwiklinski had visited the village several times in the past, and was acquainted with many of the local families.

Storis departed Atka's protective harbor the following day for the last time. A feeling of accomplishment lingered throughout the ship as the remote island was left behind.

The cutter continued west, and crossed the 180 degree longitude line for the last time at 3:25 a.m. on November 23, 2006. It returned to Kodiak from patrol on December 3, 2006. The final Bering Sea Patrol covered 7645 nautical miles in 53 days.

The Storis was commissioned in 1942 as an ice patrol tender. Its first mission was the Greenland Patrols, searching for

Nazi weather stations in the North Atlantic. After World War II Storis remained in the Atlantic home port of Curtis Bay, Md.

On September 15, 1948, Storis was reassigned to Alaska, and originally home ported in Juneau. Its mission became the Bering Sea patrol, delivering medical, dental and judicial services to isolated native villages. Storis helped establish LORAN stations, provided supplies for the Defense Early Warning System and conducted surveys in the uncharted waters of the Arctic.

In 1957, the Coast Guard cutters Storis, Bramble and SPAR, ended a 450 year search for the Northwest Passage. Storis became the first U.S. registered vessel to circumnavigate the North American continent.

The cutter was reassigned to the homeport of Kodiak, Alaska, and in 1972 underwent major renovations converting her from a light ice breaker to a medium endurance cutter. In 1986, further renovations added female crew quarters and a small recreation area.

The hull of the Storis is painted with the gold number 38, signifying that she is the oldest commissioned cutter in the Coast Guard fleet. The decommissioning ceremony is scheduled to be held in Kodiak, February 8, 2007.

Aboard the Storis crewmembers often speak to the vessel by name, knowing her so well that the old ship seems to have developed a kind of character and connection to its crew. Some may ponder that a ship this old has become greater than the sum of its parts, and taken on a sort of identity. They may find themselves wondering if some non-corporeal essence exists within the aged hull, something left behind by previous crews, experiences or events.

So, is it not sorrowful to decommission a vessel that has so diligently personified the Coast Guard's missions throughout the years? The answer would likely be different for every person asked. A possible conclusion could be that if a ship has a soul, the Storis is likely one that has long awaited rest, and will depart us with the peaceful solace of one who has traveled far and done many great things.

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