

SPAR sailor earns at-sea honor

by Nicole Klauss

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Brittany Smith, on the Coast Guard cutter SPAR, recently received her Permanent Cutterman's insignia. (Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard)

Serving five years on ship isn't an easy task for any Coast Guardsman.

Coast Guard FS2 Brittany Smith recently earned her Permanent Cutterman's insignia, an award for serving five cumulative years on ships. Smith is currently working on the Kodiak-based Coast Guard cutter SPAR.

"It's a pretty big deal," said Ens. Paul Milliken, who serves onboard SPAR. "It's something not a lot of people in the Coast Guard have, and not a lot of people on our boat have."

The insignia represents the professional training and service associate with a seagoing Coast Guard career, he said.

Milliken said the award is not seen frequently because most Coast Guardsmen don't want to be on the water for that long and float tours usually aren't more than three years.

"It's not really the norm anymore," Milliken said. "It takes a lot of individual effort and perseverance to be afloat for that long. You have to want to be on ships, and not a lot of people do."

Smith has been in the Coast Guard for seven years; five were spent afloat.

"As I've been in the Coast Guard longer it's been a big goal to get my Cutterman's pin," Smith said. "It's usually people that have more time in than I do."

Smith said she enjoys her time on Coast Guard cutters.

"I try to stay on boats as long as I can," she said. "I enjoy the adventure and sometimes not knowing what is going to happen day to day."

Living on a boat for that long has its challenges too.

"It makes you feel a little older than you really are," Smith said. "Being away from family and friends for so long — that part gets a little challenging."

Knowing that she's doing something she loves is what keeps her excited to be on boats.

"I enjoy cooking for the crew," Smith said. "I enjoy being able to make people happy because other people might be having a bad day and just having a good meal might make their day better."

Smith plans to continue serving tours afloat.

"If I can at least get to 15 years, that's my goal," she said.

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Smith has spent her Coast Guard career on the West Coast. She has been based in Los Angeles and Alaska, and served time on the Coast Guard cutters Maple, Munro, Alex Haley and SPAR. She spent close to three years on the cutter Maple, based out of Sitka.

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