
SCENE

16

CG CUTTER *DUANE*—1939-1940 (NEUTRALITY PATROL / WEATHER PATROL / GREENLAND VISITATION)

I reported to the *Duane* on her return to her Oakland, California, home port, and just in time for my August twentieth birthday. I turned twenty-four years old. Commander Grogan was the Captain. He assigned me to deck watches in port and the mid-watch underway (12-4 a.m. and 12-4 p.m.). My stateroom was the aftermost on the port side in officers' country. By ancient nautical custom, the starboard side of the ship is the senior side. A battleship at anchor would have a gangway on each side for liberty boats. The officers used the starboard side, the enlisted men the port.

On the *Duane*, the staterooms for officers lined the starboard and port sides with a passageway down the centerline. The Captain had a two-stateroom "cabin" under the bridge; the Executive Officer the forward stateroom on the starboard side; the Chief Engineer the forward stateroom on the port side. Other officers were assigned going aft with lowering rank until there was yours truly, most junior officer in the most junior stateroom! That put me directly above the port propeller (swish-swish-swish-swish, not to mention the rise-and-fall when pitching).

After about a week in Oakland, we relieved the *Hamilton* and anchored off the Marina District. The **Golden Gate International Exposition** was underway at Treasure Island, the landfill expanding Yerba Buena Island to the north. It was a beautiful sight at night—like a golden city of ancient lore!

On the third of September, while at anchor there, the radioman received an ALCOAST dispatch which read "A STATE OF WAR NOW EXISTS BETWEEN ENGLAND FRANCE AND GERMANY X JUDGE YOUR ACTIONS ACCORDINGLY."

On September 5, the messenger, with clipboard in hand, let officers read the dispatch just received as he made his way looking for the Exec in the wardroom. It read "DIRECT DUANE PROCEED TO EASTCOAST IMMEDIATELY X PERMANENT EASTCOAST STATION WILL FOLLOW." The time was 2020. At 2150, we were moored in Oakland and word was being spread like wildfire! It was tough on family men and their families. Easy for me. All I had to do was get rid of my jalopy.

On September 6, we went to the Mare Island Naval Shipyard for fuel and our wartime allocation of ammunition. On September 7, we passed under the beautiful Golden Gate Bridge at the start of our 5,450-mile cruise to the East Coast, still not knowing our destination!

On September 9, excitement so soon! I woke up after a short nap following the mid-watch to find everybody busy dogging down hatches and lashing things in place. The ship was being readied for a **hurricane**.

I am now going to quote from a notebook I kept. Bear in mind that we didn't have electronics like today with satellite navigation, or radar, or LORAN, or weather reports, or GPS. But we were more attuned to reading the weather as ancient mariners did through the ages.

"We were about 400 miles south of San Diego and the storm was well ahead but heading our way. A large swell was coming from the south. The barometer was dropping with unsteady fluctuations. The clouds overhead were cirrus. Ahead on the horizon they were alto-stratus with some stratocumulus, much as should be expected. By mid-afternoon the wind hauled around indicating the storm had passed. Winds never exceeded 48 knots. The preparations were for naught, and I missed an experience which, while perhaps not pleasant, would be interesting to have while on a safe ship like this."

It may have seemed like an anticlimax to us, but it was the only Mexican hurricane to strike Southern California in the twentieth century. And it hit during the Labor Day weekend, the traditional end of the summer sailing season. Hundreds of yachts were caught at sea in the Catalina Channel and many had serious storm damage.

Porter and two male friends, Onnie and Marty, with their dates were anchored in Emerald Bay when the storm hit. Porter feared *Dagge* would drag anchor and be washed ashore. A plan was decided: Porter and Marty would sail to Fisherman's Cove at the Isthmus, which had complete shelter. Onnie and the girls would hike to Fisherman's Cove and meet there.

The plan failed. *Dagge* was a slow, low-performance cruising boat. Try as they did, they couldn't beat against the strong wind to make it to the cove. There wasn't enough fuel aboard to motor, and it was years before VHF ship-to-shore communications. What to do? Porter decided to set a small storm tri-sail, heave-to, and ride out the storm.

The next morning, a Greek freighter spotted them off Point Hueneme, 60 miles up the coast. They radioed to Coast Guard. The **Coast Guard cutter *Ingham***, a sister ship of

the *Duane*, also ordered to the East Coast and two days behind us, took them in tow. Off San Pedro, the tow was taken over by the **Coast Guard cutter *Hermes***, a 165-foot patrol vessel that took them to a safe haven.

Do you think that is the end of the story? Stay with me.

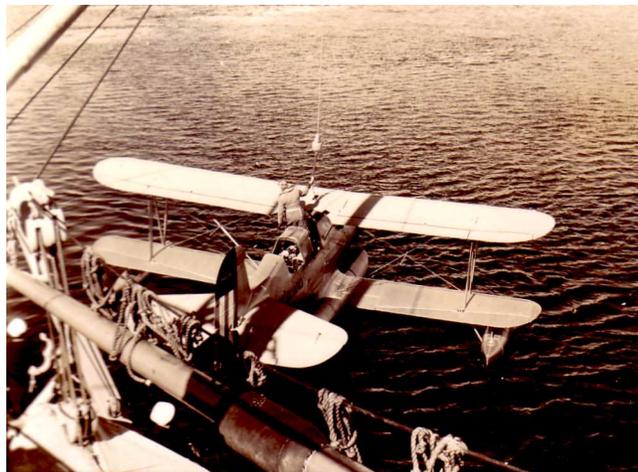
I had a classmate, Lynn Parker, on the *Ingham*, who was assigned to the mid-watch (12-4 a.m.) as was I. After his watch, he took a nap and after breakfast wrote his log. *Dagge* was in tow. The skipper's name was Sinclair. Lynn mused that he had a classmate named Sinclair who often spoke of sailing with his brother when on home leave. Do you suppose??

We cleared the Panama Canal before we received orders to Boston, our new home port. *Oh, No! Not New England again! What happened to that dream of West Coast duty?* And we learned that the *Hamilton* was ordered east too. And the *Ingham* was following us. *What's the big deal? Why the big rush?*

The biggest and newest cutters in 1939 were known as the Secretary Class, being named after Secretaries of the Treasury Department, of which the Coast Guard had been a part since 1790. There were only seven of that class and they were stationed with one in Pearl Harbor, three on the West Coast, and three on the East Coast. They were designed to be compatible with Navy operations and especially equipped for convoy escort duty. This class would join Navy destroyers in the **Neutrality Patrol** being established. They lacked the speed and fire power of a destroyer but had better sea-keeping qualities, could stay at sea more than a month without logistic support, and could cruise twelve thousand miles without refueling. The armament consisted of a five-inch gun, two twenty-millimeter machine guns, two fifty-caliber machine guns, two K-Guns, and depth charges. They had sonar and primitive radar. They had turbines with double-reduction gears and a top speed of twenty knots. They were beautiful ships, 327 feet in length and equipped to carry a single float seaplane.

Yes, but why the rush? We weren't at war! Maybe not, but the **Battle of the Atlantic** had started. German U-boats were sinking merchant ships of our allies close along our Atlantic coast. The U-boat operation they called "Drum Beat" sank three hundred sixty ships totaling 2,250,000 tons! And Germany lost only eight U-boats.

As I found out later, on September 5, 1938, President Roosevelt ordered the Navy to organize the Neutrality Patrol. By September 10, the plan was in place. By October, it was established for



Grumman J2F Duck scout plane used to search for potential airfield sites in Greenland, being lowered off the *Duane* for takeoff. Upon landing, the amphibious biplane was caught with a net and pulled to a crane to lift it back on board

continuous patrolling of an area about two hundred miles offshore, extending from the Grand Banks to Trinidad. The Coast Guard cutters would cover the easternmost areas and the Navy destroyers the coastal waters.

Lots of actions were taking place, including assignments of senior officers. Commander Grogan was relieved by Commander von Paulson. He was one of the Coast Guard's earliest aviators, who were known to be a daring and non-conforming bunch.



Giving "sideboys" to the Governor of Greenland on board the *Duane*

He took command in Boston. The military etiquette we were taught at the Academy said that we officers must call on the Commanding Officer at his home and leave a calling card. The hours of 8 to 9 p.m. were specified. I tried to find his home in Chelsea, but by the time I got there it was after 9 p.m., so I tried again the next night. Right on time I found his apartment with a bare light bulb lit and hanging by its cord from the ceiling. I rang the door bell. No answer. I rang it twice

more. Finally, his gruff voice came through the speaking tube, which old apartments often had in those days. He asked, "Who is there?" I said, "Ensign Sinclair calling, sir." He said, "I'm not at home!" (Click, voice tube shut.) I left my cards, one for him and one for his wife, as proper, and got the heck out of there.

"One day on Neutrality Patrol we were hove-to but unable to maintain steerage-way at slow speed so needed to use the twin screws to keep us hove-to. The starboard lifeboat worked loose, but was on the lee side, so the crew secured it. Later the port lifeboat broke its gripe and we had to wait and hope until we were able to give it a lee. The anemometer exceeded its 90 knot limit and took off like a helicopter. The Hamilton stood by the ocean liner President Harding who reported numerous fractures among the passengers. An SOS from the Blainby, a Scottish freighter, said the steering cable broke. It was 300 miles from us. We started that way but soon they said assistance was no longer needed. The MV Selve reported loss of a propeller. We found her 21 miles southeast of St. Pierre but a commercial tug was en route from Halifax. We stood by while the Selve was taken in tow."

Such was the life on Neutrality Patrol.

We were assigned a sixty-mile square to patrol for our month on station, unless we were needed on a rescue case. We did have some boring days. One day, after a series of days steaming upwind and drifting back down, I had the afternoon watch as Officer-of-the-Deck. The Commanding Officer (von Paulson) came to me and ordered me to "get underway for Boston and make twenty knots!"

What does a poor Ensign do with such an order? I said, "Aye, aye, sir," and walked over to the messenger and told him to find Commander Littlefield, the Executive Officer, and tell him the OD wants him to the bridge immediately.

He showed up immediately and out of breath. I was waiting out on the wing of the bridge, where I could tell him quietly of the Captain's order. He calmly approached the CO, who obviously had been drinking, and suggested they retire to the cabin, which they did. (End of incident.)

On January 27, 1940, we received orders from the Commander, Boston District, to the *Duane* and the *Bibb* to prepare to establish and "OCCUPY TWO WEATHER STATIONS BETWEEN BERMUDA AND THE AZORES X DURATION WEATHER STATION PATROLS AND SCHEDULES TO BE DETERMINED LATER X DUANE AND BIBB PREPARE TO SAIL THIS DUTY 31 JANUARY PREPARED TO KEEP TO SEA FOR A PERIOD OF AT LEAST ONE MONTH X DEFINITE INSTRUCTIONS RELATIVE THIS DUTY WILL BE ISSUED LATER X THIS IS TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENT PENDING REFITTING AND FURNISHING FOUR MARITIME SERVICE VESSELS TO BE PERMANENTLY ENGAGED THIS DUTY MANNED BY COAST GUARD PERSONNEL."

On January 31, we arrived in New York, where we picked up two Weather Bureau men and special weather recording instruments. Then, on to Norfolk for fuel and liberty. On February 5 we left, bound for our assigned weather station between Bermuda and the Azores, 1,760-miles distant.

Our sister ship, the cutter *Bibb*, was assigned to Weather Station #1, one third the distance from Bermuda to the Azores. We, in the *Duane*, to Weather Station #2, two-thirds the distance. We inaugurated an expanding **Weather Patrol** program that included weather stations in the Pacific. The program lasted from 1940 to 1960, by which time technical advances in aircraft capability, satellite communication, weather tracking, and new technology made weather stations obsolete.

There was an urgent need for the services provided by the North Atlantic weather ships. The war was raging in Europe, and American civilians were fleeing. Most were leaving by ocean liners, but many diplomats and wealthy American were being evacuated by **Pan Am Clippers** (seaplanes) flying from Lisbon to New York via the Azores and Bermuda.

The weather patrol cutters were already along the flight route should search-and-rescue become necessary. Radio contact tracked their positions and flight conditions. A radio beacon from the cutter served as an aid to navigation.

Although we were unaware of it, we also had a military mission—to provide to allied commanders on the battlefields of Europe accurate weather data from its source of origin. This gave allied forces lead time for planning maneuvers. That explains why we had Weather Bureau personnel with us. Anyone can read a thermometer, a barometer, and an anemometer and estimate the direction and force of the wind, but the weathermen could do more.

Six times a day, they sent surface weather conditions to their bureau for analysis and forwarding encoded to the Army. Twice a day, they released a pilot balloon filled with helium. These were about five feet in diameter and colored red, white, or black. The color was selected for best contrast with the type of sky. The rate of ascent was known. Our gyro repeaters were used to obtain the azimuth and an astrolabe measured the altitude. The cloud ceiling is determined by the time the balloon disappears in the cloud cover. These reading were corrected for the ship's course and speed.

At midnight, a pilot balloon with a radio device that measures temperature, pressure, and humidity was launched. This balloon penetrates the overcast and continues sending data until it bursts. Our first try was almost a record. It went well into the stratosphere and reached the troposphere with the temperature a minus seventy-two degrees Centigrade.

We also had a **Public Health Service Doctor** assigned for the cruise. And we were happy to have him when one of our enlisted men had an appendicitis attack.

He determined that the man needed to be hospitalized as soon as possible. Ponta Delgada on São Miguel Island was the nearest hospital. We steamed there at twenty knots. The man's appendix was close to bursting. The operation was difficult and the man required continued hospitalization. We left him there for the next Weather Patrol vessel to bring him home.

We returned to our #2 Station just in time to face a *HURRICANE!!* *"We were tossing, rolling from 20-30 degrees. There was a choice mixture of rain and spin-drift driven by a 50 knot wind with seas running 50-60 feet high, confused by a cross swell. In one hour the barometer had dropped over 1 inch down to 28.86 inches. At noon the wind shifted to NNW and reached 80 knots. The seas couldn't increase for their tops were shaved off by the wind. Plenty of green water hit the bridge as we sliced and knifed through the on-coming combers. As the eye of the storm passed over us, we made our way into the Halifax outer harbor where we rode out the remainder of the storm at anchor."*

July 5, 1940. My notes are incomplete and confusing, but we received a message stating that on relief by the *Ingham*, we were off Weather Patrol for awhile. We would go to Norfolk for battle practice and back to Boston for a six-week in-port period of regular

district patrols (one week out, two weeks in). Not another Weather Patrol until November for the *Duane*!

July 26, 1940. Our rejoicing was short-lived. Halfway through the battle practice came this message from headquarters to COMEASTPRACFOR: "DIRECT DUANE PREPARE FOR THREE MONTH SPECIAL EXTENDED DUTY TO DEPART 22 JULY." That is all we had to go on.

Our Captain telephoned headquarters and found out our destination would be Greenland. I call it a **Greenland Visitation**. Our battle practice was cut short. Hectic days followed loading ammo, fuel, dry stores, Arctic clothing, etc. Also a **J2F Duck** single-float seaplane with spare parts, two pilots (Coast Guard Lieutenant Shields, Army Air Corps Captain Lacy), and a Coast Guard Aviation Radioman (Johnny Merada).

Our mission would be diplomatic and exploratory, as the Greenland Patrol would not be officially established for another year.

July 22, 1940, was an unrealistic target date. We did very well to depart on July 28. And on that very day near the end of my 1200-1600 watch, while steaming east just south of Sable Island, in a thin fog, the bow lookout called the bridge reporting something in the water about a mile off our starboard bow. Through binoculars it looked like a lifeboat. I slowed the ship, headed in that direction, and notified the Captain who appeared immediately and took the conn.

It was a lifeboat with twenty men aboard who had survived a convoy attack the night before. We rigged a cargo net over the side for them to scramble aboard. We assigned them Chief's Quarters, and, of course, fed them. I was too junior to be privy to the debriefing, but I know they asked where we were bound. They were told Greenland. Although we had just "saved their lives," they complained bitterly. They wanted to go to St. John's, Newfoundland. Well, that's where we went, as it was on our way and was an interesting port. We stayed two nights. About 200 locals lined the docks to see us off.

Between Newfoundland and our landfall on Greenland's southwest shore, we saw beautiful Northern Lights and our first icebergs. On nights with good visibility and clear skies, the illumination from Northern Lights makes night navigation quite safe. The piloting problem is to gain entrance to the fjords that lead to the villages. The fjords were deep and clean cut by glaciers, many over one hundred fathoms deep, but the debris was pushed and dumped at the entrance—and there was not a single aid to navigation in all of Greenland except for cairns (piles of rocks) that are marked on Icelandic charts.

Greenland had been a colony of Denmark for several hundred years. The larger villages are governed by Danes, accompanied by their families. The Eskimos prefer to be called Greenlanders because they have acquired European blood lines through the years, and look different.

When the Nazis moved into Denmark, the lifeline to Greenland was severed. Our Army and Navy moved immediately into Iceland along with the British, and our Coast Guard moved into Greenland.

Another cutter brought the first U.S. Consular Officer to Greenland slightly ahead of us. We (on the *Duane*) gave the Governor of Greenland full dress honors. (My Academy Class was the last required to purchase frock coat, fore-and-aft hat, epaulets, white gloves, and sword. World War II ended that degree of formality.)

We visited native villages to establish friendships and ascertain the loyalty to the Allied Forces and denial to the Axis. And to establish means of logistical support. Also to find alternate colleges for the Danish students visiting on summer break. The Sears Roebuck catalog was the book everyone wanted. We entertained the Danes with on board movies and American meals, and they treated us to Danish fare in their homes. The Danish ladies were especially proud of their home brew!

To conclude this lengthy Scene, I must describe **Storis** ice. The North Sea freezes solid, but then storms and currents break it into leads and rafts and sets some free to follow ocean currents. Ice floes, called Storis, leave the North Sea drifting southward down the east coast of Greenland to Cape Farewell. It then goes west around the Cape and starts drifting north up the southwest coast. By then, warmer climate and water melts most of it and the floe doesn't normally get above Ivigtut. But this year, the Storis drifted farther north and caught us at anchor. I watched in horror as a big hunk of ice slid down our starboard side going forward and reversed its direction and slid aft catching our starboard propeller. As it left, drifting away, I saw floating on it a one-by-three-foot tip of our starboard propeller.

We were immediately relieved to return to Boston and yard availability. We limped and thumped our way straight into the path of another **hurricane**. We were just south of Halifax, and with our maneuverability hampered by the damaged propeller and the vulnerability of the seaplane on deck, a wise decision was made to duck into Halifax harbor and ride out the storm at anchor. Ahhh, what a comfortable night's sleep!

The storm passed about forty miles west of us and the winds only reached fifty-five knots, but there was over a million dollars in damage around Halifax with yachts washed ashore, fires from power lines down, an apple crop of one-and-a-half million dollars destroyed (largest ever).

When the weather cleared the next morning, there was a sight to see—over three-dozen loaded ships at anchor waiting to form a convoy to Europe. We saw twenty-three stand out to sea. And ten of the fifty four-stack destroyers we were trading to England for Atlantic island bases were still at anchor.

We made Boston on September 21. It was hard to believe that we were not yet at war. Preparations were evident everywhere. On September 28, I was off to **Optical and Fire Control School** at the Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D.C. This was an enjoyable change of pace. I lived at the Theta Chi fraternity house for the four-week course. And that enabled me to visit the Capitol with Congress in session, the Smithsonian Institute museums, and the many famous memorials.

Before that assignment was over, I had orders to the Army Fort Tilden at Rockaway Beach, Long Island. There we would learn more about our machine guns and fire live ammo at towed sleeves!

Life back on the *Duane* wasn't too great. Arming her meant shipyard workers everywhere with their electric drills and welding torches making a mess, reports and paperwork piled up, and on top of it all I had to take written promotion exams given service-wide on a designated day! (In those days, a new officer had to serve for three years as an Ensign and under two or more Commanding Officers, then pass promotion exams to become a Lieutenant Junior Grade.)

The holidays were a lonesome time for me. Being a bachelor with no strings attached led the married watch standers to expect me to take the duty on holidays so they could be with their wives and children...and I usually did.

January 1941 was a quiet month moored in Boston. I managed liberty to New York City where I met my dad, who was on a business trip. We saw many of the tourist sights. I bought a little eight-millimeter movie camera which led me into a long-lasting hobby.

There is nothing like a North Atlantic winter cruise to make one year for inshore duty. Ours came in February with orders to escort the Army troop transport SS *Edmund B. Alexander* with twelve hundred troops from New York to the newly established base at St. John's, Newfoundland. Our coastal waters were now quite safe from U-boats, they having been driven away by our Neutrality Patrols and the effective little aircraft carriers affectionately known as "Jeep Carriers." We had good weather for a change, so it was a pleasant cruise.

Back in Boston, someone couldn't stand to see us idle so they sent us on a two-week district patrol. Mainly, we guarded the fishing fleet on George's Bank and the Grand Banks. I don't recall any calls for help.

I became an orphan while out on patrol. **My father died** of a heart attack in the Portland hotel where he was staying while employed as the Northwest Sales Director for the Pepsi-Cola Company.

On May 7, 1941, I was transferred to the **Coast Guard cutter *North Star***, a veteran of both Arctic and Antarctic waters. Could that mean back to Greenland? Well, "Good bye, *Duane*. Thanks for a GREAT two years!"

P.S. Where is the *Duane* now (2004)? She and the *Bibb* are keeping company in Davy Jones' Locker at the bottom of the sea just off the Florida Keys. They are part of an artificial reef formed to give shelter to fish and recreation for scuba divers.



In full dress uniform with fore-and-aft hat