

## ODD JOBS ~ I

Much of my life has been spent working. I still dream about work situations that occurred fifty years ago. This is not the best or most important part of who I am, but it has certainly defined a lot of my life. I'm going to list the jobs I've done and tell you something about each of them.

Some of the dates are probably wrong. Also, if you add the time I've had on each job, you might conclude that I'm really one hundred-thirty years old. Not so. I just have had more than one job at a time. Longest lasting were Siegal Medical Group and the Coast Guard which had an eighteen year overlap. When I did five different jobs at the same time, while, living in Bryson City, time warped slightly.

**EGG CANDLER** - At the age of 4 or 5, George Ernst, a friend of my parents, showed me how to candle eggs he'd gathered from his hens. One at a time, in a dimly lit room, the fresh egg is held in front of a candle to see if it has any spots in it. Spotty eggs were set aside and good ones placed in a bowl. Easy, I thought. And I got paid a penny each. Normally George wasn't grouchy and I was surprised that he didn't want to pay me for broken eggs. Go figure. I didn't earn much.

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**NEWSPAPER DELIVERY BOY I** - I was big for my age. At nine years old I got a job delivering the Brooklyn Eagle. My boss told me that I needed a work permit but I didn't think I could get one until I was twelve so ignored the paperwork. I figured that it might go away. He brought the requirement up more than once and still I ignored it until he showed up at P.S. 246 one fine day to take me to the permit office. I refused to leave class. He found out that I was three years short of twelve and had to let me go. Sigh!

**NEWSPAPER DELIVERY BOY II** - Ambitious Billy again went into the newspaper delivery business. I delivered papers for months, learning that there wasn't much money in it. In fact if my customers didn't pay, money came out of my pocket. When I couldn't pay my paper bill, Mom loaned me the money. When my new Christmas bike got stolen I had to quit. Too much stress. Sigh.

**PIN SETTER** - In Farmingdale, when I was 14, my friend Albert Walters told me that I could earn twenty to forty dollars a day setting pins at the Fair Lanes Bowling Alley. He was right. Hard work. Big money. No stress. We had the newest thing there - semi automatic pin setting machines. The pin boy just had to load a rack which would place the pins just right. I did this for about a year until I annoyed the boss and he fired me. Sigh.

**FUNERAL WREATH WORKER** - Oscar the boss was a heavy old man. Finn got me the job. "Pine on picks. Pine on picks," we would chant, sitting in front of a very pleasant fireplace putting a little greenery on large, pre-wired toothpicks. Later these little assemblies would be poked into Styrofoam crosses and circles to be bases for floral arrangements at funerals. After a day of this our fingers would be sore, green, and blistered. When Oscar had enough picks he'd have us paint the inside of the house or do other tasks.

Oscar turned out to be a dirty old man wanting to have sex with me. I quit and told my high school friend Alex that there was a job available at Oscar's place. Later he was a little mad that I hadn't told him about Oscar. Sigh.

**NURSERY WORKER** - I got a job with Jack and Sally Jacoby doing general nursery work. They were growers as well as retailers. I got really strong here shoveling shit and sand into wheelbarrows and moving the materials to where Jack wanted them. I worked for Jacoby for two years doing lots of dirty and hard work for little money. Finn and Johnny worked there too sometimes.

Our pay was a dollar an hour. Jack warned us not to tell Henry how much we got for fear that Henry, who as an adult earning the same thing, might demand more. Jack told us that he

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paid Henry a dollar an hour too. I stayed with this job until I graduated from high school.

I should have gone back to Charlie Havens at the bowling alley and begged forgiveness and another chance.

Setting pins paid much better. I think I got \$.10 a line plus tips. On league nights I'd make \$12.00 or \$15.00 for five hours work. On weekends we'd go in around noon and work 12 or 14 hours and come out with over \$50.00. I felt rich.

**HOT HOUSE WORKER** - My parents moved to Fort Lauderdale Florida in 1955, just after my high school graduation. I stayed behind in New York to attend Hofstra College and lived with my friend Finn Andresen's family for the summer.

I got a summer job at Manker's Roses where Finn's dad was employed. The house they lived in was next door to the greenhouses and we just had to step through the gate in the back yard to get to work. Finn and I both worked there at a variety of menial jobs for a low wage. I wish now that I'd swallowed my pride and begged for my old job as a pin setter at the bowling alley.

I had to quit in September, when school started, and I found a room near the college for \$10.00 a week and became a full-time, dirt-poor, starving student.

**SOD LAYER** - I moved to Florida and lived with Mom and Dad in their tiny rental house in Fort Lauderdale. I slept on the couch and looked for a job.

Every morning I'd put on my blue seersucker suit and walk a few miles to the city center and ask for work at various shops and offices. Nothing doing. I'd come home hot and sweaty and discouraged. Dad found a job for me laying sod for a landscaping contractor.

I worked with a crew of fifteen or so Puerto Ricans. They were small guys but they were dynamos when it came to work. I had to hustle to keep up.

Dad had gone into business with a new friend Sy Rogers. They formed Rogers and Serle Air Conditioning contractors.

Sy was a Southerner and he looked at my skinny 165 pound frame and soft student body and drawled, "Billy. You ain't gonna last two days in that hot sun. They'll wear you out with wheelbarrows and shovels. You got my sympathy boy!"

I knew better. I'd handled plenty of wheelbarrows, shovels, picks, and such in my years in Farmingdale. I was used to hot and cold weather, heavy loads, and outdoor work. So I worked through the blisters and earned a little money. The boss, William Tarpley told me at the end of the summer that I'd done a good job and that he was giving me a twenty-five cent raise to \$1.25 an hour. I wish he's told me earlier in the season so that I could have enjoyed more quarters.

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**LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR** - Peggy Ledbetter worked for dad and lived on the same street. This kindly seventy-year-old neighbor worked for Dad as the office secretary. She mentioned that her grass had died in the back yard and I offered to lay some sod for her.

I bought a load of sod from Mr. Tarpley and borrowed a dump truck from him to transport it to Peggy's backyard. I charged her \$30.00 for the work and lost money.

I had a hard time managing the truck and pretty soon the engine began smoking. I was on busy Broward Boulevard and panicked. I stopped as quickly as I could to look under the hood – seeing no flames I ran into a bar across the street and shouted, “Fire – call the fire department!” The mid-day drunks at the bar weren't much interested and hardly looked at me. There was no phone anyway. Since the truck had quit smoking I continued my trip to Peggy's.

The stress was too much for me. I lost money on the job. The grass soon died and I was never tempted to go back into that line of business again.

**AIR CONDITIONING MECHANIC'S ASSISTANT** - The next summer I worked for Rogers and Serle as a mechanic's helper. I enjoyed the work even though I was usually the one in the hot attic knocking holes in CBS walls. The fiberglass insulation is very itchy on sweaty skin.

I took a little kidding and abuse because I was the owner's son. The other installers would blame me if things went wrong. “Lightfoot tripped on the supply pipes and caused the leak.” “Bigfoot did it again.”

'Twas a good summer. I dated a pretty professor's daughter and had some romantic moments and fun. I'll tell you about Barbara later, if you're good.

**APPLIANCE SALESMAN** - Following the tried-and-true job search method of going door to door, I got work at Kirby-Tuttle Appliances on S.W. First Street in downtown Miami. This was an old business. Tuttle was long gone but Kirby was hanging on and took me on, I think as a charitable favor to a shy young man looking for a break. I wore my suit, studied the literature on the appliances so I could answer shoppers' questions and didn't sell anything! There were no customers walking into the store and I felt like a failure. After a week of this worrisome non-activity, Mr. Tuttle transferred me to other duties.

**APPLIANCE DELIVERY** - I spent most of the next year cleaning up in the Kirby-Tuttle's parts department and storage room upstairs. Not much of a job. But, whenever they sold an appliance I was called on to either do the delivery alone or, more often, help the full-time guy. Art Stevens. This was fun. I did notice that most refrigerators went to second floor apartments in buildings without elevators.

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**PRESS RELEASE COURIER** - In January 1957 I found a better job. I got \$2.50 an hour working for the Publicity/ Public Relations Department of the City of Miami. I worked three hours weekday afternoons, mostly delivering press releases to local newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations. I was given a big woody Buick station wagon for the deliveries and loved every minute of it.

I stayed with this until I enlisted in the Coast Guard in November 1958.

**APARTMENT BUILDING MAINTENANCE** - On Saturdays I had another job. That paid \$10.00 plus lunch. Mrs. Oglesby, the owner of a little apartment complex kept me on for about a year but finally fired me for not showing up. As I remember it, I was too sick to leave the house and we didn't have a telephone. Oh well. I was \$10.00 a week poorer, but I now had Saturdays off!

I was living with Nick Keenan who occupied his mother's two-bedroom house at 241 Beacom Boulevard in Miami. A life-long bachelor, last I heard, he's still living there.

**BUILDING JANITOR** - I was earning the princely sum of \$47.50 a week between the City job and Mrs. Oglesby. As a full time student I was pretty spread out for a fellow with no car. City bus or walk was the solution.

In mid-1958 I was offered a thirty-day gig as a fill-in for the Bayfront Auditorium where the Publicity Department was located. The manager, Connie, was a beautiful blond woman who always had a kind word for me, and she knew that I needed money. So I attended school, worked afternoons at the Publicity Department, and nights at the Bayfront Auditorium. What a nightmare.

My duties included cleaning the offices, public rest rooms, and picking up after events. Event nights were the hardest. It was a pretty big place and they could probably seat five hundred people for a party.

When there was an event I would show up at eleven PM as usual, and be faced with putting away hundreds of folding chairs and scores of heavy folding tables. But first I would have to clear the tables. That was the worst. I would fill up many large garbage cans with the dregs of the parties. Empty glasses and bottles reeking of liquor, hundreds of nasty ash trays, empty plates, plastic spoons, and paper napkins. Five hundred people can make a hell of a mess.

Then there were the bathrooms. Yuck. I did the best I could but by seven o'clock in the morning, when the day crew reported, I was sometimes still scurrying around completing my list.

During the week and on Sundays there were usually no parties or events and things would go much easier. I carried a little gym bag with a blanket and alarm clock to work and would get some sleep in the wee hours of the night. I usually woke before the day workers caught me nap-

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ping. Boy did I need sleep.

Taking the bus to work in those two years would usually involve nodding off while the bus moseyed along. Sometimes I'd sleep through my stop and have to walk back a few blocks.

I paid Nick \$10.00 a week rent. I had to buy cigarettes, food, bus fare, and tuition. I don't ever remember buying clothes. I was always short on tuition until, at last, the University said "No more classes!" until the back and new tuition was paid. There were no student loan programs (not yet invented) or state universities available. So it looked like I would be drafted to go overseas and required to visit the tropics to shoot native people.

As I walked down the streets of downtown Miami one fine day with nothing much on my mind I was assaulted by a sign outside of a military recruiting office:

*Uncle Sam Needs You*  
*Six Months Active Duty for Training Then*  
*Participate in Reserve Training*  
*Join the United States Coast Guard Reserve!*

Uncle Sam was pointing his finger right at me, and in the background was a heroic portrait of a big Coast Guard cutter under way, splitting the waves. I went in and shyly asked about the program, feeling that the Coast Guard would need perfect sight. I'd started wearing glasses when I was about twelve-years old.

To my delight, I was told that I was qualified and could do anything I wanted except fly aircraft. Wow. I could be a seaman just like my dad. I signed up as soon as I could because I was close to my twentieth birthday which would end my eligibility.

**COAST GUARD SEAMAN RECRUIT** - Thus began a job which lasted from November 12, 1958 through the 5th of May 1959. Even now it seems like an adventure. From the beginning when I got off the bus in Cape May and became a Seaman Recruit at the Recruit Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey and they began haranguing us, basic training style, through the day we proudly marched in a parade and graduated from the sixteen-week basic training as Seamen Apprentices.

The highlights of basic training are familiar to many men and women in the United States but I'll mention a few for the uninitiated reader who may wonder



February 1959 - This is my basic training graduation portrait - a gift from the Coast Guard.. The jumper came with two stripes indicating Seaman Apprentice but the second stripe wasn't official until after I reported at my reserve unit after the initial six months were completed.

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about the process. Here's how it went for the Coast Guard at that time:

- Shave all heads.
- Mail all civilian clothing, books, toiletries and possessions home in a box.
- Herd naked and shivering men through a medical exam and give them tetanus shots.
- Form a training company.
- Issue uniforms, a sea bag, a ditty bag, underwear, socks, boots and shoes, shoe shine kits, fart sacks, blankets, towels, tooth brushes, shaving gear, and all the items one needs to be an apprentice seaman. They taught us how to pack every thing we were allowed to have into the sea bag except for a few toiletries which were kept in the ditty bag. All clothing items and towels had to be rolled tightly and uniformly tied with cords in a specified way.
- Meet the company commander and his assistant, squared-away sailors who had backbone: CPO Thompson and Boatswains Mate First Class Smith.
- Line up, march, wait, go to bed, wake up, shit, shower and shave as a unit. Moan about our sore arms where they'd given us the tetnus. Same time every morning.

Basic training was divided into 16 week-long segments. Each week was devoted to classes on a particular subject, and all men who passed the tests with a satisfactory grade moved on. Anybody who failed to pass had to do the week over and would have to move out and join the next training company to repeat the week. Boy were we motivated.

We received practice and training every day in military courtesy, short order drill and physical fitness. We underwent an official uniform inspection and a barracks inspection every week. There were gigs and demerits for dirty floors and lint on uniforms. Training companies with demerits would not see the other side of the gate until graduation. We were permitted to go "ashore" for a four-hour liberty after our fourth week if we had a good record.

The training weeks, as best as I can remember them were:

- Intensive short order drill and military courtesy
- Military history
- Seamanship and nautical nomenclature
- Marlin spike seamanship
- Navigation and piloting
- Weapons
- Small boat operations
- Search and rescue
- Aids to navigation
- Atomic, biological, and chemical, warfare defense
- Water safety
- Galley operations
- Fire fighting

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Many good and interesting things happening to us. I quickly gained thirty pounds as the regular meals and bodybuilding benefits of hard exercise took effect. I was selected for the company's competition rowing team.

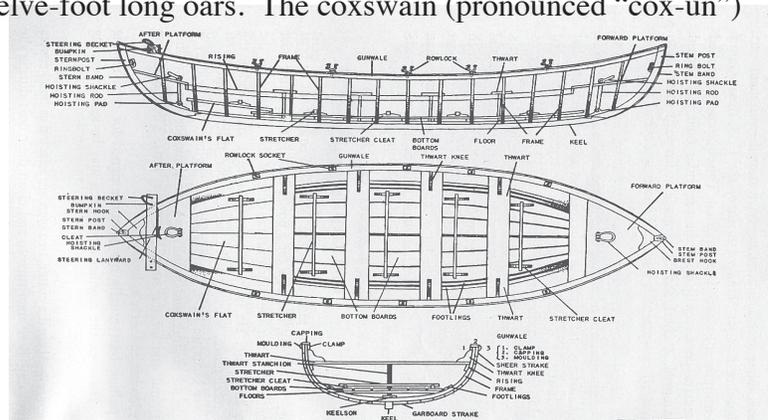
If you have ever seen the movie *Onionhead* with Andy Griffin, you may remember Coast Guard Trainees rowing a fake boat on dry land. Well we did that too before they let us touch a real boat.

Our training boats were twenty-six feet long. They were carvel-planked, Monomoy Whaleboats which were powered by ten twelve-foot long oars. The coxswain (pronounced "cox-un") stood in the stern and steered with a long sweep oar. We all learned to pull oars during our week of small boat operations but the rowing team had to practice every morning before breakfast for the entire sixteen weeks. There was a race every Friday and the best placing companies would get points to help their training companies achieve liberty on Saturdays after the fourth week.

The weather in November and December 1958 was cold and snowy. Some mornings we'd have to shovel snow out of our boats before practice. We practiced speed rowing as well as maneuvering and salutes and such.

The day of our first race was awful. The wind was howling, the snow was blowing and there were cresting waves in the harbor by the Coast Guard Station. "Thank God," we muttered. "We won't have to compete. We can go inside out of this weather."

So we marched down to the



The Monomoy design is an evolution of the classic whaleboat: a double-ended, lightweight, boat to be rowed or sailed under all conditions. In 1934 the U.S. Coast Guard standardized the design, and thousands were built for use as lifeboats and gigs for military ships and commercial vessels. The standard Monomoy is 26'0", 7'0" breadth and has a depth of about 2'4" amidships. There are stations for 10 rowers, a plank across the stern for a steering oar. The boat is simple and Spartan.

A study of whaleboats compiled at the Mystic Seaport Museum in 1978 noted that a similar whaleboat built in 1933 cost \$440 fully equipped with sails and rig, a price double that of boats built 50 years earlier.

I note that the boat in the old picture below is probably 3 feet shorter. It has only eight rowers but it gives an idea of how rowing was done.



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small boat docks believing that we'd have to shovel the snow out of the boats and then be dismissed. We were wrong. The folks in charge treated it just like any other day.

We shoved off and rowed to the starting line with a dozen or so other boats. Al Unger, our coxswain, chosen because he was the smallest man in the company, could hardly stand up. The starting gun barked and we were off in our first race. We sweated despite the cold temperatures and wind. Al was screeching "Stroke. Stroke! STROKE!!!" at an ever increasing cadence, far beyond our abilities to row. It was a mess. Only thing was that all the other boats were in a panic mode too even though they were all more experienced than us. Most were disqualified due to collisions and being turned around backwards. We came in third. Chief Thompson was proud of us. We were good, getting better, and, in future competitions, we usually won.

Toward the end of our sixteen weeks we were awarded a couple of thirty-six hour liberties. One was spent drunk in a motel room in Cape May by me and my room mates. (There were eight men to a squad bay.) The other long liberty was much classier - we rented a bus and the whole company went to New York City. I saw The Music Man with Robert Preston on Broadway standing in back of the theater.

We got paid in cash and I lost my money in the barracks! So I declared that I could not pay my share of the bus and would have to stay behind. The men in my company kindly took up a collection and I had enough to make the trip!

The last two weeks of basic training were work/training weeks. They divided the company into two groups; firemen and food service workers. Half of us lived at the base fire department. The other was assigned to foodservice, preparing meals, under the supervision of the regular mess cooks, and cleaning up the mess hall. Three meals a day meant a long work day and week. Being a fireman seemed an easier calling than dishwasher. We had a week of each then switched roles.

I then spent a month aboard the 325' Coast Guard Cutter Unimak in April 1959. We voyaged to Nassau, Bahamas where we had a fun liberty. There were no casinos at that time we could only drink and go to the beach. We took a glass-bottomed boat trip to Pig Island before they built a bridge and renamed it Paradise Island!

We performed a rescue at sea when two ships collided. Later we endured a real North Atlantic storm with enormous seas crashing over the bow and slamming into the superstructure. Spectacular. When I had bridge duty I found that I didn't have a lot of skill steering the ship. Our wake would have looked like a snake when I had my turn.

I was sick the whole time I was aboard the Unimak and lost fifteen pounds. First I had strep throat and spent a few days in the hospital then I got seasick. I was glad when the time was over.

We off-loaded ourselves in a blizzard in Groton, Connecticut using cargo nets and a 30-

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foot Coast Guard patrol boat. It was freezing cold. Snow and sleet were blowing hard. We were lucky that no one was hurt in the process. Then commenced a boring thirty-day advanced seamanship course.

In the merry month of May, when my six months active duty for training came to an end, I journeyed by train to Miami. I was met there by smiling Carolyn Klepfer and her parents. They stood by the side of the tracks to greet me as there was no platform. They were impressed by the changes wrought in me by my six months of active duty. I was as fit as I had ever been and forty pounds heavier than when they last saw me.

I was happy, broke, and anxious to find a job, get back in school, get into Carolyn's pants, and so forth. Basic training was simpler than real life. Chief Thompson tended to my basic needs for housing, food, and security in boot camp, and others took his place as I moved about the program. Now it was my turn to be in charge of my life. Hah!

I rented a little room on top of an old hotel in Coral Gables for \$10.00 a week. I found a job selling magazines. After a week I found a cottage near 27th Avenue and N.W. 36 Street in Miami for \$75.00 a month. My friend from college Bill Davis agreed to split it with me. I began to participate in Coast Guard Reserve training drills one weekend a month. I got a job.

I carried countless memories away from my Coast Guard experience as well as my copy of *The Bluejackets' Manual*. To finish basic training we read and were supposed to memorize every word of this book.

For the next eight years of my life I would wear white bell-bottom trousers in the summer and blue wool bell bottoms in winter when I attended reserve drills and went on my annual active duty for training. We wore the little round white hat all year. When I became an officer I lost the privilege of wearing bell-bottoms and sailor hats.

**WARNING** - Now, unless you're a glutton for punishment, go to the next chapter now. This last bit may be too boring to bear.



USCGC UNIMAK was a United States Coast Guard cutter from 1949 until she retired in 1988. Originally a Navy sea-plane tender she was loaned to Coast Guard in 1948.

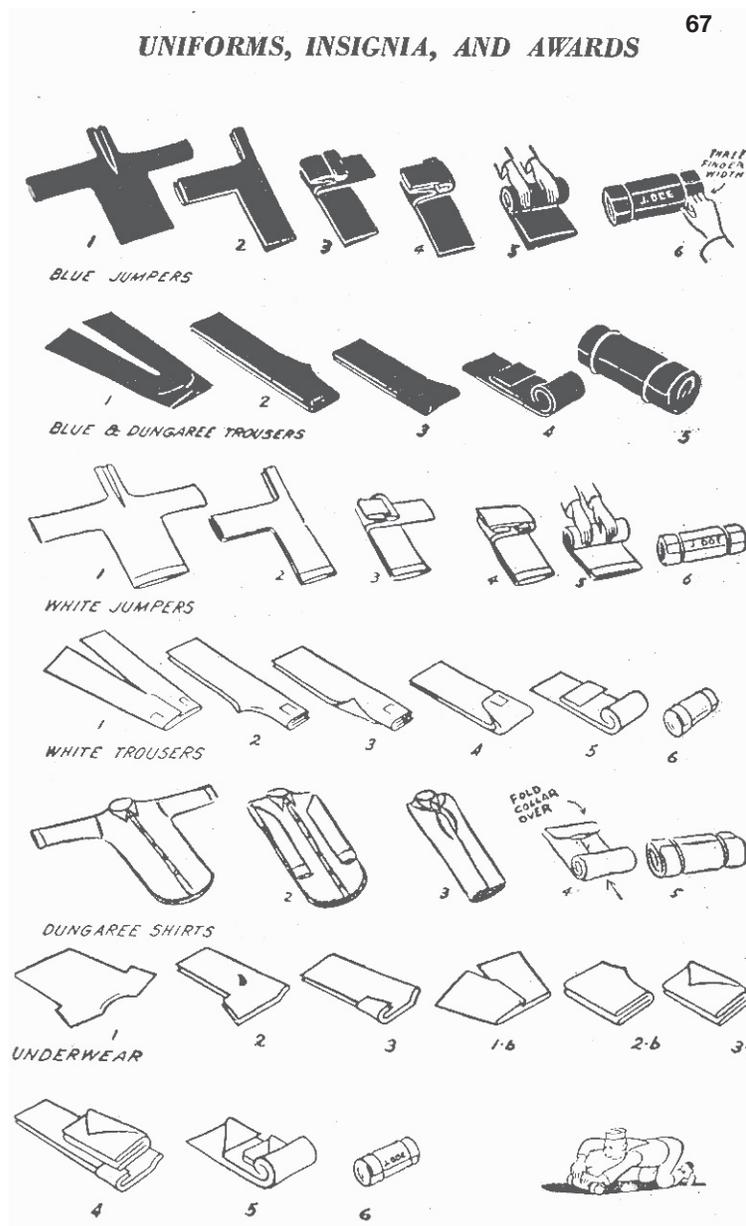
Unimak served in Central America, the Galapagos Islands and the North Atlantic during World War II and in Hawaii, the Aleutian Islands and the North Pacific postwar.

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The *Bluejackets' Manual* is a Navy book first published in 1938. We used the fifteenth edition released in 1957. (The C.G. used a lot of navy hand-me-down materials.)

Some years after I was assigned to a reserve unit I was given the third edition of *The Coastguardsman's Manual*. It was copy written in 1952, 1954, and 1958. It would have been a good thing to have the C.G Manual in basic training even though, at 820, pages it is 173 pages longer than the Navy Manual we used. They must have been out of stock when I was in basic.

The next few pages should be ignored entirely, unless you want to know how we were able to fit everything we owned into a single sea bag.



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GENERAL

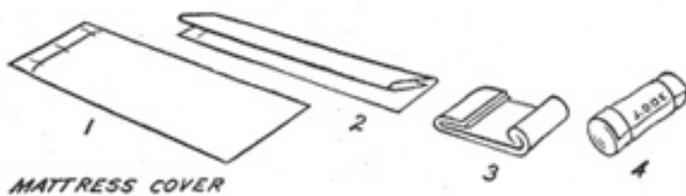
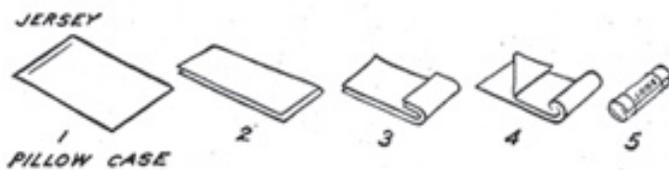
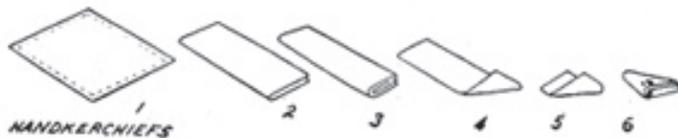
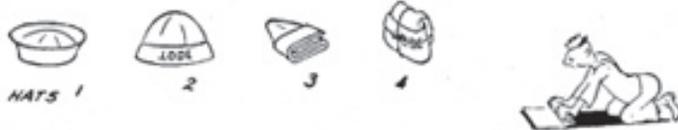
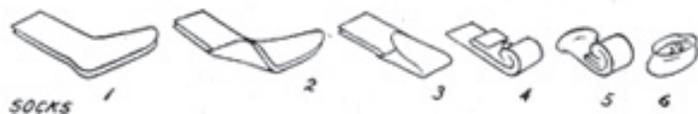
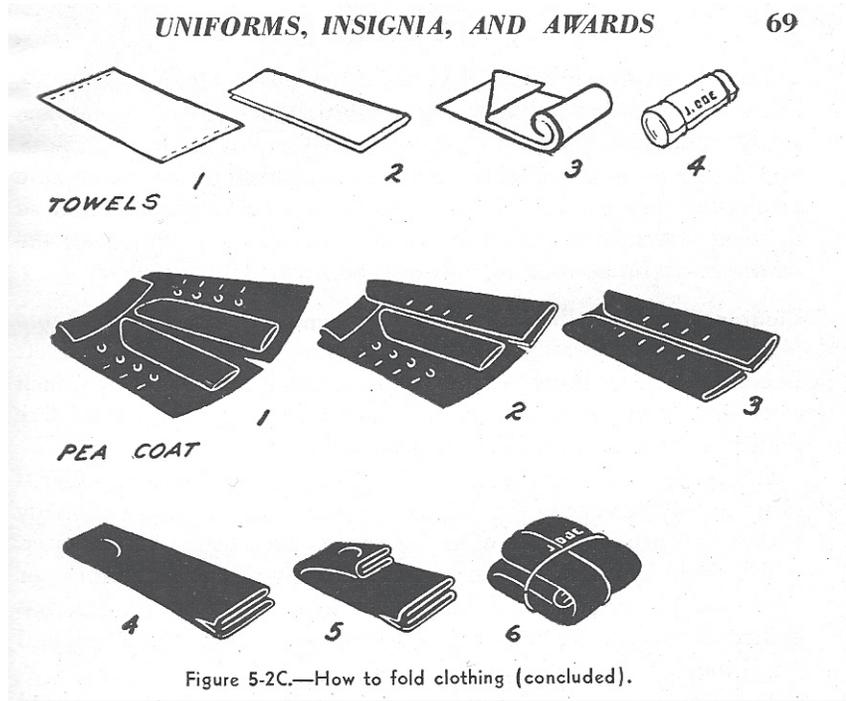


Figure 5-2B.—How to fold clothing (continued).



**TIME OUT!!!!** When I was a lad I never dreamed that I'd travel as much as I have. Daisy and I enabled each other by spending on memories rather than saving for old age travels. Starting in about 1990. I think we were right. Travel gets harder as we age. We've been to Barcelona 6 times since 1992.



TOP RIGHT - Plaza Real from our hotel room in 2005.



RIGHT - Peter Joyce and Daisy Strolling La Rambla.

LEFT - Bill falling in love with a living statue on La Rambla in 2009.



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### BARCELONA

Art, for me, is often better than photography. Ron Roman who helped me bring *Fun Things To Do In The Mountains* to life was a photographer. He once said, "Getting the right photo for your paper will often be impossible. We photographers are not that good. Think about using an artist to provide images sometimes."

The photo on the preceding page was taken from our window. The regal buildings surround the plaza on all sides. You enter through broad tunnel-like openings.

I think he was right. We stayed on the third floor of the building you see here, in an inexpensive hotel. The plaza is Plaza Real, meaning Royal Plaza. I've got many good photos of it but none move me like this piece of art that cost very little on La Rambla.

