

ODD JOBS ~ II

COAST GUARD RESERVIST - When Yeoman First Class Ralph Gardner mustered me into my reserve unit on a hot Saturday in June 1959 I had just been advanced to Seaman Apprentice. I was Commander Serle, my unit's Commanding officer, when I checked out of my last paying billet in 1986.

My retirement package is over \$15,000 in 2008 dollars with lots of benefits. The first retirement check was deposited on my sixtieth birthday. The other benefits include great insurance coverage with Tricare for Life (the health insurance is worth a lot) Life Insurance eligibility, and travel savings. The memories are mostly happy and exciting. It was the best part-time job I ever had.

There are lots of stories to tell. Some of them make me blush for I did not always act professionally and even lied to cover up my mistakes. Yet I believe that making mistakes can be a learning experience and perhaps you will learn from my goofs. I trust that the statue of limitations on stupidity has expired.



Circa 1985 - I had this photo taken as a present to Dot, my step-mom. She wanted a Rogues-Gallery of her kids in dress uniforms. I'm not sure if brother Guy had to submit a photo since he didn't get into the armed forces - good for you Guy. We love you all the more.

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DAMAGE CONTROLMAN THIRD CLASS SERLE - COXSWAIN - In the hot, humid summer of 1961 our reserve unit went to Port Canaveral, Florida for annual two week active duty for training together - over a hundred men. Maybe one woman. Maybe not, since women were rare back then.

Our mission was to establish a mock port security zone around Port Canaveral and the large navy ship Observation Island. There weren't nearly enough of us to do the job so we had to do watches four hours on and four hours off.

I was a third-class damage controlman. "Serle," said one of the lieutenants, "You'll be assigned to watches as coxswain in charge of this thirty-foot diesel utility boat we borrowed from the navy." (The Coast Guard did not have many boats available - as I recall there was only one forty footer for the entire Port Canaveral Station.) "You'll have an engineman to run the diesel and a seaman to help you."

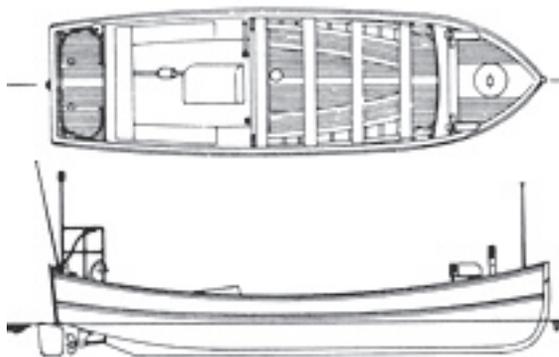
"Yessir," I said. I'd never had much to do with power boats but I figured that if it was hard, they'd give me some training. Last time I was on a boat was pulling one oar. I had no practical experience with power boats but I was about to get some. Our job seemed to be protecting the Observation Island from divers by watching for bubbles. Given the terrorist activities of the recent past it was an important job.

Tired, hot, bored, numb and dumb, night and day, we three motored around the harbor. We'd sleep four hours and then be assigned to security guarding, clean-up, painting duties, or to do our shifts on the boat. Soon Seaman Dos, Engineman Larry Brooks and I ran out of conversation.

Once an hour the radio would crackle and the officer of the watch, comfortably ashore,



Here's a look at the boat which I thought was so cool. My first command. Above is Larry Brooks, engineman third class steering and Seaman Dos looking cool. I think I am at the wheel in the photo below but the resolution is too low to be sure. We had a 25 HP diesel for power.



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would ask for a report. Each time I docked the boat I got more proficient and, if you squinted, you could hardly see the cracks in the bow that my first docking efforts had produced.

One dark night Dos, so named because he was twice the trouble to his mother than his brothers, talked me into going off station and check the harbor mouth. So we motored quietly past the C.G. station and out to sea. I told them we'd only go to the sea buoy and back. We were enjoying the breeze created by the speed of the boat and the quiet motion of the sea. The dark night was hot and humid, as usual.

Some time after turning the boat back towards the port and going a ways through the dark night, I spotted breakers on our port side. "Say Dos. Look over there. Is that surf?"

"No Bill. That's just the breakwater. Get us a little closer and we can see better."

Things did not feel right to me. I thought we shouldn't be seeing breakers because if they were breakers on our left we were going north along the Florida coast and had missed the harbor entrance's rock jetties.

I turned the wheel to get a little closer and immediately experienced the fury of surf on a sandy beach. A wave broke over the starboard side and swept our ten-thousand-pound craft toward shore - out of control.

We all held on and yelled in fear. My entire life flashed before my eyes - particularly my Coast Guard career, such as it was.

I put the throttle on full and turned the wheel to starboard. The boat began to swing into the next breaking wave but it hit us before I could get the bow perpendicular to the waves and we got washed back again.

The engine roared and the boat began to move again and the bow began to point away from the beach. We got pushed back twice more but, at last, the little launch prevailed and freed itself from the beach!

When we turned the boat over to the next crew we just wished them a good night and went to bed. The secret has held - until now.

There's more. Next night, in the boat, solidly on station and doing our jobs, we heard the radio crackle at around two AM. "Base to waterside patrol. Over"

"Patrol to base. Over."

The watch officer, Mr. Gollatcheck, seemed excited. "Patrol there's a 40 foot Coast Guard Patrol Boat washing ashore just south of the inlet. They went to assist a grounded fishing boat



This 40' CG patrol and rescue boat very similar to the one I helped pull off the beach at Port Canaveral.

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and wrapped a line around their props. Respond immediately!”

“Patrol boat aye. We're on our way.”

So not two days later we again went out the cut into the Atlantic. This time we went out under full throttle.

We found a chaotic scene on the beach. An 80' fishing boat was aground. It rose and fell as the waves went underneath and it sounded like a mighty drum being beaten each time it came down and thumped on the bottom. The spume from the waves rose high in the air as the waves broke.

Port Canaveral's 40' patrol boat lit the scene with a search light. It was dead in the water, parallel to the fishing boat and just a few feet away. At any moment the boats would crash together.

I maneuvered to put my stern close to the patrol boat and Dos passed them a line and tied it off to a stern cleat. I applied power in a controlled way so as not to break the cleat or the line and we pulled the bow of the P.B. in the right direction while it did its best to blind us with the search light and confuse us with angry, shouted commands.

The problem was that my 30' single screw utility would not steer with the tension from the tow line aft of our rudder! So after a few feet we were in just about the same situation as we started - except this time, there were three boats in the surf.

I eased tension on the tow line by backing a little and managed to get my bow pointed out. Again I gave it a some throttle and moved the 40 footer again but after a short time I realized that I could never get him off the beach with the towline tied to my stern. Meanwhile the coxswain of the other boat was going crazy shouting curses at fucking reservists who didn't know their asses from...

I had very little time to sort things out. I solved the steering problem by putting my stern to the surf, away from the beach, and towed him away from the scene ass backwards. All the while we endured insults, invective, and his damn searchlight.

Once freed of the danger of the surf I turned and slowly towed him back to the harbor and to the dock frequently leaving slack in the tow line in order to steer my boat.

No one ever said thanks. Good Job. It was just a part of the day's work to put up with negative feelings from the regular Coasties. I was happy not to have been caught in the surf myself and off station to boot.

Some years later we went to Port Canaveral for two weeks as a unit again. This time I was a Second Lieutenant. I planned and controlled the exercise. There was so much stress on me that I began smoking again after having been off the weed for over a year.

Here are some more stories.

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ENSIGN SERLE - First day on the job - Marijuana. 1966 - As a brand new Ensign I screwed up right away! I had the primary duty of Unit Administrative Officer and a number of collateral duties, including supervising the clean-up of the Reserve Center each afternoon.

We used the administrative offices of the Miami Beach Coast Guard base and, when they came to work on Monday mornings, we wanted there to be no trace of our busy weekend activities. We had offices, meeting facilities, bathroom facilities, and classrooms. Miami Beach was a large base with an exchange, galley, and a nice wardroom for officers' dining. The area by the counter at our main entrance was designated "Quarterdeck." We posted a guard there to greet and direct visitors as well as to provide security.

A new man, we'll call Boatswains mate Second Class Manny M., reported aboard the unit on Sunday with his sea bag and orders. When the guard asked him for his orders, there were a couple of chief petty officers conversing nearby. They could hardly miss the fact that when Manny pulled his orders out of his bag, a funny looking cigarette flew out, end over end, and landed at their feet,

"What's this?" they said in unison pointing at the offending roach.

"Don't know chiefs," said Manny. "I never saw it before."

Most of the guys in the unit were cops, firemen, or federal law enforcement officers. Manny was arrested on the spot for possession and he was in deep doo doo with the City of Miami Beach Police, the Dade County Public Safety Office, the DEA, and the Coast Guard. Did I mention that one of the busiest missions of the CG at that time was interdiction of drugs including ship loads of marijuana.

Manny was detained in a back room to be searched and the evidence



This must have been taken shortly after I was promoted to ensign in about 1965. Our reserve unit appears to be marching in a Fourth of July parade down Biscayne Boulevard in downtown Miami.

Bill Alexander, the commanding officer is out front. Jerry Skinner, Harvey Williams, and I follow dutifully. The men in the unit were friends as well as associates and because we were fucking reserves (technically speaking) we weren't transferred geographically. So I worked with some of these guys for over twenty-five years. Bill was a biologist working at the Everglades National Park, Jerry was a high school principal, Harvey was a Prudential Insurance Company salesman, and I worked at the First National bank of Miami. I can't make out anyone in the ranks but many of them were policemen and fireman.

This was our white dress uniform. I sometimes dream that I have been recalled to duty. In my dreams I have a hard time finding all the bits and pieces needed for a proper uniform. I sweat over the shoes, sometimes having to resort to wearing sneakers. Boy would that have been fun. Not! LOL.

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was put in a safe place. It took all day for the authorities to resolve jurisdictional problems, write reports, and confer with the each other. I don't remember who won jurisdiction.

At the end of the day the clean-up was conducted by the men. The chief petty officers did the real supervision. There was a lot of sweeping, dusting, trash removal, toilet scrubbing, mopping, etc. I was in charge but was told to do no work. I was an officer now and had to accomplish things by telling others,

We were all tired from the busy weekend and ready to go home. I was inspecting. As I walked through the Captain's office everything looked good except that there was a beat up hand-rolled cigarette in the Captain's ashtray. No one was near me to do the work, the second hand was ticking toward the final minute of the day - we were about to muster for dismissal. So I just cleaned it up myself. I grabbed a tissue, cleaned the ashtray and popped the little mess into an outgoing garbage bag.

Clean-up complete! Ahhh.

A hue and cry went up just before we were dismissed. The evidence had disappeared from the Captain's office. Everyone was questioned.

I have never smoked a marijuana cigarette. I didn't know what one looked like or how it smelled. When they asked Mr. Serle he said. "No Sir. I didn't see any marijuana, even though I suspected that I was responsible.

Manny was assigned to an inactive status. I never saw or heard about him again.

THE SERVICEWIDE EXAM - Enlisted men are advanced in rate and pay through a competitive exam given at exactly the same time throughout the world. Even if they are serving overseas in different time zones. The exams are kept in safes.

I was assigned to proctor an exam on a weekend when I was usually off. I was invited to go sailing with my friend Viktor Hackl and called the reserve center to see if the exam was on. The guy who answered the phone didn't know anything about it my contact with a District reserve officer gave me the wrong information. So I was sailing and was out of touch when I was needed to open the safe to get the exam out. Boy that was embarrassing.

Ensign Serle had to go to the District Office for a reprimand from hard nosed Captain Sandy Bee. He was a good guy I think and liked by his peers - but he scared me. I thought that my next stop would be dismissal from the service.

LCDR Bill Alexander, my Commanding Officer, was supportive and had me write a letter to Captain Bee to show both remorse and a good attitude for rehabilitation. It worked.

COMMAND - My Coast Guard career prospered. I was following the rules, studying hard. My last paying job was Commanding Officer of the 7th District Office Unit. This was my second

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command assignment.

Our unit's main job was to augment the regular Coast Guard and prepare the members for advancement and promotion. In civilian life my officers and men were mostly federal and local law enforcement officers. Some were pretty senior in their departments. On drill weekends and on active duty for training they worked all over the district, from South Carolina to the Greater Antilles. I kept as few people in my office as possible in order to have men and officers in the field helping and learning.

On weekends we used the District Reserve Office and I had a nice corner office available although I usually just did my job at a desk in the prairie village.

The nice office was the one where Captain Bee had reprimanded me. I often used it to counsel and meet with the men from my unit.

The world had turned.

AND IT CONTINUES TO TURN - I have a page to fill so I'll share some 2011 Vacation Photos. We flew Orlando-Chicago-Rome. Then a week in Italy. The first and last nights were spent in a wonderful hotel in Rome - The Boscolo Autograph by Marriott. Sorry if this sounds like an ad for the hotel. As I mentioned elsewhere in this memoir, Daisy is a helluva shopper - we paid \$80.00 a night (Using our friend Gail Mangione's Marriott reward points) including taxes. The regular rate for this joint is over \$400.00 a night.



We left our heavy luggage at the hotel and took small suitcases to Naples for 5 nights. Naples was intense - we have good and bad memories. We almost got arrested for failing to validate tram tickets but the police got diverted when the tram struck a pedestrian at the train station which was our stop.

A pickpocket almost got my wallet as we boarded the train to Pompeii. The cruise ship Mariner Of The Seas took us to Palma de Majorca, Cartajena, Spain, the Canary, Mederia, and Bahamas Islands. We ended up in Galveston Texas. We flew back to Florida. **Beats working.**

PS - Breakfast was included. Full service and delicious. The hospitality here is superb.



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2011 - The trip was a kalidescope of color, activites, people and places. We sat at a table of eight. Alice and Denis from Canada were our favorite couple. Pompeii was wonderful as were the island stops. The

Tomato Girl was at the Mariner Casino entrance. I didn't lose much and had a lot of fun playing Blackjack.



Isla Gran Canary



Madera Island



Naples Sunset

Naples was delicious. We called our favorite restaurant,



Tony's Place

Gastronomia Medina, on Medina Boulevard, Tony's Place, because we liked Antonio the waiter.

Travel is more challanging as we age. It's harder to tote our suitcases and make proper connections when getting around. We're planning a voyage in spring 2012; cruising to Europe, visiting ashore for a while and then flying home. I'll bring fewer things next time.