

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

My Service in the U.S. Coast Guard, 1959-1963:

The Remembrances of Coast Guardsman Rufus Bradley "Brad" Forbes, Jr.



**Top left & bottom left: USCGC *Raritan* (WYT-93); top right: *Chincoteague* (WAVP-375);
bottom right: *Marion*, (WSC-145)**

My name is Rufus Bradley "Brad" Forbes Jr. I am from the small town of Bath, NC. I enlisted in the Coast Guard 10/19/59 and served for four years. Boot Camp was at Cape

May, NJ. We were in boot training for 13 weeks. Our training company was Lima 41. We all shared good and not so good moments as boots. It was pretty tough. We did much classroom work as well. Some went to schools and many others went to their first duty station.

My first duty station was the Coast Guard Cutter *Raritan* W-93. It was a WYT, meaning Yard Tug, 110' length. We were stationed at Group Norfolk, Berkley Station, Norfolk, VA. A crew of 18 to 20 men. We mostly did inner harbor patrols every morning from 0800 to about 1400hrs. Up the Elizabeth River to Pier 12 of the Norfolk Naval Base; then to Newport News, VA via the James River. We logged and reported merchant ships which were either moored or in quarantine anchorage as we went our way. We were always ready for distress calls or anything the 5th Coast Guard District might direct us to do. We took part in many of these distress calls including medico cases, some towing of disabled craft, warehouse fires, small boat boarding. Probably the two events that I still remember well were:

- 1) The Ash Wednesday Nor'easter which hit the Hampton Roads area in the very early 60s. The *Raritan* spent the night before warning ships in anchorage to be on guard with extra anchors out or ready. We then went up the York River to be the unit on call there.
- 2) In the very early part of the year of 1960, we were ordered to the upper Chesapeake Bay for ice breaking duties (as we had an ice breaking bow much like the Coast Guard icebreakers which were in service at that time). For more than a month, without liberty, we broke ice between Baltimore, MD and Chesapeake City, MD to make passage for ships and barges going to and from the places mentioned through the C&D Canal. We also did ice reports from one point to another by radio. The temperature was sometimes 0 degrees F. The ice was from 10 to 14 inches thick. It was cold and very hard to sleep due to the noise of the ice against the hull. This and many other events were part of *Raritan's* Norfolk, Va. history.

I spent most of my four years on the *Raritan*. I was a SN E-3 while on the *Raritan*; however as many Coast Guardsmen know on smaller units you will be required to handle jobs like cook, deck, generator watch, ship handling, and other things like line handling, making "puddins" for the bow of a tug. Making all the "fenders" with line. Though it was sometimes hard, I'd have to say that it was good for me. It's a good lesson to learn that "I am not the center, but part of a team." The *Raritan* was transferred to Milwaukee, WI and I did a "mutual transfer" to the C.G.C. *Chincoteague* W-375 with a seaman from Milwaukee. What a break for both of us. (At the time I was on the *Raritan* we were berthed next to the decommissioned U.S.S. *Massachusetts* & the U.S.S. *Salem* next to our base.)

After my "Mutual Transfer" from *Raritan* to cutter *Chincoteague*, I found out quickly what mess-cooking was. How to clean the steamline where we served chow. During my first patrol to Ocean Station Delta, I mess-cooked most of the beginning of that patrol (usually about 30 days until we were replaced by another cutter). I had "struck" for QM3 on the *Raritan*; and had actually taken the exam. Passed with a 93-percent. I had been in the Guard a little over two years. CDR Henry C. Keene, Commanding Officer, called me from the galley to his quarters to be introduced to the cutter *Chincoteague*. He asked me why I "mutualed" to his ship. I told him that I wanted to make a rate as Quartermaster and had passed most of what I needed to make QM3. He was very cordial to me and welcomed me to his ship. I also knew Chief Trax, QMC who came from the other tug, *Mohican* to the *Chincoteague* somewhat earlier. A day or so later I was summoned to the bridge, and was transferred to "O" division. A couple of months later I made QM3.

Chincoteague made three weather patrols while I served on it. They were I believe; Delta, Bravo, and Charlie. We did do SAR duty in St. George, Bermuda where we actually ran aground as we were entering Town Cut into St George harbor. We made front page news in the *Bermuda Gazette*. Of course a Board of Inquiry agreed that an untimely loss of steering was the problem. We had not enough time to engage "after steerage" before running into shallow water. We then proceeded to Curtis Bay (Baltimore) MD, for repairs.

One last item: After one of our patrols we encountered a large Russian fishing fleet (about 40 vessels) not far from Nova Scotia. We took pics and they took pics. We waved and they responded as we went just about through the middle of that fleet which had an oiler, mother ship, and lots of antennas.

Another note: I personally logged some #9 seas (mountainous!) 50-footers. The Coast Guard was quite a ride. I was honorably discharged in Sept 1964. I recommend it highly for it taught me well. I retired from Insurance about 6 years ago.

Thanks again, Brad Forbes.

