
SCENE

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COAST GUARD ACADEMY—1936-1937 (THIRD CLASS YEAR)

Cruise to Europe, Home Leave by Train/Air

It was a great day for the First Classmen who filed up onto the platform to receive their Diplomas, their Bachelor of Science Degrees in Marine Engineering, and their Commissions as Ensigns in the Coast Guard. It was a great day for my Class too, because we were automatically advanced to Third Class.

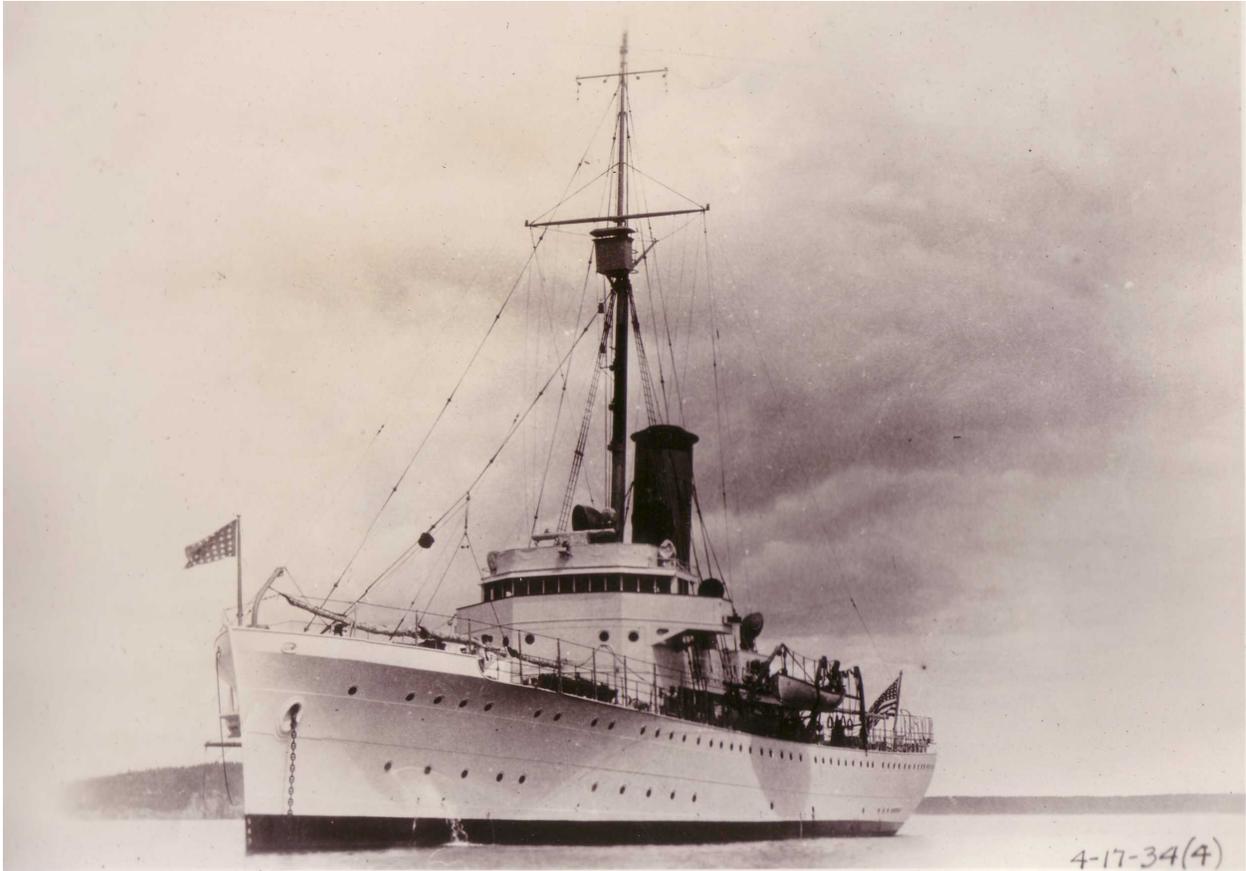
We were no longer subject to hazing and harassing. We were pretty much left alone, which made studying easier and life in general more pleasant. We could smugly watch the new Second Class work on “indoctrinating” the Swabs.

The 250-foot **Coast Guard cutter *Cayuga*** was waiting at the Academy dock to receive us. The regular crew had been reduced to a minimum number of key officers and enlisted personnel. The new First Classmen would understudy the officers while my class of new Third Classmen would fill enlisted billets. Some billets would require supervision by senior rated men.

We had readied our “sea bags” of uniforms, including work and service dress whites, toilet articles, and everything we would need for a two-month-long cruise. Our first seagoing act was to shoulder them like old salts as we toted them aboard. The gangway was shipped, and we were underway before we knew it. The first order of business was to secure (*i.e.*, fasten down everything so that nothing went adrift or rolled about with the cutter’s rolling and pitching). By the time we crossed Block Island Sound and took departure straight for Scotland, everything was stowed away, wardroom chairs

bolted to the deck, hatches dogged down, lifeboats rigged out, cruising ensign streaming, and all was unusually quiet on deck. Why?

The *Cayuga's* course took us straight into the Gulfstream. The weather was fair but a gentle swell from our starboard and a confused sea from an earlier blow gave the ship a corkscrew motion that gave many of us that uneasy feeling. I felt a tinge myself, although I claimed I never got seasick. I took a look around at how hard some were taking it and, believe it or not, I immediately felt fine. (I have ever since felt that there is a psychological factor in seasickness.)



This is the 250-foot CGC *Cayuga*, which we took on our Third Class year cruise to Europe. Before our return home, the decision was made to keep the *Cayuga* in Spain to serve the Ambassador, and we returned home on the Navy battleship USS *Wyoming*

Scotland. Edinburgh was our first port of call. Our sightseeing coaches took us into the highlands for views of a beautiful landscape complete with “lochs” and old castles. Nessy, the famous Loch Ness Monster, had not yet been “invented”! At pull-outs along the way, there were pipers droning and cantering to entertain the tourist buses.

We cadets and our officers were invited to tea in Edinburgh Castle. We were told to form a line so that Lord So-and-So could greet each of us. We were to give our names. (I think now that he must have been intrigued by the ethnic origins of our American family names.) When I gave my name as “Cadet Sin’clair” he chuckled and said, “Ah,

Scottish eh? Sink'ler, Sink'ler." We were then offered a "nice cup o' tea." With it came a little cookie and a choice of lemon or milk. I chose the lemon, but the tea was too hot to drink, so I added milk...which curdled! I discretely deposited my awful looking tea on a convenient shelf, and went for a stroll around the castle. There in the pavement was the burial stone of Lord Sinclair!

Denmark was our next port of call and the best by far. We moored at the guest dock at Langelinie Park, the gateway to Copenhagen. Just a few boat lengths ahead was the famous "Little Mermaid," known to the Danes a "Havfrau," meaning half woman! A beautiful young female seated demurely on a bolder surrounded by bay water (to keep children from climbing on her and photographers from using her for a photo prop).

We set port and starboard watches in port. On the first watch, I was assigned as Messenger, under the direction of the First Classman who was assigned as Officer-of-the-Deck. We were hardly oriented to our posts when a Dane approached by water in his single scow, getting his morning exercise, I suppose. We watched and admired his adeptness on the oars. Suddenly, he boated his oars and crawled aft to where his Danish flag was flying and he dipped his flag! The cadet OD called to me, "Hurry! Return the salute!" I dashed to our stern and lowered our ensign and immediately "two-blocked" it again. Salute returned. The Dane was pleased (and so were we).

One of our treats was hosted by the Danish Navy—the biggest, best, and most artistic smorgasbord I have ever seen, before or since!

Another special treat was a night visit to **Tivoli Gardens**. It was ablaze with lights and an extra large crowd. We soon found out why: it was the night of the Summer Solstice, which the Danes called "Mid-Summer Night"—cause for celebration! Like we might expect at Halloween, a witch came out of nowhere (on a wire) and streaked across the sky, tail of fire, fireworks, and all! (The Danish beer wasn't bad either!)

One more treat I will mention was a tour of the **Tuborg Brewery**. It started off as usual looking at the vats and uninteresting equipment which we had to tolerate before we got to the tasting room. While huge trays of draft brew were brought endlessly into the room, the lights were lowered so we could see a movie of Tuborg Beer being shipped around the world. Well, after the first round of drinks, matters got out of hand. We picked up on the movie's theme song: "It's Tuborg Makes the World Go 'Round." At about the third time 'round, beautiful four-part harmony filled the room. What gives? When the lights came on, we found we were in company with the Yale Glee Club on concert tour.

The story doesn't end there. At our tables were ceramic ashtrays about six inches in diameter and two inches thick with TUBORG in bold letters. I'm sure they were meant to be swiped, but who was asking? I got one. So did our heavyweight boxer nicknamed McGuff. I don't recall how I carried mine, but he tucked his under his belt and topcoat. Outside, waiting for traffic to pass, his fell out and smashed on the pavement. A Dane equal in size said, "Ve doan do dat. Pick it op!" McGuff did. We helped. I had mine at home for many years...advertising TUBORG, the beer that makes the world go 'round.

Germany. Hamburg was our port of call. Before we were granted liberty for a tour of Berlin, we were thoroughly briefed on the political situation. Note these dates: Hitler was the leader of Germany from 1933 to 1945. The Summer Olympics were held in Germany in 1936. The Holocaust, or mass murder of Jews, was from 1939 to 1945. Our cruise visit was in summer 1936. We were not to discuss politics with anyone, not even among ourselves. Quislings were everywhere. Storm Troopers were to be avoided.

While Hitler was brainwashing the people into believing they were a superior race, he was preparing for war. We would not see any evidence of this. What we saw on our city tour of Berlin was a clean city, with old historic buildings scrubbed and painted. No beggars or homeless.

We toured in a big open bus. It was a lovely, clear day with a warm sun. It was sooo relaxing after scrubbing the *Cayuga's* decks and standing watches that we couldn't stay awake. The poor tour director was at wit's end, shouting, "Gentlemen! You are supposed to be sightseeing Berlin...not sleeping through it!"

We were ordered not to leave the main streets and to always be in a group. And so a small group of us visited a nightclub. It was not unlike ours at home except for the table arrangements. Spaced around the dance floor, each table had a number clearly displayed above it and a telephone on it. If you saw an attractive girl at a table across the room you could break the ice by telephoning that table and visiting awhile, or send over a drink and play cool until you stirred up interest and got an invitation to join forces.

France. We moored portside to a quay in Le Havre. It was made of cold hard granite, which was covered with slimy algae kept wet by a fifteen-foot tidal range. We rigged four mooring lines: bow, forward spring, after spring, and stern. They had to be adjusted every watch. No fun.

I don't remember the tourist sights of Paris except for going up the Eiffel Tower. What I do remember is seeing the Red Light District! We had been thoroughly briefed on the hazards of romancing a local girl or woman. Incurable sexual diseases were rampant. Becoming infected would lead to dismissal from the Academy. We would be physically examined (called short-arm inspection) after sailing. When ashore, stay in groups. Avoid "ladies of the night" and their pimps. If in close encounter, "looky but no touchy."

With a group of cadets, I walked the Red Light District streets past the cribs of prostitutes beckoning for your trade. They were licensed and regulated. They stayed in their cribs and did not come out to harass or touch us. Really, a very pathetic sight. So much for France.

Spain. En route to the Madeira Islands, we were diverted to Bilbao, a port on the north coast of Spain. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was raging, and was being won by the rebels. Francisco Franco later became dictator. Our orders were to evacuate U.S. citizens, transporting them around the corner to Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

The Naval Academy midshipmen's cruise, consisting of two old battleships, was also sent to Bilbao. Those ships were too large for evacuating Americans locally, so the

decision was reached to transfer us cadets to the battleship *Wyoming* for the return to Norfolk and leave the Coast Guard cutter *Cayuga* in Spain to serve the Ambassador.

USS *Wyoming*. This cruise would provide an interesting comparison of the training opportunities for the small number of cadets as compared with the problem of training the large number of midshipmen.

For example: at sea, we were on watch four hours and off eight. Our Third Class stations were helmsman, messenger, and lookout. We would steer almost every watch. A midshipman got one hour on the helm during the entire cruise, with a quartermaster at his side. When assigned to engineering duty, we traced pipes and cables for our notebooks, helped change and adjust burners in the boiler room, kept the areas clean, etc. I drew engineering duty with the midshipmen assigned to the boiler room (130 degrees and under pressure). Our duty was to sit four hours in the entrance way to keep cool in the forced draft. No work of any kind. Just an endurance test.

At the end of the engineering watch, we went to the head and drew a bucket of water, which we poured over our heads to cool off.

The head had a trough of sea water running all the time out the stern. Mounted over the trough were toilet seats. A favorite stunt was to wait until several seats were occupied, then gather a big handful of toilet paper, light it off, and send it downstream. Need I describe the action that followed?

When on a day-shift without watch-standing duties, our whole class was assigned to the starboard air castle, a shelter in the superstructure, to keep it clean. We were to chip away the rust and slap on fresh paint. That took about two days. After that, we spent our days in a watertight compartment down in the bilges, where no officer would find us! (It was kinda scary.)

Some higher authority thought it would be fun to have a little competition between the midshipmen and the cadets. There must have been about one thousand of them to one hundred of us. Anyway, we were game.

Their first mistake was boxing matches. That was one event in which we excelled because our trainer was once a national lightweight champ. We easily took that challenge.

Their second mistake was to have a race launching the lifeboats for a man-overboard drill. This we did regularly on our cutter, completely handled by cadets with the First Class in charge. The "Now Hear This" speaker came on announcing, "Man overboard. This is a drill." Our designated First Classman took charge with a First Classman on the boat falls fore and aft, and a First Classman ready to man the steering oar and take charge as coxswain. Members of my class were assigned to the oars.

We rushed to our boat and were ordered by our Cadet-in-Charge to "take your stations." When all aboard, he ordered us to "lower away fore and aft." The naval officer in charge of the drill about had a fit. "What are you doing?" "I'm launching the boat, sir." "You have

no permission to launch.” “I’m in charge, sir.” “You must have a Warrant Officer on each fall.” “We don’t have any Warrant Officers, sir.” “Stop lowering. I will get you one.” The Navy won this contest.

Back at Norfolk, we joined the Midshipmen in gunnery practice, firing a few rounds. I don’t remember the details but am told we scored better than they did.

That is enough about my year as a Third Class cadet. On return to New London from our training cruise, we were granted our month long summer leave. It was a long way to my Santa Monica home, an adventure in itself. I went west by tourist coach, sitting up all the way. I returned hitchhiking on the Navy Secretary’s plane to Montgomery, Alabama, an Air Corps’ Flying Fortress to Wright Patterson Field in Ohio, and lastly by train to the Academy just before my leave was up! That leave was tremendously important to me. It was the last time I was to see my mother.