

Interview with Vice Admiral J. E. Stika, USCG (Retired)

Interviewer: MSTC Dennis Noble, USCG

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Place:



Editor's notes:

In 1975, Chief Marine Science Technician Dennis L. Noble interviewed retired Coast Guard Vice Admiral Joseph E. Stika about the early years of his remarkable career in the nation's oldest sea service. VADM Stika joined the Revenue Cutter Service, the fore-runner of today's Coast Guard, in 1908, and served his country through two World Wars, compiling an admirable service record before retiring in 1951. Chief Noble, who retired from the Coast Guard as a Senior Chief Marine Science Technician and later earned a Ph.D. in history, captured the only interview we now have on file of a veteran of the Revenue Cutter Service and it is fortunate that he did, as Admiral Stika passed away the year after this interview. A noted

author and historian of the Coast Guard, the Revenue Cutter Service, the Life-Saving Service, the Lighthouse Service, and most recently the small boat stations of the Coast Guard, Senior Chief [& Doctor] Noble has left us a priceless legacy that is unsurpassed in its importance to our history and we would like to thank him for his efforts.

This interview is so important because, as I mentioned earlier, it is the only interview we have on file of a veteran of the Revenue Cutter Service. VADM Stika lets us glimpse a world long past, of a small fleet of cutters, dedicated to the service of their country, that had been sailing the nation's coastal waters as well as on the high seas since the spring of 1791. Stika describes how, after seeing the gleaming white hull of a cutter on Lake Michigan during his summer vacation in 1908, he decided to join the Revenue Cutter Service. Read about the old "School of Instruction" in Arundel Cove, Maryland, the predecessor to today's academy in New London, Connecticut. Stika details what life was like as a cadet in the years prior to 1910, and he also describes the time when the School of Instruction moved from Arundel Cove to Fort Trumbull, Connecticut. Stika provides us with small details that bring that time to life, details such as the lack of running water in the old Army fort in Connecticut; the cadets actually had to ask permission to go to a hotel in downtown New London just to bathe. He describes what the instructors were like, men such as the aptly-named Horatio Nelson Wood, and what it was like to shovel coal on board the cadets' training ship, the old coal-fired cutter *Itasca*.

Find out what it was like to be a new third lieutenant, sent out to the fleet after a little more than two years at the School of Instruction. Here Stika carried out duties that the Revenue Cutter Service had been doing for decades, duties that made this sea-going service unique. These included searching for any vessels and sailors in distress, checking fishing boats and their catches, patrolling sailing regattas, breaking ice, and sailing on winter cruises. He also sailed the Great Lakes, where the cutters would lay up in port during the winter months. Then it was on to the Bering Sea Patrol, where he and his compatriots protected fur seals from marauding poachers in an early example of the federal government protecting a natural resource and in this case probably saving these valuable marine mammals from certain extinction. They also delivered medical care to the local natives and enforced the law as well. During the winter months in Alaskan waters, they braved the ferocious gales that tossed ships around as if they were toy boats in a bathtub. Despite such excitement, however, life could get dull and the food monotonous, but there was always a chance to fish for salmon or hunt for caribou to supplement the daily rations. To break the boredom, they would play poker with locals or set up rowing races with the crews of other cutters. Stika describes all of these activities and more, providing a complete picture of what it meant to serve on board a cutter in the Revenue Cutter Service prior to 1915.

Stika was there when Congress merged his "old" service with the civilian Life-Saving Service to create today's Coast Guard, and he describes his thoughts about that reorganization, one of the largest the government had undergone up to that time. Find out too what some of the more famous characters of the Revenue Cutter Service were like; men like Elmer "Archie" Stone, the service's most famous aviator, and Captain (later commandant) Ellsworth Bertholf. This is history as it was lived, remembered by a man whose vivid memories bring that time alive for us.

The Coast Guard Historian's Office is pleased to bring this important interview to the attention of the men and women of the Coast Guard, to researchers, and to the general public. Thanks again for your efforts, Senior Chief [& Doctor!] Noble! Read on, then, and take a trip through time; learn what life was like in a service long gone and little remembered--although its soul still exists in today's Coast Guard.

Scott Price, Assistant Coast Guard Historian
Editor
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Biography of Vice Admiral Joseph Edward Stika, USCG (Retired)

Vice Admiral Joseph Edward Stika was born on 21 September 1889 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He attended the public schools in Milwaukee and Kewaunee, Wisconsin, and, on 19 October 1908, was appointed a cadet for training at the School of Instruction, Revenue Cutter Service. Progressing through the various grades of the Service, he was promoted to rear admiral on 30 January 1948.

His first duty assignment was on board the *Androscoggin* on duty in the North Atlantic in December 1910. Commissioned as a third lieutenant in the Revenue Cutter Service on 18 January 1911, he continued service on board the *Androscoggin*, with a short period of temporary duty on the *Itasca*. In April 1913, he was transferred to the *Tuscarora*, on duty on the Great Lakes. A year later, Stika moved to the *Snohomish*, homeported at Port Angeles, Washington. Assigned from April 1916 to March 1917 on the *Unalga*, he made two Alaskan cruises. Afterward, he served a short tour of duty on *Tuscarora* before telegraphic orders sent him to the *Yamacraw*. These, however, were soon superseded and he transferred to the *Itasca* on duty at San Juan, Puerto Rico.

After the US entry into World War I, Stika transferred to the New York Division from San Juan in February 1918. On 7 October 1918 Stika earned the Navy Cross, "for heroic conduct on the occasion of the fire at the shell-loading plant, Morgan, NJ, when, with others, he moved a train of nine cars loaded with high explosives to a place of safety through an area where fire was liable to break out at any moment." With five enlisted Coast Guardsmen and two soldiers, all volunteers, he laid down rails and directed the moving of the cars filled with TNT to safety.

In November 1918, he was transferred to duty at the Coast Guard Depot, Baltimore, Maryland and a year later to the *Apache*, then to the *Yamacraw*, and in May, 1920, to command of the Manhattan during the Lipton Cup Races off New York. In July 1920, he was assigned to outfitting the *Chillicothe*. He assumed command of it and had interesting duty during the enforcement of prohibition on the Canadian border. In January 1922 he was given temporary duty on the *Seneca* and in December of that year was assigned to duty on the *Ossipee* in the North Atlantic. In March 1923, he was assigned to the *Modoc* for three ice patrol seasons off the Grand Banks.

He was made executive officer of the *Conyngham* in June 1925, and in July of the next year, made commanding officer of the *Roe*, operating out of New York. In May 1929, he was assigned to duty with the New York Division, and promoted to the rank of commander, effective 1 September 1930. In March of 1932 he was given command of the *Seneca*, which was on duty at San Juan. In June 1934, the *Unalga* replaced the *Seneca* at Puerto Rico and he assumed command of that vessel. Vice Admiral Stika was commended by the Swedish government for "the good work and excellent seamanship displayed by the Commander, officers and crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Unalga" on the occasion of the accident which occurred to the Swedish training ship *A.F. Chapman* in the harbor of San Juan on 18 July 1934.

In January, 1935, he was appointed Purchasing Officer, Coast Guard Store, New York, followed in July of that year by assignment as Ordnance Officer at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC. Under his supervision many improvements were made in Lifesaving Ordnance, including the Lyle Gun. The system of training all law enforcement divisions of the Treasury in revolver shooting was instituted and put into working condition under his administration, and he also promoted the efficiency of the Coast Guard rifle teams.

In May 1937 he was assigned to duty as executive officer of the Coast Guard Academy, where he remained until June 1940, when he became Commanding Officer of the *Bibb*, which was on Atlantic weather patrol. With the U.S. entry into World War II, Stika held a number of different posts. From 1941 to 1943, he served simultaneously as Commanding Officer, Alameda Base, Purchasing Officer, Pacific Coast, and Superintendent, Merchant Marine Training Station, Government Island, Alameda, California. In May 1942 he was also appointed Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Training Station at

Alameda. He returned to the East Coast in September 1943 for duty as District Port Security Officer, Fifth Naval District, Captain of the Port, Norfolk, Virginia and Assistant District Coast Guard Officer at Norfolk.

With the war's end in September 1945, he resumed duty at Government Island, Alameda, California, as Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Group, which included the Operating Base, Supply Depot and the Training Stations. Vice Admiral Stika was assigned to duty as Commander, Thirteenth Coast Guard District with headquarters at Seattle, Washington on 8 July 1946. He went to San Francisco on 13 March 1949, as Commander, 12th Coast Guard District and Commander, Western Area. He retired 1 October 1951 with the rank of Vice Admiral.

Vice Admiral Stika died on 15 July 1976 at the Marine Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia.

Chief Noble: Good afternoon, Admiral. I would like to start out by asking you what made you interested in the Revenue Cutter Service?

Admiral Stika: The reason I became interested in the Revenue Cutter Service was because I lived on the Great Lakes and right on the seashore of Lake Michigan. I could look over the lake and every now and then, in the summertime particularly, I'd see the *Tuscarora*--the Revenue Cutter *Tuscarora* --sailing by. Especially in the hot summer, it was a glorious picture to see that white ship sailing through that cool-looking water while I was up on top of a load of dried peas with a lot of thistle in it trying to stomp it down and keep it loaded properly while some full grown man pitched it up to me. A most uncomfortable job for me, but that cutter out there was a delightful sight. Of course, I was interviewed by Admiral [Preston H.] Uberroth just before I entered the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction, [as] they called it in those days. He was kind enough to bring his ship in--he was the commanding officer of the *Tuscarora*--into Kewaunee Harbor and asked me to come down and talk with him, which I did, and he arranged for me to get into the Service. The Congressman at that time was Kusterman, Representative Kusterman, with a home in Green Bay and his daughter married a Kewaunee man who was a friend of ours--Doctor Wochos.

Noble: So you'd say, basically, what really got you interested in the Revenue Cutter Service was seeing the *Tuscarora* (right) sailing by?

Stika: Yes.

Noble : I imagine that would be impressive while you're there sweating.

Stika: A beautiful sight.

Noble : Some of these questions I'll ask you, Admiral, might seem a little strange, because I'm orientating this toward a person that has never heard of the Revenue Cutter Service. On October 19, 1908, you were accepted as a cadet in the Revenue Cutter Service, and you were sent to the School of Instruction, as you said. Could you tell me, for the record, where the School of Instruction was located?



Stika: Arundel Cove, just outside of Baltimore, Maryland, at what is now known as the Coast Guard Yard, in part of that area. We had a few wooden buildings for classroom work and we lived on the *Oriole* and the *Chase*, hulks that were laid up alongside the pier. The *Oriole* was the old Navy *Dale* and the *Chase*, of course, was the old training ship, sail-rigged, for Revenue Cutter cadets. We had a little drill

field. We had gymnastics before breakfast every morning, except Sunday. When the weather was right, or when it wasn't too icy, we'd have rowing drills in place of calisthenics. That meant handling a pine tree oar that was very, very heavy and sitting on thwarts that were wet from the night's dew and that meant that most of us would line the inside of the back of our pants with newspapers to keep the water from soaking through and making us feel uncomfortable.

Noble: How long was the school, Admiral?

Arundel Cove, Maryland

Stika: In those days it was two years to three years. It was just during the transition from two to three years. My class came in two sections. The first section came in May 1908, and made a cruise before my section joined them and we had to catch up and stay with them for the rest of the time. I spent two years and two months before I was graduated. But part of my class had spent from May until October in addition to that. We were moved from Arundel Cove to Fort Trumbull, Connecticut, under Captain W.V.E. Jacobs (**right**), [who was the] superintendent at that time. We lived in the fort casemates which were in the stone fort in New London, Connecticut, while Congress was studying what and how to build a new academy. So we were graduated from Fort Trumbull, New London.



Noble: I didn't know that. What's something that slipped by me in my research.

Stika: Yes, well it's just a detail. The moving from Arundel Cove to Fort Trumbull was cumbersome. We, of course, had our own personal effects to pack and carry on to the *Itasca*, the training ship at that time. Besides that, we carried as much of the school equipment, such as the shore study room, study tables and chairs and so on, which was quite a job. We had to not only load it, but unload it in New London. At Fort Trumbull, for a time, we didn't have running water in the casemates so we had permission to take our baths periodically, at least once a week, at the hotels in New London. We had to have special permission to go there and use them for that purpose. Later on, of course, we had running water and could do that in the casemates.



Noble: How was your school year divided, Admiral? Winter classes and summer cruising?

Stika: That's what it was, yes. We'd have our classroom work in either Arundel Cove or Fort Trumbull during the wintertime. In the summertime we had the cruising time on the training ship *Itasca*, in those days. We made a Mediterranean cruise during my time and we made a Cherbourg--London cruise another time. I had only two cruises but, as I said before, the first section of my class had three cruises.

Noble: How large was your class Admiral?

Stika: We entered with 35, first section and second section, and we finished with 16. Nineteen dropped for various reasons, mostly for lack of a high enough percentage in classroom. Those were very small classes compared to what they have now.

Noble: Still, that's 35. I didn't really expect that large a number.

Stika: Well, that was to begin with. We dwindled down to 16.



Cadets drill on the parade ground at the Revenue Cutter School of Instruction, Fort Trumbull

Noble: Was the school strictly for line officers, or did engineering officers go there also?

Stika: My cadet period was just during the transition. We used to have engineers and line cadets, but gradually we merged and it's hard for me to remember just when the engineer cadets disappeared. But it was during my time, somewhere just around 1910.

Noble: Prior to that it was just for line officers then?

Stika: Prior to that we had engineer cadets. A separate corps.

Noble: Were they in the same place?

Stika: Yes. Their classroom work of course was somewhat different, but messing was for all and morning exercise the same way. Lots of those things were combined when the classroom work was different. Beginning in 1910, why, it was all the same classroom work.

(Photo, right: cadets of the School of Instruction's Class of 1913 on board *Itasca*; Stika is second from right)

Noble: Staying right on the subject of classroom, do you recall what the basic thrust of the curriculum was and what was your best subject?

Stika: Well it was not quite as technical as today. We had, as I recall it, theoretical seamanship, navigation, mechanical engineering, ordnance, physiology, under a Public Health Service doctor. Of course, we



always had a lot of signal practice, electricity, physics, history--world history. That's about all I can recall.

Noble: That's a pretty well-rounded curriculum. Do you remember what your best subject was, or what would you consider your best subject?

Stika: Oh boy! There was so much of it. Ordnance and gunnery, I guess, was my most interesting subject. That I forgot. We did a lot of work in what, at that time, we called gunnery. I loved it. I believe that was my favorite subject.

Noble: Were the instructors professional teachers or officers assigned these duties or a combination of both and how would you rate them?

Stika: Yes, we had one civilian instructor for French and he was very good. How he ever got anything through us in the little time that we had for it, I marvel. He was very good, Mr. Mason. The rest of the instructors were Revenue Cutter Service officers. In engineering we had Wood, I think his name was Horatio Nelson Wood, an instructor in engineering--marine engineering. We had John J. Hudson for some of the subjects. C.G. Crapster taught us navigation and seamanship. S.V. Parker I think was the ordnance instructor. E.D. Jones (**right**) had the rather civilian-side subjects, like civil government and history.



Noble: Is there any instructor that still stands out in your mind?

Stika: Well, of course, I liked E. D. Jones very, very much. He was more



easily contacted from a personal standpoint. Stanley V. Parker was an excellent instructor, but he was harder to reach. In other words, he was not as likeable personally to most of us as E.D. Jones. J.J. Hudson was tops--I loved him. He was wonderful, and so was **T[hadeus] G. Crapster (left), although Crapster was very sharp about** keeping us held down to doing our best. He was not as popular as the others.

Noble: Well, to get away from the classroom, let's turn to training on board a cutter. What type of cutters did you train on?

Stika: The *Itasca* .

Noble: What was she?

Stika: She was a former Navy training ship for naval midshipmen. She was triple expansion; coal burning; twin screw. Steam, of course. She had some sails for storm use, fore and aft sails, square rigged on the foremast.

Noble: Could you tell me basically what a cadet did aboard these training cruises and maybe a little bit about a routine day?

Stika: Well, we did practically all of the things that had to be done on a ship by enlisted men. Also such jobs as officer of the deck. We had some enlisted men in the organization, but most of the work was done by the cadets. We stood bridge watches. That is, we stood lookout watches and we stood fantail watches and we stood officer of the deck watches, but always under the supervision of a commissioned officer. In port we stood gangway watches, checking people in and out as a quartermaster would do in a

ship without cadets. In short, we did all the things that were supposed to be done by the ship's company, including engine room watches and fire room watches. We actually shoveled coal. Yes. The coal burning *Itasca* had to be coaled. We not only helped in coaling ship, but we also shoveled coal out of the bunkers onto the floor plates and from the floor plates into the boilers. That, I remember, was very, very interesting and I used to laugh about it because I was a good shoveler. I came from a farm in Wisconsin and when it came to shoveling coal, why, that was meant for me. I didn't mind that a bit. Sometimes we had bad coal and it meant using many a shovel full to keep that thing going. I remember one load of coal we got in Ban, Italy, on the Adriatic, and that coal was hard to burn and when it did burn, why, it wouldn't produce much heat, so it meant using a great deal of coal in order to get the power that we needed. I had a good mark in engineering, during the cruise! I could shovel well. I sort of joked about it.

USRC *Itasca*

Noble: Was this your first time out to sea Admiral? If this was your first time, what was your impression?

Stika: Well, it was a feeling of pleasure as I remember it. I remember leaving Norfolk for the first cruise and I was assigned to the wheel watch. Oh, boy! I saw those cadets passing out while I steered. Why, they were popping off like buttons! Seasick in the waterways. But I felt fine. I was exhilarated--until I went off watch. When I came off watch I went down below and first thing you



know I felt that humid air down below and lack of ventilation, no air conditioning in those days, and I was seasick myself. But that is the last time I remember being seasick, the first time and the last time. The rest of the time it was sort of a pleasure. I liked the open air jobs on training ship very, very much. And I didn't mind the engine room watches and I didn't mind the coal shoveling. Drills were gun, manual of arms, signal, boat (oars and sail) and abandon ship.

Noble: Do you remember any possible strange thing or something out of the normal during the practice cruise? I understand you ran into something a little special when you were in the Mediterranean.

Stika: No, I don't remember anything special. It may have happened to the first section when they had that cruise, which I missed. I don't remember anything drastically interesting one way or the other.

Noble: I see. One other very general question. Is there any event or experience or personality that you really remember during your period at the School of Instruction? Something that really sticks out in your mind?

Stika: I was especially friendly with [Russell Lord] Lucas. Lucas was a classmate. Also [John Merrill] Trilck, [Jr.] and we were known as "the Triumvirate," the three of us, Stika, Lucas, and Trilck. During study hall we would sneak next door to the empty study room in order to be alone. Lucas took command and he rated us. In those days we had "Boys"--the mess attendants were boy first class, boy second class and so on. He would give us enlisted "Boy" ratings and on up into quartermaster. Sometimes we even made chief under his management! But our point was that we could concentrate better by ourselves. Somehow or another we were fond of each other. I might say that, or friendly--friendlier than was the rest of the class. Strange to say, both Lucas and Trilck committed suicide. So I'm the only one

left of triumvirate. That was a strange thing to me, I couldn't understand it. Lucas was strong physically. On the *Oriole* he could grasp the up and down stanchion and raise himself straight out on his arms and his biceps would stick out. He was a marvel of a physical specimen.

Noble: He'd have to be to do something like that.

Stika: Yes. He was a red head, curly haired man. Very, very likeable sort.

Noble: So you graduated from the School of Instruction in 1910 as a third lieutenant.

Stika: Yes, in December.

Noble: I mentioned "third lieutenant" to somebody a little while ago, and they didn't even know what a third lieutenant was. It was basically, I think, like our ensign.

Stika: That's it. We were commissioned third lieutenants until Congress met next month in January. A third lieutenant at that time had second lieutenant, United States Army, equivalent. Later on, of course, it came about that they changed the name of the rank.

Noble: Even nowadays, a lot of people really don't know what the Coast Guard is.

Stika: That's true.

Noble: I'd like to ask you, what did you consider yourself and your fellow officers when you graduated from the School of Instruction; did you consider yourselves civil servants or military officers?

Stika: I had pride in the Revenue Cutter Service. I had ambitions before entering the service [through] an appointment to West Point or Annapolis, but I couldn't make it. The Congressmen were too busy with their own people and so I was grateful to have an appointment to the Revenue Cutter Service. I felt that I was following my original desire of becoming a member of the United States military services. It was a little bit later that it became necessary to transfer the Coast Guard to the administration of the Navy without any trouble for war purposes. I was rather proud of the fact that I was part of the military forces of the United States.

Noble: I think most people do. But a lot of times, as I said, some people ask, even today, "What are you, military or civilian?" It's kind of nice to know how you felt about it.

Stika: Yes, being so small, naturally we had an up-hill fight to more or less make people believe that we were part of the uniformed services of the United States, part of the military forces of the United States. Our work during peacetime was so closely connected with civilian business. In other words, we worked both peace and wartime. With the Navy and Army people it is training for wartime only.

Noble: After you graduated, from the School of Instruction, your first assignment was the *Androscoggin* out of Portland. Could you sort of describe what kind of cutter she was? And what were her primary duties?

Stika: Yes. She was a slow, wooden ship and in rough weather, why, she opened up under the transom and leaked. We had to keep pumping her. She broke ice, such as there was in Castine Bay and other places in the Northeast and did it very well. She had iron plates riveted to the sides of her bow so that it wouldn't dig up the wooden hull. She was slow. Our first rescue job on the *Androscoggin* was the *Cavalier*, that's a picture of her there just in line with the lamp. The *Cavalier* was a fisherman out of Gloucester that had lost all her sails and had been more or less wrecked for navigating on her own power. We found her 225 miles east-southeast of Cape Ann and towed her back into Gloucester,

Massachusetts. They were delighted to see her back; they thought she had perished and they made us Master Mariners. Anyone in Gloucester that became a Master Mariner was tops among the fishermen and we were gratified in being included as Master Mariners after towing in the *Cavalier*. Icebreaking, of course, in the wintertime for the *Androscoggin*, and winter cruising. In those days they called it winter cruising. Instead of waiting in port for a rescue call we were supposed to be out at sea. I remember Christopher Gadston Porcher was engineer officer. He used to say it's just like a fire engine cruising the streets of a city in order to find a fire instead of waiting at a central point from which you could hurry to a disaster when it was reported. He didn't think much of this winter cruising. In the summertime, of course, we had more pleasant weather and we patrolled races and tried to take care of shipping in trouble.

Noble: What were your duties as a third lieutenant aboard the *Androscoggin*?

Stika: Standing duty in port and standing bridge watch at sea and commissary officer. I was responsible for the crew having enough food on board and ordering the stuff and paying the bills. Strange to say, when I was promoted one grade to second lieutenant, well I was still commissary officer, because they changed the laws; a regulation that the second lieutenant was the fellow that had more experience and he's to be the commissary officer.

Noble: Couldn't get away from it.

Stika: No. And of course, depending on how many other officers we had--junior officers--one of us had to be in charge of the navigation department and another one the ordnance department, commissary and then the engineers, of course, had their own social department.

Noble: When you were underway, Admiral, what type of drills did you have? Were you drilling constantly?

Stika: Well, we had daily quarters on weekdays and during those times we had drills of various kinds. Even manual of arms on deck, 3- and 6-pounder gun drill.

Noble: While you were underway?

Stika: Underway, yes. And resuscitating the apparently drowned, and abandon ship, lowering and hoisting boats and sailing. Our ship's boats were rigged with fore- and aft-sails. And we, when the weather was not too bad, would lower all the boats at sea, rig the sails and sail them and then have a combination of sailing boat drill and rowing boat drill. Every holiday, like Fourth of July and so on, we'd have a contest or race. I remember we licked the *Gresham* one year by scrubbing the surfboat, that we used as our race boat, clean and dry and then shellacking the outside until she was smooth as glass. And we licked the *Gresham* for that reason, because they were good--and so were we--but we had an advantage because we could use that slick bottom to beat them.

Noble: The Revenue Cutter Service, from what I have read, did a lot of boarding details, anti-smuggling and things like that. While you were aboard the *Androscoggin*, did you ever take part in a boarding detail Admiral?

Stika: Yes, we had boarding duty in every port that we visited. It was a regular job in those days to check on the fishing schooners and even the ferries--the steam ferries. I rather liked that work. We usually got a dollop of fish from the fishermen and they were generous as all get out. And they even gave us lobster! And that was a treat in those days. Of course the idea was to make sure we spotted those fishermen that caught short lobsters, which was contrary to law.

Noble: Did you ever take part in an armed boarding detail, where you actually had to go armed? And if you did, how many men did you take and how were you armed?

Stika: Yes. The only time I remember being scared was in Cook Inlet, Alaska. We were sent ashore with a squad--that's eight men in those days--armed with .30 caliber rifles. It seems that there was some disturbance with the miners in that area and I don't remember any more details about that.

Noble: You got way ahead of me there on that one. That's the only one you really took part in?

Stika: That's the only one I remember force of arms being used.

Noble: Mostly a peaceful type thing, just to check and see if any illegal fishing or that type of thing?

Stika: Yes. I don't remember any illegal fishing, except checking on them.

Noble: This next question may be kind of a bad question to ask, being that you were commissary officer. That would you say that the living conditions and the food was like for a third lieutenant and also for the enlisted men?

Stika: Well, of course I suppose we should say that the officers ate better food than the enlisted men, but the enlisted men had plenty to eat and very fine food. They had their coffee in the morning before breakfast and they had good meals, three good meals a day. As I remember it, there was no complaint about the food, ever.

Noble: I see. How would you say the living conditions were, Admiral?

Stika: Well, of course, living was not as elaborate as it is today. The enlisted men used hammocks and they had to lash them in the morning and stow them in the hammock nettings along the rail.

Noble: To keep along with the enlisted men here a little bit. I know in my research I haven't seen too much on enlisted men. One of the questions that has been asked of me in the past was: Do you recall how long an enlisted man served in the Revenue Cutter Service? How long was his enlistment?

Stika: Oh, let's see. Let me go back. It seems to me that it was two years--I think it was two years--it may have been one year.

Noble: I have heard somebody say one time he thought it was one year.

Stika: I think it was one year at one time and then was increased to two years. The one-year enlistment of course meant we had to depend on their being satisfied to re-enlist. Or else find another one.

Noble: It worked a lot like the Merchant Marine then, right? Sign on for that one ship for one year and then at the end of that year if you didn't like it you could just go off?

Stika: That's the way it was.

Noble: What was your opinion of the caliber of the enlisted men aboard then? On the *Androscoggin*?

Stika: They were mighty good men. Naturally they weren't all ideal, but I remember, even during my cadet days, I would talk to the enlisted men and get a powerful lot of good information from them. Most of them were highly inclined to regard the regulations as sacred. Naturally we had Absence Without Leave and even desertions. But, as a rule, they were fine sailors.

Noble: Being as there was a one-year enlistment, were they mostly, let's say, for the *Androscoggin*, people from right in that local area or did they come from some distance?

Stika: As a rule, they were local people as I remember it.

Noble: After I get through each one of these duty stations, I'd like to ask you just a very general statement. For example, this period of time on the *Androscoggin*, what event or experience remains most vivid in your mind?

Stika: I believe the *Cavalier* was the outstanding experience. Rescuing the *Cavalier* with its hungry crew and disabled ship, getting her into Gloucester harbor and having people so grateful that they were not lost. That I think was the nicest memory of the *Androscoggin*.

Noble: How many people were aboard the *Cavalier*, do you remember right off?

Stika: No I don't, I'm sorry to say. I would say, just as a guess, about 20 or 25.

Noble: It was a fairly major rescue then. Do you recall how long she'd been missing?

Stika: Oh, well, I don't remember that either. Except that she had been missing for more than a month.

Noble: I guess they were happy to see her after a month. I think that would be the event of my life for something major like that. In 1913 you were ordered to the cutter that sort of stuck in your mind, the *Tuscarora* out of Milwaukee. Lets talk a little bit about the *Tuscarora*. How big was she? What was her duties?

Stika: I don't remember her tonnage, but her job was assisting vessels in distress and boarding in order to check up on the obedience of the shipping regulations. She was too light to break ice, but she did have to break ice every now and then in the early spring and late fall.

Noble: What was her cruising area, Admiral?

Stika: She had Lake Superior, Lake Huron, and Lake Michigan. Those three lakes and, of course, shipping froze up in those days on the fresh water lakes so in the fall before freezing up, why, we would change headquarters from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Harbor Bay in lower Michigan, and operate from there. If a vessel was caught in the ice getting through to Lake Superior, why, we'd go and try to help them through. The summertime, of course, was spent in assistance of vessels in trouble and navigational inspection.

Noble: I see. I've served on ships in both the oceans and the Great Lakes just like you and I know there's always a comment from the "deep water" sailors about the "shallow water" sailors. Could you tell me any difference you particularly noted between sailing on the Great Lakes and sailing out on the ocean?

Stika: The only difference, I suppose, is that on the Lakes we always had a port close by to sneak into, where, when you're at sea, especially on a job like this *Cavalier*, several hundred miles away from land of any kind, made it a little more interesting or harder. Even if there was a temptation to seek shelter, we weren't always handy to it as we were in the Lake region.

Noble: Was the cruising routine aboard the *Tuscarora* any different than the *Androscoggin*? If so, would you tell me any differences that you recall?

Stika: The only difference is that in the wintertime we would have to lay up. We did lay up. There wasn't any shipping, so we made fast alongside of the dock. I spent one winter on her with nothing to do, except go down and report and go on back home, which was a very pleasant winter. That is the big difference between *Androscoggin* and *Tuscarora*, the fact that we had no work to do in the winter time.

Noble: Were the enlisted men in sort of the same situation or did you just lay them off? '

Stika: That's a puzzler. I remember that we reduced crew. Now I don't know whether that was because we enlisted men for the summer only--I don't know. I know that we didn't have the full crew in the winter time. I've forgotten.

Noble: That is kind of different, because as I say, I have been on the Great Lakes and I did notice in the old movement reports at Headquarters that they said laid up *Tuscarora*, and it sort of took my notice right away. I didn't know they did such things as that. It's very interesting to find out about that. I read where your commanding officer noted that on 11 through 17 November 1913, that when the *Tuscarora* was short 20 members of the crew, that you "...rendered valuable assistance to the Commanding Officer when *Tuscarora* saved Dredge No. 21 from being wrecked and assisting to float the steamer *Nottingham* ashore at Perisian Shoals." Do you recall any of that Admiral?

Stika: Goodness gracious! I'd forgotten all about that.

Noble: I saw that in one of the reports. Can you recall anything of that? I don't even recall where the shoals are at, Admiral.

Stika: No, that *Nottingham* kind of rings a bell, but I can't recall that incident at all. I wish I had kept a record of those incidents. I don't remember that.

Noble: That's all right. That was just one out of the blue that I picked up and I didn't know whether you'd remember it or not. I guess I chose them because I'd never heard of the shoals. Again, another very general question here, Admiral. What event or experience really sticks in your mind about being aboard the *Tuscarora*? Any thing particular or any thing outstanding?

Stika: That's strange, I should remember because I rather enjoyed it, patrolling regattas.

Noble: You know, I enjoyed sailing the Great Lakes. When it was calm it was very pleasant, it was almost like a summer's outing.

Stika: Yes.

Noble: Of course, when I sailed it, it was wintertime but it was still very pleasant.

Stika: Yes. Well that was true. On the Great Lakes, why if it got too rough you could always sneak into port, quite a contrast to being at sea in salt water and not having a port to sneak into.

Noble: Well, in 1914 you were again transferred. This was basically the third transfer in four years. Was it normal for the Revenue Cutter Service to transfer its officers so often?

Stika: No, but I suppose the reason for it was more because I was concerned with the Lakes. That was a part-year job, she froze up in the winter time so I was sent somewhere else.

Noble: I see. It wasn't really normal for the officers to move that often?

Stika: No, see the idea was to share our east coast and west coast work. So on the way across from the east coast to the west coast, the *Tuscarora* was handy for the job and on the way back it was handy, also.

Noble: Oh, I see, sort of like a stopping-off place.

Stika: It shortened the time on one ship.

Noble: I'm about half way through with the written questions I've got here Admiral. Do you feel tired or would you like to continue on?

Stika: No, we might as well finish it if you're willing.

Noble: Sure, if you feel all right, we'll go right on.

Stika: We can keep hammering at it. I'm not as satisfactory as I should be.

Noble: I wish I had your memory Admiral. I have a hard time remembering things that happened to me last week.

Stika: Well, I should do much better, but I didn't pay enough attention to it while things were happening. What I should have done is insisted on at least an outlined on each case of assistance and so on. That would have been a nice record.

Noble: I say the same thing. I was telling the Coast Guard Historian the other day, I wish that when I was out to sea and up to Alaska I'd have written down a little diary. Nothing fancy, something that jogs your memory. Well, I'll ask you the next question I have here Admiral. The next duty station after the *Tuscarora* was the *Snohomish*.

Stika: *Snohomish*, Port Angeles. She was a sea-going tug, really. And was homeported in Port Angeles. To be closer to where the trouble usually was, we spent a great deal of time with Neah Bay as our headquarters or homeport. We would stay there from Monday until Friday. Friday we'd get underway from Neah Bay and go back to Port Angeles and spend the weekend unless we had a job. Yes, the *Umatilla* and *Swiftsure* Lightships. We delivered their mail once a week and we gave them newspapers and then we would slow down to what we called "fishing speed" and troll for salmon around the *Swiftsure* Lightship. We always got a load of salmon. So we figured usually to go out and see those ships about Wednesday or Thursday and we'd get our salmon and throw them into the icebox and have them when we got back to Port Angeles to take home with us.

Noble: Having been out on the west coast, as I told you earlier, I was stationed at Port Angeles and I know that the area is still pretty isolated--even today--and I imagine it was pretty isolated when you were out there.

Stika: Very much so.

Noble: This is a little bit away from the Revenue Cutter Service, but could you possibly tell me your impression of the area and for people not familiar with the area. Where is Port Angeles and Neah Bay and what was your impression of the area?

Stika: Well, of course, we made rather close friends with the people in Port Angeles. In Neah Bay there wasn't much. There was an Indian reservation and one man, a white man, ran the store, the local store, for the Indians. I don't remember his name. He was quite an interesting fellow. There was also an elderly man who was in charge of the Indian reservation. I think his name was Wood, I'm not sure. We would go ashore and play bridge with them--and even poker at times! At Neah Bay we had a plot of garden, a plot of land and the rest of us, we dug that place up and raised fresh vegetables. That helped a little when there wasn't anything important to do.

Noble: Could you tell me what your duties were on board this cutter?

Stika: Of course she was a tugboat and didn't have as many officers as a Revenue Cutter on the stations so that they doubled-up. I think I was still commissary officer and also ordnance officer during my time on her. That's about all I can remember.

Noble: Is there any event or experience aboard the *Snohomish*?

Stika: Yes, let's see. Now what the devil did we do on the *Snohomish* that was interesting? Not one specific instance that I can recall that was particularly interesting.

Noble: Just general patrolling?

Stika: Yes. There was one instance where we towed a ship from South America that was disabled because her crew was incapacitated due to beriberi. Bad food, apparently. We found them and I remember the commanding officer said you don't have to go, but somebody's got to go aboard there and tell us what they need because we can't talk to them. So if you want to go, all right. If not, I'll get somebody else. So I did. I went aboard and I was sort of a go-between with that ship. Most of it was I could see what we needed and yell it over to the *Snohomish*. They would come through with what was necessary. Beriberi, that was, I think, the most interesting incident. We towed her' as far as Port Angeles, anchored there overnight and went into Seattle the next day and got rid of them and got them taken care of by the Public Health Service.

Noble: That is kind of interesting.

Stika: That's out of the ordinary.

Noble: This may be kind of hard; do you remember the name of that ship?

Stika: No, I do not.

Noble: That is asking a little bit too much.

Stika: Well, I should remember it--was it the *Catanya*--I don't know, I'm not sure.

Noble: Right now it's about 1915, and during this year the Revenue Cutter Service merged with the Life Saving Service and formed the Coast Guard. I can imagine before this happened there were a lot of rumors running around the Revenue Cutter Service, both pro and con. Do you remember any of the arguments, both ways, for and against this merger?

Stika: Well, the Life Saving Station in Neah Bay, Keeper [George W.] McAfee--I remember him. He was sort of doubtful about that. He said, "What are they going to do when we become part of the Revenue Cutter Service, will you snatch me off this nice shore job I have and put me at sea? And same way with the men that I have in the Life Saving Service, they're all local people. They have families or one thing or another. Would you take them and send them to sea?" We said, "We do not know. We don't do the sending. But chances are that your crew will be replaced by Revenue Cutter Service people who've spent their time at sea and who're entitled to a job ashore. Sort of rotate the hard duty and the less strenuous duty." That's about all I remember, but they were all willing to join up with the Revenue Cutter Service because they saw that there was an advantage in a bigger service. And it made it easier for us to feel that we don't have to ask that man to give us a hand; we tell him.

Noble: Do you recall any of your own thoughts on the subject?

Stika: That's about the size of it.

Noble: Same thing, yes, I see.

Stika: We had no objection to taking them in. In fact, we felt it was an advantage to have them close to us rather than as a life-saving service [only].

Noble: After the merger, was there any change in the uniform or anything major, as you recall?

Stika: It seems to me the shield gained prominence somewhere during that time, but I'm not sure when the enlisted men were required to wear the shield. I don't remember when that happened, but that was probably one of the things that occurred when we expanded into owning the Life-Saving Service. I believe the lifeboatmen's attractive blue Norfolk coat and trousers were replaced by regular sailor jacket and bell-bottoms.

Noble: Well, I'd like to, if I may, cover one other period here. I'd like to cover your time up in Alaska. That period is very interesting to a lot of people. In March of 1916, you received orders again and this time you went to the *Unalga*. What type of cutter was she?

Stika: She was a rather slow vessel. I remember that she was peculiar in that her bulwarks were cut down at the stern so that when we towed, why, the towing hawser swept clear along the after rail transom. One incident I remember on the *Unalga* was in the wintertime. We were caught in a gale wind blowing off the Melaspina Glacier. It was thick fog and we edged in toward the beach, hoping to get a lee until we had four fathoms--24 feet of water--which soon would be nothing. So Captain [Frederick G.] Dodge just stopped all engines and let her drift. She took a position with her quarter to the gale and her bow headed off shore and we just drifted. One side, of course, was exposed to the gale wind off the glacier all the time. So that side froze up with the flying spray and fog clinging to the rail. We had the rail of course, pipe rail, but that froze practically solid. It was just a slit between rails and the rest was all ice. There was ice on the deck also. And so much more ice on that side because of the weather side, that we had to chop it off the rail and chop it off the deck and heave it overboard. Which was hard work.

Noble: I've done that myself and I know that it's very difficult.

Stika: Yes. I think we would have capsized if we hadn't done it. That was the one outstanding experience that sticks in my mind.

Noble: The Alaska Patrol that you were on is better known as the Bering Sea Patrol by a lot of people. Just for the record, could you give us a real brief description of what the Bering Sea Patrol was?

Stika: Yes. You were always in what we called "Bering Sea skies". A sort of haze. We seldom saw the bright sun without haze in it. The idea was to prevent sealing, protect the fur seals. Seal Islands were visited regularly. The vessels in the area were naturally watched very closely to make sure that they weren't sealing in order to keep the fur seals from being exterminated. That was the important job in Bering Sea. Now what the hell's the name of the Seal Islands?

Noble: Pribilofs.

Stika: Maybe it was Seal Islands.

Noble: Yes, they called them that. Sometimes they're known as the Seal Islands or sometimes, the Pribilofs.

Stika: Pribilofs, that was it.

Noble: I've seen it used interchangeably.

Stika: Yes, yes, yes. That was the job of the Bering Sea.

Noble: I made two Bering Sea Patrols.

Stika: You did?

Noble: I was right near the end of the Bering era--1961 and 1962. I know a little bit about the area and this is recalling some memories for myself. I remember we put people ashore there every once in a while just to go and see the sealing operations.

Stika: Correct. We'd take pictures of the seals and watch the rookeries. The bachelor with his group of female seals, insisting on keeping them his own to the extent of having a fight with the bachelor that tried to steal his women.

Noble: I can remember that they were always warning us not to play around with the pups. Because the seals could really move and somebody would always end up getting bit or almost, getting bit because those things can get quite vicious. Before coming here, Admiral, I read a little bit on the Bering Sea Patrol report for the trip you made, and we discussed it just briefly earlier. I notice that before even getting into the Bering Sea Patrol this year, you were ordered to Cook Inlet and Anchorage to assist the U.S. Marshal there.

Stika: That must have been the incident where we used a squad of eight men armed with rifles to go ashore and help influence the local people to quiet down.

Noble: Strike in progress there?:

Stika: It must have been a strike, yes. It must have been something of that sort that caused us to have to go into Cook Inlet to do that thing.

Noble: After leaving Cook Inlet, your ship went to Unalaska. That was, I believe, the Bering Sea Patrol headquarters.

Stika: Yes, that was our more or less homeport. Unalaska. Oh, my! We had to have enough food before we left Seattle to last us. Coal. I suppose we coaled in Unalaska.

Noble: Do you remember anything about the town of Unalaska?

Stika: Let me see if I can picture that. Nothing, except it seems to me, that we couldn't go very far before we came to this wall and you couldn't go any farther unless you wanted to climb. That's about all I remember. [Third] Lieutenant Edward F.] Palmer and I climbed a mountain--Metuchin?--and brought back sacks of snow to freeze a mess of ice cream.

Noble: Wasn't too much to do there then?

Stika: No, there wasn't anything to do.

Noble: Maybe this might help you remember something, Admiral. I noted in some of the reports a mention of a Jesse Lee Home. Do you remember this?

Stika: Jesse Lee Home? That was a home for Eskimos that had to be taken care of from children on into old people. Jesse Lee Home. I hadn't thought of that in years.

Noble: I noticed that in one of the reports. I didn't know whether it was a missionary type place or for destitute seamen.

Stika: I think it was a federally managed outfit, but I'm not sure of that. Jesse Lee Home seemed to be the United States Government taking care of the Eskimos that were unable to look out for themselves. I had forgotten there ever was such a thing. I remember the doctor, we called him, what the hell was his name? That's gone also. This doctor was in charge of the Jesse Lee Home and he would come aboard and we'd have him to dinner and one thing or another. We kept very close with him.

Noble: I believe there was a church there also, wasn't there Admiral? I remember an officer telling me just recently that there was a Russian Orthodox Church.

Stika: Yes, yes, yes, with the dome. That's right. You have one more memory.

Noble: I don't have the memory of it, but it's just because somebody happened to mention it to me, that's the only reason. I, unfortunately, never got to Unalaska.

Stika: Well, you didn't miss much.

Noble: Even today, sailing around the Aleutian Islands in the Bering Sea can be very risky business. Could you tell me if there was any difference in sailing routine when you entered the Bering Sea and the Aleutian Islands than normal sea watches?

Stika: I didn't think so. You see, in the summer time, of course, we had daylight almost day and night. It was never bright. It was always overcast and visibility was not too good. I don't remember that the routine was much different from other cutters' jobs. It seemed the same thing, except for the fact that we tried to watch for seal poachers--which was unusual for a cutter and the winter work when we were exposed to possible icing.

Noble: How far north in the Bering Sea did you go, Admiral? Do you remember?

Stika: I don't think we ever went beyond the Straits. We'd go up and take a look at the Straits and then go on back into the Bering Sea. I don't remember being outside of Nome, for instance.

Noble: I can remember going to Nome many a time.

Stika: Yes. The life-saving station there, of course, would have an officer in charge that stayed year out and year in, but I think they reduced the crew in the wintertime. Navigation practically ceased up there.

Noble: That's something that a lot of people don't know, that there was a life-saving station up in Nome.

Stika: Yes.

Noble: I didn't know about that until a few years ago, myself.

Stika: Yes. I don't remember ever seeing it except that we kept in touch with them and that they seemed to be active in the summer time, but inactive in the wintertime.

Noble: I know part of the job when I was on Bering Sea Patrol was to give medical aid to the natives.

Stika: Oh, yes.

Noble: Did you ever do any of that, Admiral?

Stika: Yes, we had a Public Health Service surgeon on board and he would go ashore at any place that was handy and check on their health. I don't remember any epidemic or anything of that unusual sort, but we did that.

Noble: Did you give physical examinations to the natives or anything like that?

Stika: Yes, and when they asked for it, he would check them over and give them what he thought was necessary.

Noble: Is there any particular village you happen to recall? I can remember, even today, one particular village. I don't know if you happen to remember any.

Stika: Susitna. One thing that sticks in my mind, but what we' did there except see and check it, isn't clear.

Noble: You did boarding duty also on the *Unalga*, check them for seals, is that what you did?

Stika: Yes. Sometimes go through a lot of fishing vessels in the area. They needed checking to keep them from being tempted to take fur seals.

Noble: Do you feel that being on the Bering Sea Patrol, which was kind of rugged duty I would imagine, did that make you feel like you were anything special, to know you'd gone through a Bering Sea Patrol?

Stika: Well, that's about the only reason we looked forward to it. It was isolated duty. Very much away from the ordinary civilized life of the United States, but everybody was sort of proud of having gone through a Bering Sea Patrol. So that seemed to be the answer. We wanted to be as good as the next fellow, as experienced as the rest of them.

Noble: Do you recall anything that you consider a first on Bering Sea Patrol?

Stika: Nothing except this icing up off of Melaspina Glacier.

Noble: I keep coming back to this food thing, and I think you're going to think I'm after you because you were a commissary officer. I recall reading a book recently, called the *The Sea of the Bear* [M.A. Ransom & Eloise K. Engle. *Sea of the Bear: Journal of a Voyage to Alaska and the Arctic, 1921*. Annapolis: Unites States Naval Institute 1964]. I don't know if you've read that one or not Admiral. A very good book about the old *Bear*, the last few cruises of the *Bear*, written by an ex-Coast Guard officer. And one of the things he said was that they got so tired of the same old food on Bering Sea Patrol, that they shot a reindeer, and shot also caribou, and they said it was bad, but at least it was' something different. How is your feeling on that Admiral?

Stika: Well, let me see. There was a Cape and we'd go ashore there and would kill caribou. Shoot them and we would eat caribou as long as we could be sure that it was not full of worms. That was a change of diet from in those days, mostly salt food.

Noble: Mostly salt food?

Stika: Yes, as I remember it. We had iceboxes. Of course, ice would give out after a while and we had to eat the barreled salt beef and pork. Oh, this is a dirty one. Our master at arms was a little crooked and he had friends ashore, natives, as well as some whites. He traded a lot of food out of our commissary to the natives, what for God only knows, but when I came to check at the end or the month, I found a heck

of a lot of shortage and once that resulted from the fact that we saw evidence of food being carried from the hold, across the deck and ashore at night. The morning watch noticed it. So we were short of food and had a siege of drastic fish catching and we lived on fish through the ordeal until we could get back to the States to replace that stolen food. Made me sick.

Noble: I can imagine. That's a lot of time to eat fish. Could you perhaps describe a typical day on the Bering Sea Patrol? That maybe a little difficult to do.

Stika: Well, yes. Weekdays, of course, meant if the weather wasn't prohibitive, a day of watches and afternoon general quarters and the usual drills. Naturally, we had a schedule so as to cover all of the drills in a more or less routine way. Those not on watch, would play bridge or poker and that was the evening entertainment. During the day there wasn't much time for play' due to routine ship keeping. Saturday was a general cleaning day. Sundays, as I remember it, we had a general muster, Sunday General Muster. Have you ever had that?

Noble: No, I can't say that I have.

Stika: After a while they changed it to either Friday or Saturday, but I remember this Sunday general, full-dress muster was of a kind that we didn't like. I'm glad they changed it. We needed as much of a day of rest as possible.

Noble: That is kind of unusual to have it on Sunday, isn't it?

Stika: Yes, I don't remember anything else that's very outstanding.

Noble: Well, that's pretty interesting to find out what a day's routine was. To me it's interesting, and I think it'd be interesting to anybody else.

Noble: I've got about three general questions here, Admiral. Taking the whole Revenue Cutter Service years, what personality really impressed you during your Revenue Cutter years?

Stika: Well, the one that tops them all is L[eon] C. Covell. L.C. Covell (**right**), we admired him. We not only respected him for his knowledge of the Coast Guard, but he was such an agreeable personality. I believe Admiral Covell was our favorite. There were a good many others. P[hilip] B. Eaton was an outstanding engineer officer. He was not only a shipboard engineer, but he was qualified as a flyer. He was an aviator.

Noble: That's kind of unusual to see an engineering officer go to aviation. Very unusual. That must have been close to when they first started the aviation? Did you know him, Admiral?

Stika: Yes, I knew him well. "Archie" Stone was a superb aviator and as navigator of the NC-4; he made it --the rest of them didn't. So that's an outstanding thing that I remember.

Noble: He made the first trans-oceanic flight in a seaplane, wasn't that it, Admiral?



Stika: Yes. He made the first Atlantic one. He was not in command, he was the pilot.

Noble: Well, that's still plenty right there.

Stika: Yeah, but she wouldn't have made it without his navigation [Stone was the pilot and navigator of the NC-4].

Noble: I think I just saw an article a short time ago that just off on the side there was mentioned Lieutenant Stone-- everything else was Navy --and all of a sudden you see U.S. Coast Guard.

Stika: Right. We used to sort of joke about Captain [Benjamin L.] Brockway. Captain Brockway was a good Coast Guard officer, a good regular-service officer, but he hit the bottle quite often, quite too much, and that was always a point with us.

Noble: I remember reading about, and maybe you've read of him too, of [Captain] Mike Healy up on the Bering Sea Patrol.

Stika: Oh, yes. I've never been shipmates with him, but we always heard about Mike Healy and *Bear*. Captain [Leland S.] Cochran superseded him. He was quite a guy, but not for us junior officers, not friendly you know.

Noble: Did you serve with Captain Cochran?

Stika: No, I've met him. Captain Dodge was a sea-going Revenue Cutter officer. Captain Covell, of course, was not only sea going, but a very, very delightful personality. Captain Uberroth, highly respected. Captain [Ellsworth P.] Bertholf, afterward Admiral Bertholf.

Noble: He was commandant, wasn't he?

Stika: Yes, he was one of the first aviators with [Robert] Donohue and [Charles E.] Sugden, [Elmer] "Archie" Stone.

Noble: Admiral Covell, was he your commanding officer on *Tuscarora*?

Stika: No. He was commanding officer of *Snohomish*. Then Captain Dodge had the *Unalga*.

Noble: You say Admiral Covell was a good leader of men?

Stika: Yes. An unusually fine personality. Sense of humor that was rare.

Noble: What event, out of all your years in the Revenue Cutter Service, is most remembered by you? What is the event that really sticks in your mind?

Stika: That's a tough one. I suppose it's a feeling that I had that we were doing something for people. Looking out for their health and maybe looking out for them in a business way, helping them to get along in the seagoing business--merchant marine particularly. I think we helped them a good deal to do better than they would have done without our supervision. That's about the only point I can make on that one.

Noble: Well that's quite an important job I think

Stika: Yes.

Noble: That's what we're here for. One of our many, many duties. Is there any character that you recall meeting or hearing about during these years? I think every service has a certain character--he gets things done, either a little differently or you hear amusing stories about him. Do you recall any character particularly, Admiral?

Stika: Yes. Well, of course, "Archie" Stone, that's the pilot on the NC-4, that's an outstanding one. Commandant, yes. His engineering chief was [Charles A.] McAllister. They must have been outstanding people to not only reach out for those jobs, but to handle them as well as they did with the great respect that we had for them. Captain W.V.E. Jacobs, was Superintendent of the School of Instruction. He was a bachelor and had two sisters who lived with him. A very well-educated man and highly respected, but not that you could get close to him personally.

Noble: Sort of aloof?

Stika: Aloof, yes. Great guy, but not the kind that Captain Covell was.

Noble: I gather that you really thought a lot of Captain Covell.

Stika: Yes. We respected him highly.

Noble: I'm very interested that you knew Lieutenant Stone. Was he in your class, by any chance?

Stika: Unusual people. No, no. He was in the class below me. He was a great guy.

Noble: It must have been difficult to get aviation duty in those days?

Stika: Yes. I applied for aviation, but my application was "received and placed on file and would be considered at the proper time!"

Noble: That hasn't changed a bit Admiral.

Stika: No, I suppose not. Donohue and that gang kind of ruled it; they had the upper hand.

Noble: Was Donohue in charge of aviation assignment?

Stika: He was in Washington, I think, part of the time as Number One aviator.

Noble: Oh, I see.

Stika: I remember [Frank J.] Gorman. Gorman was more a mathematical man --keeping track of the dollars.

Noble: Well, I'd sure like to thank you. That's all the questions I have right now on the Revenue Cutter Service, Admiral.

Stika: Well, I hope it'll help you.

Noble: I know it will, there's no question in my mind.

Continuation of Interview with VADM J.E. Stika, USCG (Ret.)
June 3, 1975
By MSTC Dennis L. Noble, USCG

Noble: It really is Admiral. I'll tell you, I know there's stuff that came out of here that's very interesting, and while I'm a professional historian I'm quite certain it's going to be . . .

VADM Stika: Well I hope it'll help.

Noble: I know it will. There's no question in my mind about that. As I said, that's all that I have on the Revenue Cutter Service.

VADM Stika: Uh huh.

Noble: Do you mind if I ask you one other personal question . . .

VADM Stika: No.

Noble: . . . or a couple personal questions? Do you feel tired?

VADM Stika: Help yourself.

Noble: [Chuckle] I would eventually, sometime, if you still feel up to it, come back someday and ask you some more questions.

VADM Stika: Oh, this is just fine.

Noble: I would like to ask you one thing and I'm sorry I didn't research it because I didn't know how much time we were going to have.

VADM Stika: Yes.

Noble: I've noted with great interest that you won the Navy Cross during the First World War.

VADM Stika: Yes.

Noble: And I thought it was very unusual because you won it for a non-combat situation.

VADM Stika: Yes. I really don't deserve it.

Noble: Well I don't know from what I saw of it. I thought that you deserved it Admiral.

VADM Stika: Well, I happened to be Port Security with Headquarters in New York, and this [T.A. Gillespie shell-loading plant] was in Brooklyn [and had] loading plants and storage for explosives. The explosives were stowed in separate buildings far enough apart so that if one exploded it wouldn't simultaneously induce exploding on the next one but that didn't happen. One of them blew up and that person was thought to have sabotaged it, under the influence of our foreign enemy, but no one has ever been able to prove it. So when they blew up, the Captain of the Port in New York kept cognizant and sent me, and I said, "Can I take someone with me?" I had about a thousand men in the gang to watch and in connection with Port Security, and he said, "No, I want you to go alone", and I went alone. But my bugler; a man named Cavister (phonetic) insisted on coming with me and I said, "The Old Man said I was to go alone." He said, "You're not going alone. I'm going with you", and I thought, "Hell, I can't fight him off, and I hurried over to Port Angeles. And there I met [Kenneth S.] McCann; a Chief Warrant Officer [Machinist], who gave me the outline and we went into the area and all we could do from then on is hope to find some of the living people and help them out by commandeering trucks. It was an undesirable job of loading

those trucks where the people just couldn't get out by themselves and later on taking care of the dead ones. Eventually, of course, the explosions stopped and while that was going on the only shelter we had was behind telephone poles. This was all open space and no way to hide except when you saw a blast during the night - you could see that first - and then by the time you heard it you would have found a telephone pole and kind of hunched up around it, and sometimes you could even feel the pieces of steel hitting the other side. As I say, anybody could have gotten that medal.

Noble: I don't know about that [chuckle].

VADM Stika: We finally got out of there without having shaved but we did get shower baths from the Coast Guard gang and we retrieved some of the unexploded ammunition; sometimes big shells. We carried a couple of those and gave them to Captain [Godfrey L.] Carden on our return from that job and he was very, very well pleased, and he was the one that recommended me for the Navy Cross. I didn't deserve it.

Noble: Well I think you did Admiral. I think that's quite a bit of heroism to go in there and try to pull people out. I know I've been around ammo depots before and I don't want to be anywhere near them when those things are starting to blow off. I know maybe you think they won't go. That's quite a feat.

VADM Stika: It's an experience. Anybody could have done it.

Noble: No, I don't think so Admiral. That takes quite a bit to do something like that. I think a lot of people would be interested in hearing that.

VADM Stika: Well it's a long time ago and as I say, I don't deserve it. These people that are on the firing line, they're the ones that, if they survive, they should be given all the right kind of recognition.

Noble: Well I think that having ammunition blowing up all around you, I think that's pretty close to being on the firing line right there.

VADM Stika: Well you're just saying that.

Noble: I thank you for telling me that story... that's very interesting. I know your nephew Captain [Leroy] Reinberg [Junior] said that he was quite impressed with that story.

VADM Stika: Well of course he was growing up. I've held him since he was born and I knew his father much better; if he were alive today; Admiral Leroy Reinberg. We were shipmates on the *Androscoggin*.

Noble: Oh, is that where you were shipmates at? I see.

VADM Stika: And we knew each other very well. We kind of took to each other; a friendly sort of thing. I may have told you that I married his sister; his youngest sister. There were 12 children in that family. Captain J. E. Reinberg was the Superintendent of the School of Instruction of the Revenue Cutter Service when I entered the Service. He was the first Reinberg I met.

Noble: I see.

VADM Stika: Later on, on the *Androscoggin* I met Leroy; his younger brother, and his two sisters used to visit him in Portland, Maine with a friend of theirs from Washington who lived in, or had friends in Canada, and on their way to Canada they'd stop in Portland, Maine and visit with us. I got to know the Reinberg family very well. Of course when Admiral Reinberg married and then had his children, well Leroy Jr. was one of them. I've known him since he was born. He's quite a chap.

Noble: I can remember him telling me when I went up to talk to him a little a bit about coming down and talking to you about you saying that he remembers when you were Commander of the Thirteenth District and he said that he knew you when he was on the *Winona*.

VADM Stika: Yes. Easton was the Commanding Officer of the *Winona*. I had Easton as the navigator on the Puerto Rico Station; first *Seneca* and we traded her off for the *Unalga*.

Noble: And [garbled] boarded the CO then.

VADM Stika: Yeah. Well I'm afraid that I've taken up a lot of your time.

Noble: Oh, I've taken up too much of your time.

END OF INTERVIEW



Original caption states: "Before retiring October 1, 1951, Rear Admiral Joseph E. Stika, USCG, nears the end of over 43 years service in the Coast Guard as he makes one of his last official military appearances at the re-commissioning of the world's largest, strongest, and fastest battleship, the USS IOWA, in San Francisco, August 25. Admiral Stika (extreme left), who is both Commander Western Area and Commander Twelfth Coast Guard District, is shown here with (left to right) Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN; Mrs. William S. Beardsley (wife of and representing Governor Beardsley of Iowa); Mrs. William R. Smedberg III (wife of the USS IOWA's captain); and Captain William R. Smedberg III, USN, Commanding Officer of the USS IOWA (BB-61)."; photo dated 28 August 1951.

