34 Years of Service

"Mike" Shaffer Retires

By Tom Philpott

A Coast Guard reservist who began her military career with the SPARS of World War II has retired with honors in a ceremony at Coast Guard Headquarters.

First Class Storekeeper Mary Alice "Mike" Shaffer was awarded the Coast Guard Achievement Medal last month to cap off more than 34 years of active and reserve service.

CAPT J. N. Shrader, commanding officer of Reserve Unit Flag Plot and Shaffer's last skipper, presented the award in recognition of her "outstanding performance of duty" as the unit's administrative petty officer. The Flag Plot unit provides trained reservists to augment the telecommunications, operations and national pollution response centers at Headquarters.

Shaffer is believed to be the last World War II SPAR (Semper Paratus - Always Ready) to retire from the service and probably the only former SPAR to leave in compliance with legal maximum age requirements. She retired April 24, her 60th birthday.

"Of course I'm going to miss it," Shaffer said. "Both the companionship and the challenge."

Mike began her Coast Guard career in 1943, she says, after a fast-talking recruiter had her sign on the dotted line before she realized her

service obligation was not with the Navy. But, Mike adds, she never regretted the mistake.

After recruit training with the WAVES at Hunter College in New York, Mike attended Navy Class A school at Iowa State Teachers College. From there she was assigned to convoy routing duty with the Navy in Seattle. Other assignments during the war included Coast Guard district headquarters in St. Louis and at the Captain of the Port office in Sheffield, AL. In 1946 she was discharged from active duty following a tour at Washington, D. C. Headquarters.

Mike reenlisted in the Reserve in 1950. Subsequent assignments were served in Seattle, Honolulu, Boston and San Francisco. She served on active duty in 1964 and 1965 as a Coast Guard instructor at the Naval Recruit Command in Bainbridge, MD. In 1966, CAPT Shrader explained at the award ceremony, "Mike finally settled down to the steady pace of straightening out reserve units in the Washington, D. C. area." After 10 years with Group Alexandria, she volunteered for the Flag Plot unit when it formed in 1976.

Mike says she plans to retire from her civilian job as travel coordinator for the National Marine Fisheries Service later this year. Then, she says, it's life as a "beachcomber" in a new home on the Chesapeake.

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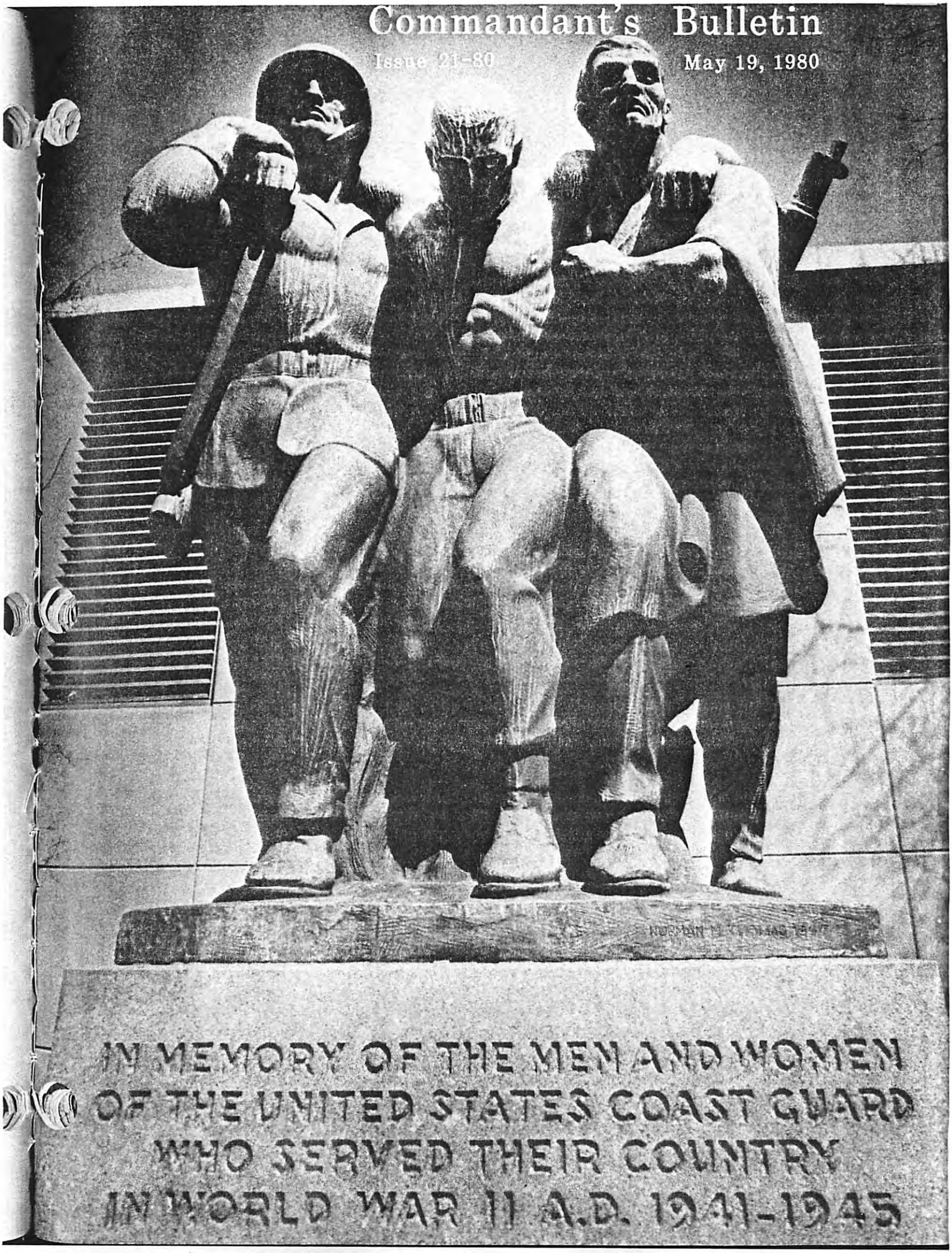
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