

Coast Guard Cutter SPAR's 4-legged furry mascot



Dogs, like many other types of domestic animals, have been a part of our armed forces for many years as companions and mascots. In the Coast Guard, the most famous of these mascots is the mix-breed canine Sinbad, who was adopted by the crew of the 327-foot Secretary-Class Coast Guard Cutter Cambell in 1937.

The presence of dogs is more common at small-boat stations or other land based Coast Guard units, they are not so common now among the Coast Guard cutter fleet but, Lt. Cmdr. Michele Schallip, the commanding officer of the Coast Guard Cutter SPAR, is one of a few Coast Guardsmen who has kept the tradition of sailing with their canine companions and mascots alive.

For the last 13 years, Schallip has had her own mix-breed dog, Magellan, named for the famous Portuguese navigator and sailor of the 16th century, underway and by her side. The rest of the crew refers to her as Maggie

“Having Maggie aboard the SPAR makes for a more 'family' style atmosphere, especially working long hours on the bridge,” said Petty Officer 3rd Class Nicolas Santos, a boatswains mate aboard the Coast Guard Cutter SPAR. “When times get stressful, it's comforting to spend a minute or so playing with her or giving her treats. Even when she's relaxing in the officer's passageway, everyone makes it a point to stop and pet her. She's a member of the crew, and she's treated that way.”

When Maggie was 3-months-old, she began her Coast Guard adventures with Schallip, who was then commanding officer of the Coast Guard Cutter Cobia, an 87-foot patrol boat stationed in Mobile, Ala

During Magellan's time in the Coast Guard she has had the opportunity to travel all over the United States. She has more seetime than most of her shipmates.

“From Mobile, Ala., we went to Juneau, Alaska, when I was at the command center there,” said Schallip. “Then we were in Sitka, Alaska, for two years, where she would come and day work with me aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Maple.”

Magellan has become part of the crew aboard SPAR. She is regarded with a kind of casual familiarity long-time shipmates enjoy.

“In passing, the crew talks to her often and she talks back to them,” said Schallip. “Also they will stop by the bridge to say hello to her.”

Adjusting to life at sea however, hasn’t always been an easy task for Magellan, but she has a bed and a lifejacket in Schallip’s cabin and the run of the decks



“The first question that I always get when people hear that she is getting underway with me is ‘Where does she go to the bathroom?’ and I think that is the biggest adjustment for her,” Schallip said. “The answer to that question is the weather decks, but it took her a while to get used to it. Now, she knows when the engines are rumbling and the crew is taking off the brow, it is time to get underway.”

During the crew’s last Arctic patrol, an anonymous writer aboard the ship surfaced documentation detailing Magellan’s internal monologue and other thoughts about what was going on in the world. They named this document “The Maggie Log.”

“It was kind of cool, because the way it was written is what they thought Magellan was experiencing from her perspective,” said Schallip. “When we were in Nome, there were musk oxen on the beach, and in the Maggie Log they were describing what they thought was going through Maggie’s mind as she was smelling these furry creatures with horns. That was probably one of the coolest crew interactions with having Maggie aboard that I remember.”

From Sinbad to Magellan, Coast Guard dogs have sailed aboard Coast Guard cutters since World War II and the practice has since become tradition. With shipmates like Schallip at the helm of our Coast Guard cutters, the tradition will be around for years to come.