



## *Our Member of the Year* *Robert E. Hammond, USCG(Ret.)* *His Story*

Robert E. Hammond, known as "Rocky" to his shipmates and friends, was born and attended schools in Plainfield, NJ. Following high school, he went to work at Raritan Arsenal located in Metuchen, NJ. In mid 1942, Hammond learned that the U.S. Coast Guard was enlisting African-Americans as Apprentice Seaman. This, coupled with a sense of national obligation was cause for Rocky to enlist in the U.S. Coast Guard in September 1942. He was sent to Manhattan Beach Training Station, New York, and assigned to Company 24 (an all African-American company). He fondly recalls with a sense of pride, how the streets of Manhattan Beach seemed to open up when Company 24 came marching by.

Hammond believes his tenure in the Coast Guard included some interesting, and significant assignments, and gave him an opportunity to contribute to racial equity. These include Salisbury Beach Patrol Station, U.S.C.G. C. Sea Cloud, General George M. Randall, CGC 95315, CGC 64308, CGC 65610, and U.S. Military Mission, Monrovia, Liberia (West Africa).

(a) Salisbury Beach Patrol Station, Salisbury, Massachusetts: The station was manned by an all African-American crew. The Officer-in-Charge was CPO Jackson. This station was in all probability, the only Coast Guard unit other than Pea Island, with an African-American Officer-in-Charge at that time.

(b) USCGC Sea Cloud: Twenty African-American Seaman volunteered to accept a special assignment aboard the Sea Cloud. The result of this assignment was that those twenty men began the process that proved racial barriers could be eliminated aboard ship and that integration could work. In addition to the enlisted personnel, three African-American officers served on the Sea Cloud, Mr. Harvey Russell, (of Pepsico fame), Mr. Jenkins, and Mr. Clarence Samuels. This assignment is one of Rocky's most memorable.

(c) General George M. Randall: Following duty aboard the Sea Cloud, Hammond and most of his shipmates were assigned to the Coast Guard Operating Base, Wilmington, California. While at Base Wilmington, a group of African-American enlisted personnel were asked to volunteer for transfer to the Randall. It was felt that a larger African-American presence would help calm a racial situation that existed on board. The Randall sailed to ports in Hawaii, Australia, Tasmania, India, France, and several Pacific Islands.

(d) USCGC 95315: Hammond was given the opportunity to train a Haitian crew and then deliver the vessel to the Haitian government. The vessel was sailed from Norfolk, Virginia to Port-au-Prince, by Hammond, three other Coasties and the Haitian trainees.

(e) U.S. Military Mission, Monrovia, Liberia (West Africa): Hammond was a member of a U.S. Coast Guard team that also included Lt. Hallberg, CPO Franklin Fountaine (now Lt. Cdr. Ret), sent to Liberia to train Liberian personnel, and assist in the formation of the nucleus, that later became known as The Liberian National Coast Guard.

(f) USCGC 64308: Hammond and his crew were involved in a search and rescue situation in the Long Island Sound of New York. For their actions, Rocky and his crew received a Commandant's Letter of Commendation.

(g) USCGC 65610: As Officer-in-Charge of the USCGC 65610, Hammond had the opportunity to participate in the construction, shakedown, and delivery of the vessel to its home port in New York. This event took place in New Bern, North Carolina.

Rocky rose through the ranks to Master Chief Boatswain's Mate. He also received an appointment to Bos'n W-1, which, for personal reasons, he did not accept. Hammond retired from active duty on September 1963, and is now fully retired.

He holds membership in the USCG Chief Petty Officers Association, The Retired Enlisted Association, Veteran of Foreign Wars, and the USCG National Association of Former Stewards and Stewardmates. If anyone should ask Rocky, he will, with pride state that he gave his best to the U.S. Coast Guard, seriously enjoyed his career in the organization and made friends that will remain indelible in his memory. Hammond believes one of his crowning achievements was the day he stood on the foc'sle of the USCGC Rockaway as a Black Chief Boatswain's Mate during docking maneuvers.

He remembers that to himself he said, " All of this was not for naught, we (Blacks) are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Hammond resides in Piscataway, New Jersey. He is the proud father of Rilette, and Robert Jr.

Other assignments: COTP Boston, Coast Guard Explosive Loading Detail, Leonardo, NJ, CGC Arbutus, CGOB Pic 9, NY, CGC Androscoggin, CGC Oak, CGC Spencer, and CGC Tuckahoe.