



Chief Boatswain's Mate George Keyes, USCGR(T), 1942, age 26 (Keyes' family photo)

Saga of a “Corsair Fleet” Skipper Chief Boatswain's Mate George B. Keyes, USCGR

**By Captain Bob Desh USCG (Retired), Foundation for Coast Guard History
based on
Oral History, Photos and Information provided by George and John Keyes**

"The Commandant, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury or of the Secretary of the Navy, while the Coast Guard is operating as a part of the Navy, is hereby authorized to enroll as temporary members of the Reserve, for duty under such conditions as he may prescribe, including but not limited to part-time and intermittent active duty with or without pay, and without regard to age, members of the Auxiliary, such officers and members of the crew of any motorboat or yacht placed at the disposal of the Coast Guard, and such men who by reason of their special training and experience are deemed by the Commandant to be qualified for such duty, as are citizens of the United States or of its Territories or possessions, except the Philippine Islands, to define their powers and duties, and to confer upon them, appropriate to their qualifications and experience, the same ranks, grades, and ratings as are provided for the

personnel of the regular Coast Guard Reserve. When performing active duty with pay, as herein authorized, temporary members of the Reserve shall be entitled to receive the pay and allowances of their respective ranks, grades, or ratings, as may be authorized for members of the regular Coast Guard Reserve”

In June of 1942, the United States Congress, at the request of the Coast Guard, amended the recently implemented Coast Guard Auxiliary and Reserve Act to authorize the enrollment of temporary members of the Coast Guard Reserve. This was a bold, necessary change that created a new, unique category of Coast Guardsman—United States Coast Guard Reserve (Temporary). In the parlance of the times, they were simply known as “TRs.”

Originally conceived as an expedient way to militarize the Coast Guard’s civilian Auxiliary and bring hundreds of small craft into the fray, the law would become a triumph in imagination. The flexibility of the legislation allowed the Coast Guard to utilize TRs in a plethora of roles, meeting an extraordinarily diverse array of maritime homeland defense and security demands.



Coastal Picket Force vessels on patrol (Coast Guard photo)

One of earliest, best known, and most dramatic applications of this new authority was the enrollment of rugged offshore sailing yachts, and their equally rugged crews, into the Temporary Reserve as part of the Coastal Picket Force (CPF). Both motor- and sailboats were utilized, but it was the 50- to 100-foot sailing yachts that became the signature vessels of the CPF. These sturdy craft were important assets because of their long cruising ranges, ability to run silently, and their seaworthiness, which was essential for operations in heavy weather far offshore.



Corsair Fleet logo designed by Walt Disney (Coast Guard)

This armada of wooden-hulled, relatively small, lightly-armed sailing vessels quickly became known as “The Corsair Fleet.” Early in the war, they became an important part of the nation’s frontline defense against the deadliest naval force of its time, the Nazi U-boat fleet.

Because of the vessels they sailed and their sometime casual attitude toward military appearance, discipline, and customs, the dedicated volunteer crews of the Corsair Fleet were mockingly known as “Hooligan’s Navy.” They would embrace the moniker with great pride. Their exploits have become legendary in the annals of Coast Guard history.

The Corsair Fleet’s mission was to conduct patrols along the 50-fathom curve of the Atlantic and Gulf seaboard. In some locations, this took the vessels as far as 150 miles out to sea. Patrol stations were assigned utilizing the Army’s Interceptor Command system. This divided the U.S. littoral into 15 nautical-square-mile sectors. The CPF vessels patrolled the assigned grid areas for specific periods of time, no matter the weather. Their orders were to “observe and report the actions and activities of all hostile submarine, surface, and air forces.”

CGR-2543

Chief Boatswain’s Mate George Keyes, USCGR was the skipper of one of these rugged wooden sailing yachts that went to sea off America’s east coast in 1942 to challenge the vaunted German U-boats. Later in life, he would record an oral history of his time in command of the schooner *Mohawk*, known officially during the war simply as *CGR-2543*. Thanks to his son John Keyes, also a Coast Guard veteran, we have an opportunity to live Chief Keyes experiences vicariously through the written word and a wonderful collection of family photos.



CGR 2543 (Schooner *Mohawk*) on Coastal Picket patrol (Keyes photo)

Service with U.S. Coast Guard Coastal Picket Force, 1942 – 1943

Oral History by George Keyes, recorded on April 4, 1988

Transcribed and Edited by John Keyes, October 31, 2020

The text that follows is George Keyes' remembrances recorded in April 1988 and later transcribed and shortened by his son John Keyes in 2020. The transcript has also been gently edited by this author. The transcript is supplemented by photos taken by George Keyes and his crew aboard CGR-2543 (schooner Mohawk) while serving with the Coast Guard Coastal Picket Force during 1942 and 1943. Additional photos and author's notes (in italics) have been added for clarification or amplification of historical details. So, don your sou'wester and enjoy a tale of foul weather, machine guns, ice, cod fishing, shrapnel and young men going to war under sail.

The saga begins...

* * *

Mr. Albert Sterns called me one evening in mid July 1942 and said, “George, I am going to loan *Mohawk* to the U.S. Coast Guard for the duration of the war. I wonder whether you would like to go with her?” I agreed to go, and then he informed me that I would have to round up a crew. I knew that yachts had been used by the Navy during World War I, but in the modern age of 1942 it was incredible that the military had any use for small sailing craft.

The impetus for the loan of *Mohawk* was based on a letter written by Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations on Mar 10, 1942, instructing all naval district commanders to make every effort “to acquire vessels which may be useful for work against submarines, for use as rescue boats, or for use as listening posts in spots where needed...in this connection local knowledge of Coast Guard officers and of officials of yacht clubs should be utilized to the limit.”



Coastal Picket Force vessels (Coast Guard photo)

Mohawk was designed by John Alden of Boston and the hull type was based on the New England Commercial fishing schooners. These vessels were husky, round, full, and had a high sided hull with bowsprit and gaff rig carrying a moderate amount of sail. *Mohawk* was built by Pendleton at Wiscasset, Maine, as were many of Alden's schooners. Her dimensions were 60' on deck, 45'6" water line, 14'5" beam, and 8'9" draft. Accommodations consisted of two pipe

berths in the fore peak, galley on the starboard side forward, and a three cylinder 40 hp gasoline engine in about the center of the vessel. On the port side, opposite the engine, was a two-berth stateroom with bureau and mirror. The main cabin contained single upper and lower berths on each side, with a gimbed dining table in the center of the cabin. On the starboard side aft was the chart table with chronometer and barometer, followed by a hanging locker for oilskins. The owners cabin aft contained two berths with bureau and mirror.

Dudley Wolf was the owner when she sailed in the 1928 race to Spain. Her sail complement consisted of a balloon jib, spinnaker, gaff topsail, flying jib, queen staysail, balloon staysail, raffe, a square sail with bonnet, and, in addition, her working sails. John Parkinson Jr who sailed her recalled: "The myriad of halyards, lifts, braces and outhauls around the foremast formed a cat's cradle that took a smart man to find his way around on a dark night. Of course, there were no spreader lights. All lighting was kerosene. Oh yes, there were two nested dories on deck. It makes one think of Magellan".



Schooner *Mohawk* / CGR-2543 (Keyes photo)

Mohawk was probably purchased by Mr. Stearns in about 1930, she was moored in front of the Stearns home in the Barrington River just below the Barrington Bridge. I sailed on her between about 1933 – 1938 on a number of summer cruises to Long Island, Block Island, and Nantucket. Thornton Stearns and I were the deck hands.

Mohawk appeared to “fit the bill” for Coast Guard use. I had met Fred Mason a few months before and asked him if he was interested in going to sea. Fred was on a summer vacation from Brown University and had the reputation for being a fine racing sailor. Fred signed on.

Our first job was to inspect the vessel to see what work needed to be done. The two of us lowered the topmasts and sent them ashore. We felt that this would reduce the weight aloft as we were in for winter weather ahead. We also had to paint of the white top sides and bright work with Navy grey.

Al “Bud” Eastwood came by in a canoe to see what we were up to; he also joined the crew, and we put him right to work. The word must have gotten around that we were looking for men as the crew filled out quickly, consisting of Art Kingsford, Robert LaRue, Harold Fenton, Earnest Trahan, and Chester Childs.



Mohawk crew (left to right): George Keyes, Bob La Rue, Harold Fenton Art Kingsford, Fred Mason, Al Eastwood

Mr. Stearns and our new crew sailed *Mohawk* to New Bedford where we stayed at the state pier until the Coast Guard made the final inspection for acceptance. As I recall, following acceptance of *Mohawk*, we then went to Boston where we were sworn in to the Coast Guard Reserve (T) temporary on Aug 7, 1942. Each of us was interviewed by Lt John Gardner and assigned ratings. I was rated CBM, Fred Mason BM 1/c, and the remainder of the crew were all rated Seamon 1/c. We were supplied with the necessary clothing, sea bag, blankets etc. then returned to New Bedford.

(Author’s Note: The flexibility of the statutes and policies governing the Coast Guard Reserve (Temporary) allowed for several pay and duty statuses ranging from voluntary part-time intermittent duty without pay to fulltime duty with full military pay. The members of the CPF were initially enrolled in a fulltime with pay status. This policy was rather short lived. They would eventually transition to either a volunteer non-pay status, or for those meeting the requirements, to members of the regular Reserve, serving for the duration of the war.)

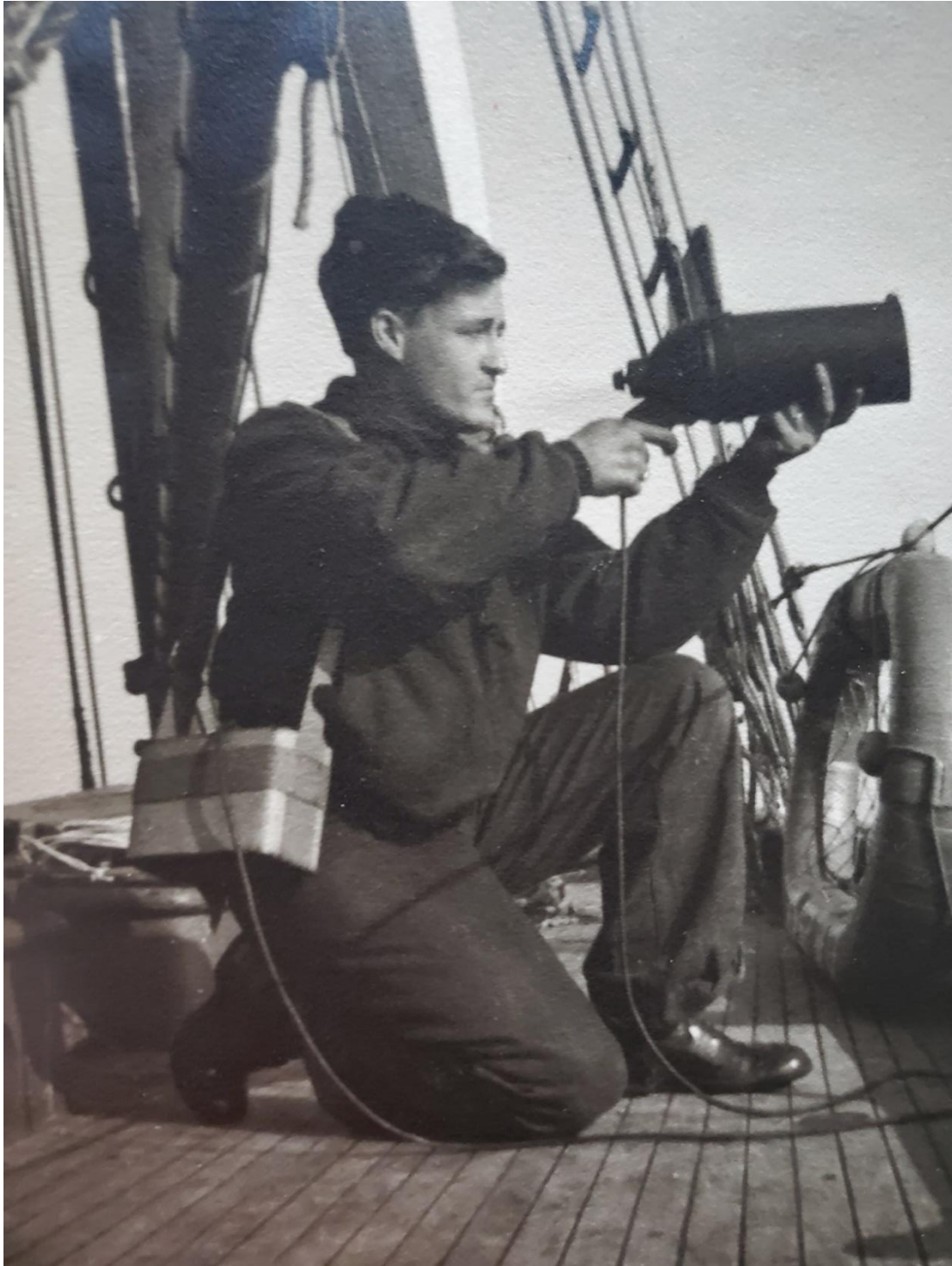


News clipping of crew becoming members of the U.S. Coast Reserve (Temporary) – (Keyes photo)

New Bedford Coast Guard then instructed us to proceed to Fairhaven Shipyard where *Mohawk* was hauled out and copper sheathing applied to the waterline area to protect the hull from ice, and the number *CGR – 2543* painted on each side of the bow. While waiting for the yard work to be completed, we began to train a green crew to hand, reef, steer, pull a dory, learn how to sail, and develop the skills required of a seaman. Morse code for signaling with an ALDIS Lamp or semaphore, as well as the routine ship drills such as abandon ship, man overboard, fire, and general quarters had to be learned by all of us. *Mohawk* became an on-board training ship.

One volunteer we really needed was a cook. No one wanted the job so each Seaman was gradually detailed to cook for one-week periods. The first man to complain about the cooking became the new cook. Morning chow probably consisted of eggs cooked in one form or another, along with plenty of coffee. Sandwiches and sometimes canned soup at noon, and the evening meal of beans or whatever the cook could figure out with the food at hand. Hamburger and hot dogs were probably common fare as would anything else that could be prepared in a frying pan.

In rough weather it was peanut butter sandwiches for all hands. In the early days when the cook got seasick, we often wondered what was in the stew, the pot was certainly a handy receptacle.



Practicing Morse code with ALDIS Signal Lamp (Keyes photo)

Following completion of the yard work at Fairhaven we received orders from New Bedford Coast Guard to report to Nantucket Coast Guard. Up until then we did not have the slightest idea of where we would be based. I thought that we might be sent to Block Island as this would have been the logical base for operations in Rhode Island Sound, especially for the area from Nantucket to Montauk Point, L.I. We departed from Fairhaven, Mass in about mid Aug 1942, sailed through Woods Hole, and anchored off the Steamboat Wharf at Nantucket that afternoon, then reported in at the Brant Point Coast Guard Station. There I received my general orders, which were to conduct anti-submarine, rescue, and observation patrols.



Work on deck on a warm day (Keyes photo)

Nantucket Coast Guard was not prepared to handle vessels and crews that reported in August. We did not have any facilities for food supplies, gear, or housing for transfers or relief crews. Food almost became a major problem; the system was to purchase at the local grocery store, then charge the bill to the Coast Guard. We bought basic supplies and just those items we knew how to cook. Later I was informed by C.G. Boston that I had overspent our ration allotment. I sent a note back stating that I had never been informed concerning the limit that I could spend each month and the food and all now been consumed. I never heard any more of the issue. Those eighteen-year-old boys could stow away large quantities of boiled potatoes and onions.

A ship-to-shore radio was installed, we were handed a 30-cal. Springfield rifle, and sent on patrol. "Each vessel was provided with an Army Interceptor Command grid chart, dividing the ocean for about two to three hundred miles offshore into sections fifteen nautical miles square. A normal operation was defined as patrolling one of these squares night and day, for a definite space of time." We were frequently assigned to area "Irene", SE of Nantucket; this is one we will not forget as we had to get around Nantucket Shoals to arrive at the patrol area. Great Round Shoal, the Rose & Crown and others had less water over them at low tide than the 8' 9" draft of Mohawk. During the early months we would run a one-week patrol, stand watch and watch for four hours duration, return to Steamboat Wharf at Nantucket, the crew would head for the Nantucket Fire Station to take showers, we would resupply with food, water, and fuel, pick up the mail, and head back out again the same day. If we were lucky the weather might turn bad and we would anchor in the Sound until it cleared.



Model 1903 Springfield Rifle (National Park Service History Section photo)



Practicing with deck-mounted 30-caliber Browning machine gun (Keyes photo)

During the month of September, 1942 the Coast Guard decided to provide us with more small arms. A deck-mounted, air-cooled, 30-cal Browning machine gun was installed just abaft the starboard shrouds; they also provided a 30-cal Browning Automatic rifle, 45-cal Thompson submachine gun and a 38-cal pistol which then became our total armament. Learning to fire, strip and clean these small arms became an interesting project as none of us had ever had any instructions in the use of these weapons. Self training became important.



Chief Keyes inspecting ammunition feed and crew loading ammunition for machine gun (Keyes photos)

During the fall of 1942 the Coast Guard took over a small hotel near the Steamboat Wharf that became headquarters for the Coastal Picket group. Relief crews and transfers now had a place to stay, take showers, and have meals in a mess hall. A Coast Guard Commissary was also set up so that we could do away with the cumbersome system previously used that entailed a lot of paperwork for me. Ensign Crosley became our Commanding Officer, and later Lt John Gardner became our Commanding Officer with Ensign Crosley as Executive Officer. Both were fine officers who understood how to handle men and solve the problems of the expanding fleet of patrol craft.

The month of October 1942 was a quiet one for us as we had so much fog that we seldom got out of Nantucket Sound. It was almost continuous fog to a point where you could barely see the end of the schooner. Our only navigation tool in the fog was the old-fashioned lead line.

Mohawk did not have any heat except for the coal-fired Shipmate stove so the only warm spot was in the galley. When the weather really got cold, we had frost under the deck in the after cabin. We often turned in to our bunks "all standing", that is, with all our clothes on and just removing our sea boots. Finally, the Coast Guard sent us to Falmouth MA to have a "dog house" built over the wheel to protect the helmsman, and they also installed a hot-water system with radiators which was heated by a small "bucket a day" furnace placed in the main cabin. It was the duty of the watch to keep the coal fires going in both the galley and main cabin. At that time, we had a new suit of sails as we had to raise the main boom to clear the "dog house".

Ladies of Barrington RI Red Cross kitted long white woolen stockings that were sent to us in the fall of 1942 for all of the crew. Wearing those stockings with our sea boots kept our feet warm for many months. The stockings were highly prized, and I doubt if we ever thanked those ladies. We now thank you, 46 years too late!

On Dec 14, 1942 we were called in from a patrol and instructed to report to the dispensary of our base, which was then in a hotel in Nantucket. We were given shots, took a test for color blindness, and told we were now in the Reserve. When I was discharged in Boston on Oct 10 1945, I noticed that my enlistment date was Dec 14 1943 and was told that the time spent in the Reserve (T) was not considered to be military duty and did not count as time in the Coast Guard Reserve.

(Author's Note: Personnel Bulletin No. 104-42 issued by Coast Guard Headquarters on October 29, 1942, ordered the reclassification or disenrollment of temporary members of the Coast Guard Reserve serving fulltime with military pay, to be implemented not later than November 30, 1942. The vast majority of personnel of the Coastal Picket Force were in this category. The date was later extended until December 15, 1942. They were offered the option of remaining in the Temporary Reserve serving full or part-time without military pay, joining the regular Reserve if physically qualified, or be separated from the Coast Guard. A good percentage, including the crew of Mohawk, transitioned to the regular Reserve. Others shifted to a voluntary non-pay status in different duties assigned the Temporary Reserve. After December 15, 1942, the Coast Picket Force was staffed by regular and regular Reserve personnel. As of May of 1942, all personnel, both officer and enlisted, entered the Coast Guard as Reservists. The only exceptions were those on active duty prior to that date in a regular status and those graduating from the Coast Guard Academy. Of the personnel serving in the Coast Guard during WWII, more than 90% were Reservists. Additionally, over the course of the war approximately 120,000 personnel served in various capacities in the Temporary Reserve (TR). Most as volunteers serving part-time without pay. A significant number, but not all, entered the TR through the Coast Guard Auxiliary. The TR is often confused with the Auxiliary. TRs held full military status while on duty, and were vested with all the rights, privileges, and powers of a regular member of the Coast Guard Reserve of the same rank or rating. They were subject to all laws and regulations and could face court-martial for misconduct or serious violation.

This quote from an editorial published in the June 20, 1945 edition of the "Boston Traveler" newspaper captures the dedication of the TRs: "In fair weather or foul, these guardians of the waterfront maintained their watch, relieving regular Coast Guardsmen for active duty. They were motivated by a high sense of service to their country, receiving only their uniform and subsistence while on duty but no pay. They went about their work quietly but efficiently and they merit the highest tribute. They performed their duty well!" The story of the Temporary Reserve is a fascinating chapter in Coast Guard history.)

January 1943 brought on some very cold weather. The complete Coastal Picket fleet was frozen in the harbor at Nantucket along with the New Bedford steamer. The steamer finally broke out and we all followed. At one point the ice almost enclosed Nantucket Sound from Great Point, Nantucket to Monomoy Point, Cape Cod.



Mohawk / CGR-2543 in the ice (Keyes photo)

We attempted to go through a large pan of ice only to lose headway and have the ice close in behind us. We dropped the starboard anchor on the ice hoping that we might crack it enough so that we could break the ice away from the hull. The anchor bounced when it hit the ice, hardly a dent!

That night Stan Nagel was doubled up in his bunk with what I thought might be appendicitis. We were still stuck in the ice the next day and finally another M/V patrol boat came along and broke us out. We headed for the Vineyard, where we went into Edgartown, called an ambulance, and sent Stan to the hospital. I later learned that Stan had a ruptured appendix. He recovered but was not sent back to the schooner.

In about February 1943 we were ordered to Newport RI. We went from Nantucket to Cuttyhunk, where we stayed for the night at the CG Station, then headed for Newport the following morning. Off Newport anti-aircraft batteries were firing at targets towed by planes. That was fine except that shrapnel was falling all around us. We donned helmets to protect our head. We passed through the mine field and submarine nets off Castle Hill, then on to Newport Shipyard where we hauled out to have the bottom painted.

We performed only one rescue while I was aboard. One black night while off Cape Pogue we noticed lights ahead. We went to investigate and found a dragger with her deck lights on, illuminating the American Flag hoisted upside down. She was disabled, so we put a hawser aboard and towed her into Edgartown. On another occasion a flyer bailed out over the shoals, but another boat was closer and he was quickly rescued.

I believe it was in the early spring of 1943 that Jim Hall of Avondale RI transferred aboard from a Nantucket shore station by Lt John Gardner. Jim had sailed in schooners before and it turned out that he was a first-class sailor.

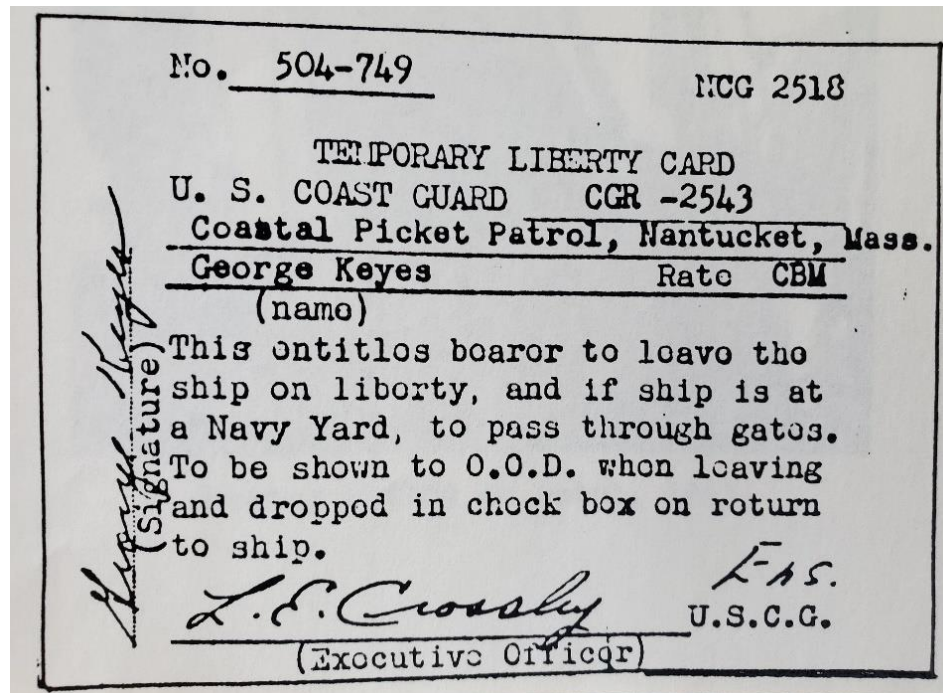


Mohawk under sail (Keyes photo)



Crew on the bowsprit (Keyes photo)

Heading back for Nantucket Harbor, we had a good breeze and a choppy sea. The *Mohawk* was burying her bowsprit to a point where it was time to reduce sail. I was debating whether to run off before the wind and take in sail when Jim Hall said, "I'll furl the jib". He went to the end of the bowsprit, we lowered the jib, and Jim went out of sight as the schooner dove. Up he came, streaming that ice cold water, and furled the jib. The schooner rode a lot easier without the extra headsail.



A coveted Liberty Card (Keyes photo)

During the spring of 1943 we were able to have more time ashore. Liberty and leave were granted for short periods of time for all of the crew. I was married in June 1943 to Mary Richards on a three-day pass to Andover MA. When we returned to Nantucket my liberty was extended so that I had a week ashore.

On one trip, while returning from Pollock Rip, we noticed boats trolling ahead for pollock. We put out feather rigs and started to bring in fish. We were due in at Nantucket that day so we took the load of fish, some perhaps 3' in length, and Joe Tracy, our cook, traded them in at the CG Commissary for other supplies. That night we ate at the CG mess and were disgusted to find that we had to eat our own fish.



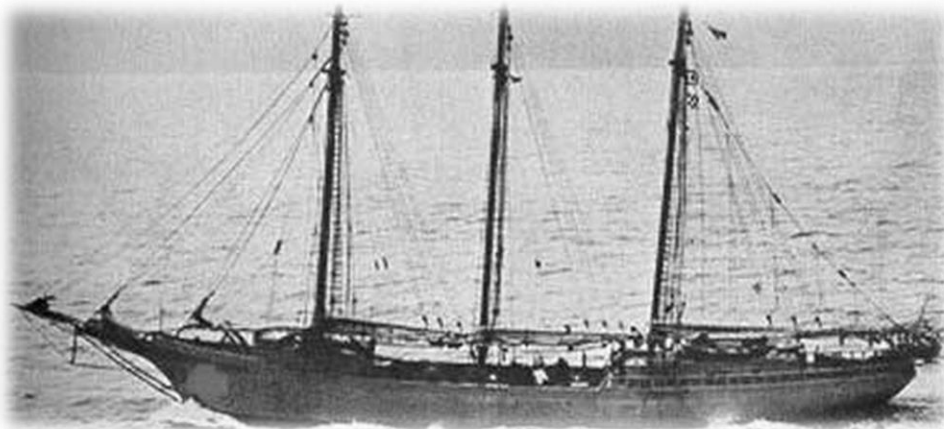
Pollock (Getty Images; Copyright: PicturePartners)

During the summer of 1943 there were many changes in the crew. Fred Mason was transferred to an 83-footer at Sandy Hook NJ, Art Kingsford went to the Coast Guard Academy, and Harold Fenton went to the USS *Cavalier*.



Coast Guard 83-foot patrol boat CG-83306 (Coast Guard photo)

(Author's Note: "83-footer" is the nomenclature commonly used by Coast Guard personnel to refer to the famous wooden-hulled 83-foot patrol boats, built by Wheeler Shipyard in Brooklyn, New York, during WWII. Designed for anti-submarine warfare and search & rescue, they would play a crucial role at D-Day when sixty of the 83-foot cutters were sent to England to serve as rescue craft off each of the landing beaches during the Invasion of Normandy. Officially called Rescue Flotilla One (ResFloOne), the cutters were nicknamed the "Matchbox Fleet" because their wood construction and large gasoline tanks made them potential tinderboxes.)



"Q-ship" USS *Irene Forsythe* (IX-93) – (Naval History and Heritage Command photo)

While returning to Nantucket in September, 1943 we noticed a schooner anchored off Great Point Nantucket. I checked her with the binoculars and noticed that she was not a working coaster as she was too clean and orderly. I went aloft and looked down on her deck and there was a 4-inch gun amidships. It was the schooner, *Irene Forsythe*.

Admiral Morison report in 1947, “The last US mystery ship to be fitted out was the three masted schooner Irene Forsyte, 156 ft long, built in Nova Scotia in 1920 and purchased for a moderate sum by the Navy. Commander Gerald Thompson supervised her conversion, and she was armed with one 4-inch gun, three automatic weapons, small arms, radar, mouse trip and sonar. She sailed from New London in late Sep 1943 in the character of an armed schooner, with Lt Commander Richard Parmenter, USNR as skipper and a volunteer Navy crew. When lying at anchor in Great Bight off Nantucket, the crew performed the entire work of concealing armament and altering both rig and profile so that she looked exactly like a certain fishing schooner of neutral registry. Thus, Irene had a very good chance of achieving Q-ship dream, complete surprise. In a heavy gale east of Bermuda her seams opened up and she narrowly escaped sinking by putting her into Hamilton Sound. CINCLANT ordered her back to the States for decommissioning.

(Author’s note: Purchased in November, 1942, Irene Forsyte was given the naval designation IX-93. Fitted with new engines, quick-firing armament, as well as concealed radar and sonar equipment, the auxiliary was commissioned August 23 1943. Based on the experience of Q-ships during WWI, it was hoped she could lure German submarines into close quarters on the surface and sink them with gunfire.)

Admiral Samuel E Morison reported, “the Coastal Picket became an excellent training school in fundamental seamanship for the Coast Guard. Hundreds of Coastal Picket ‘graduates’ were detached for duty in regular cutters, transports and landing craft, to great profit of the service. The undesigned byproduct of the patrol justified the effort and expense”. He also reported the Coastal Pickets ceased to be on Oct 1, 1943.

In November, I was transferred to the Coast Guard Detachment at the Marine Base, Camp LeJeune, NC and then to the USS *Cavalier*.



Coast Guard manned attack transport USS *Cavalier* (APA-37) – (Navy photo)



Coast Guard Ensign and Commission Pennant flown on Mohawk (Keyes photo)

(Author's note: The Coast Guard Ensign -- The initial job of the first revenue cutters was to guarantee that the maritime public was not evading taxes. Import taxes were the lifeblood of the new nation. Smuggling had become a patriotic duty during the revolution.

If the new nation under the Constitution were to survive, this activity needed to be stopped. Piracy also remained a significant issue for the merchant fleet.

It quickly became evident that the cutters needed some symbol of identification and authority when they came alongside a merchant ship during an age of pirates and privateers and ordered it to heave to. The solution was to create a unique ensign (flag) flown only by revenue cutters.

Congress, in the Act of March 2, 1799, provided that cutters and boats employed in the service of the revenue should be distinguished from other vessels by a unique ensign and pennant. On August 1, 1799, Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Wolcott, issued an order announcing that in pursuance of authority from the President, the distinguishing ensign and pennant would consist of, "16 perpendicular stripes, alternate red and white, the union of the ensign to be the arms of the United States in a dark blue on a white field."

The ensign was poignant in its historical detail. In the canton of the flag, there are 13 stars, 13 leaves to the olive branch, 13 arrows and 13 bars to the shield. All corresponding to the number of states constituting the union at the time the nation was established. The 16 vertical stripes in the body are symbolic of the number of States composing the Union when this ensign was officially adopted. The seal of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service was later added to the field of stripes.

When the Revenue Cutter Service and the Life-Saving Service combined to become known as the United States Coast Guard in 1915, the seal on the ensign was changed to that of the Coast Guard.

Cutters fly the U.S. flag as their naval ensign and the Coast Guard ensign as the Service's distinctive flag signifying its maritime law enforcement authority.

The commission pennant was created at the same time as the ensign in 1799. The pennant is flown from the top of the main mast and further distinguishes the ship as a U.S. naval vessel.

As it was intended in 1799, the ensign is displayed as a mark of authority for boardings, examinations and seizures of vessels for the purpose of enforcing the laws of the United States. The ensign is never carried as a parade or ceremony standard. The Coast Guard is the only branch of the United States armed forces to have two official flags, the Coast Guard standard (its service flag) and the Coast Guard ensign. It is a tremendous point of pride for all who serve.

It has become a tradition for the Commanding Officer or Officer in Charge of a cutter to be presented the ensign and commission pennant that flew over the vessel during his/her time in command.)

Albert T. Stearns' auxiliary schooner Mohawk has been sold to Fred Dion, who operates a yard at Salem, Mass., and who came to East Greenwich with a crew, bent Mohawk's sails and got her under way for her new home. For several years, Mohawk has been the largest sailing yacht in the Barrington Yacht Club fleet. She is a rather famous vessel, built in 1928 by Pendleton at Wiscasset, Me., from John Alden's design, for Dudley F. Wolfe. She was one of the five smaller schooners that raced from the Ambrose Channel Lightship to Santanda, Spain, in her first season, finishing in second place but losing it to a smaller boat, then went to England and sailed in the Fastnet race, according to deep-water racing men, the toughest of all the ocean races, where she again finished second and again lost the place to a smaller boat on corrected time.

* * *

She was one of the first privately-owned yachts turned over to the coast guard in 1942 when the coast guard called for boats and men for service in the off-shore patrol. She is 60 feet, 4 inches overall, 46 on the waterline, 14½ beam, and draws 8 feet and 9 inches.

News clipping on sale of Mohawk (Keyes photo)

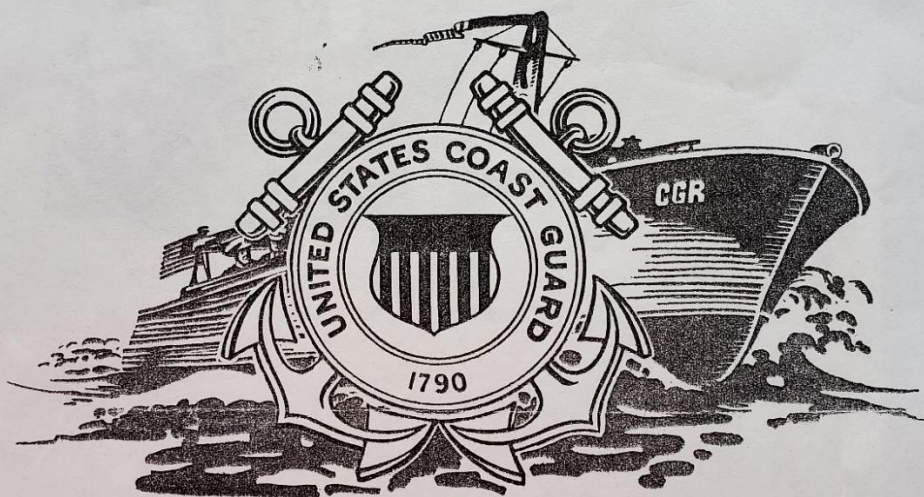
On Nov. 15, 1944, Jeff Davis of the Providence Journal, reported that the *Mohawk* had been sold. While visiting Fred Mason in the 1950's, Fred mentioned that the Mohawk had been converted to a ketch and, while on a moonlight sail out of Marblehead, she hit a ledge and sank.

United States Coast Guard

*Presents this Certificate of Honorable Service
to the*

Mohawk

In Recognition of Her Active Participation



In the
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
During World War II

J. F. Farley
Commandant

Certificate presented to the owners of vessels enrolled for temporary service with the Coast Guard Reserve

(Keyes photo)

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The saga of CGR-2543 and a fascinating chapter in Coast Guard history comes to an end...

This concludes the transcript of Chief Keyes' extraordinary oral history of his time as the Officer in Charge of *Mohawk* / CG-2543, but his Coast Guard career did not end there. As he noted, he departed CG-2543 in November of 1943 for duty aboard USS *Cavalier* (APA-37), one of the many Coast Guard-manned attack transports. The primary mission of these vessels was to carry troops to points just off the beaches where amphibious assaults were being conducted. They also carried the small landing craft and crews that transported the troops to the beaches and into the fray. In every landing, the APAs and their small craft were exposed to attack by enemy surface, submarine, and air forces. *Cavalier* participated in numerous island assault as U.S. Forces fought their way across the Pacific, including the invasions of Saipan, Tinian, and Leyte.



USS *Cavalier* standing off the coast of Saipan in June 1944 while her boats transport troops to the beach (CG photo)



Naval Amphibious Forces shoulder patch worn by assault forces, including the Coast Guard (Navy & AP photos)

Wounded! – Chief Keyes was wounded in action on January 9, 1945 during the assault on White Beach, Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippines.

Feb. 6, 1945
THE GAZETTE, WARREN, R. I.

WAS NICKED ON BEACH

1a. Way George B. Keyes, C. B. M. of U. S. C. G. Writes to Mother in Barrington of Wound Received While in Action in Pacific Area Jan. 8

A letter received by Mrs. Charles B. Keyes of Thomas Street, Barrington, from her son, George Bacon Keyes, C. B. M. of the U. S. Coast Guard, who has been in the Hawaiian Islands, on Friday, Feb. 2, states that he was nicked on a beach in Philippines landing Jan. 8, but was now on hospital ship receiving excellent care, that the food was fairly good and that he was up and about.

A letter written to his wife by Lt. John Small of Provincetown, Mass., stated he had visited her husband again and that George was quite able to do for himself now, was in good spirits and doing well. Lt. Small was on the same ship as Chief Keyes.

Mrs. Keyes, his wife, who before her marriage in June of 1943 was Miss Marguerite Richards of Andover, Mass., where she is with her parents for the duration, was in Barrington over the weekend, the guest of her mother-in-law on Thomas street.

Chief Keyes, who is 29 years of age, is a graduate of Peck high and of Mechanics Institute of Rochester, N. Y.

He enlisted in the U. S. Coast Guard Reserves (T) in August, 1942 as Chief of the Mohawk, owned by Albert T. Stearns of Barrington and turned over to the Coast Guard.

The Mohawk was manned by a crew of eight, mostly Barrington boys. He was later transferred to the I. S. C. G. and sent to Camp LeJeune as a member of the Coast Guard Detachment in November, 1943. He shipped overseas in September of the past year.

Harold Fenton of West Barrington, a former member of the Mohawk crew, is on the same ship with Chief Keyes.

The following account of these two young men is told in a letter received by The Gazette regarding the Luzon Beach party.

A dangerous day of hard work on a fresh beachhead continually whipped by Jap mortar fire was described by Chief Boatswain's Mate George B. Keyes, of 20 Thomas Street, Barrington, Rhode Island, and the other Coast Guardsmen in the beach party of this attack transport.

Reaching the Luzon shore in an early wave of Coast Guard landing boats through heavy shelling, Chief Keyes and his mates quickly got their smooth-running beach team into action—giving first aid to casualties in a hastily set up sick bay, carrying stretcher cases to outgoing boats, unloading mountains of Army supplies and maintaining short-wave radio communication with ships and control craft in Lingayen gulf.

"The work was tough enough all by itself," the Coast Guardsmen agreed, "but with those mortar shells cracking down at irregular intervals and in unexpected places, we really had a hot time. On that beach a man's best friend was his foxhole."

Article reporting on Chief Keyes being wounded (Keyes photo)

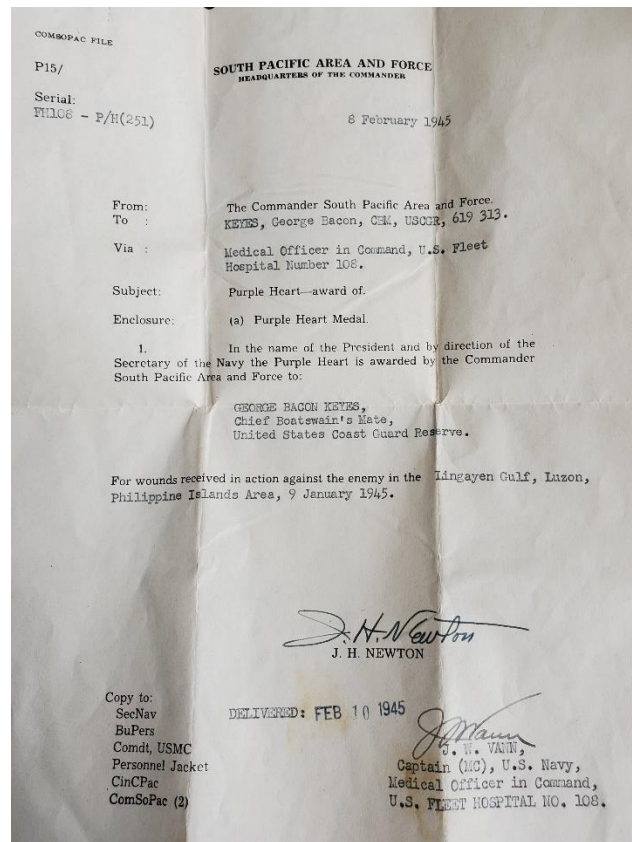
Quoting from the article – “Reaching the Luzon shore in an early wave of Coast Guard landing boats through heavy shelling, Chief Keyes and his mates quickly got their smooth-running beach team into action—giving first aid to casualties in a hastily set up sick bay, carrying stretcher cases to outgoing boats, unloading mountains of Army supplies and maintain shortwave radio communication with ships and control craft in Lingayen gulf. ‘The work was tough enough all by itself,’ The Coast Guardsmen agreed, ‘but with those mortar shells cracking down at irregular intervals and in unexpected places we really had a hot time. On that beach a man’s best friend was his foxhole.’”

After Chief Keyes was transferred from the hospital ship to a naval hospital in California, his young wife, Mary, took a train from Massachusetts to California to be with him. It took her three long days to get there. By happenstance, she arrived at the naval hospital just as Chief Keyes was walking out the front door.



CPO and Mrs. Keyes in Long Beach, California, 1945 (Keyes photo)

CPO Keyes received the Purple Heart Medal “For wounds received in action against the enemy.”



Purple Heart Medal Awarded to BMC Keyes “For wounds received in action against the enemy...” (Keyes photo)

Chief Boatswain’s Mate George B. Keyes, USCGR recovered from his wounds, finishing out his Coast Guard service stateside. He was honorably discharged on October 10, 1945 in Boston Massachusetts.

George also kept track of the service of his former crewmates on *Mohawk*. Harold Fenton served with him on USS *Cavalier*. Fred Mason served aboard an 83-foot patrol boat out of Sandy Hook, New Jersey. He and his vessel were part of the famous Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla One (ResFloOne) during the invasion of France on D-Day. Chester Childs served on a Coast Guard buoy tender in New England. Al Eastwood was assigned to a Coast Guard picket boat out of Martha’s Vineyard and later attended Chemical Warfare School, becoming an instructor at Edgewood Arsenal. Art Kingsford attended Coast Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS) in New London, Connecticut, on the campus of the Coast Guard Academy and was commissioned an Ensign. He served aboard a Coast Guard-manned Army supply ship in the Pacific. Bob LaRue served in the First Naval District (New England).

George Keyes enjoyed a rich, full life after his WWII Coast Guard Service. He maintained a passion for the sea and served with the U.S. Power Squadron. He also developed a strong interest in history, serving as a volunteer with several local historical societies. After retiring as a Photographic Engineer in 1973 and moving to Florida, he helped establish the North Indian River County Library and the Sebastian Area Historical Society. George passed away on May 17, 2013 at the age of 97.



BMC Keyes' Garrison Cover (Hat) with Chief Petty Officer cap device and WWII Campaign Medals (Keyes Photo)



Primary Sources

Obviously, the heart and soul of this paper is the oral history of Chief Boatswain's Mate George B. Keyes' service aboard the schooner *Mohawk* / CGR-2543 during WWII. I am eternally grateful to his son John Keyes for sharing his dad's original recording as well as an edited transcript and a host of family photos that make the story come to life. John is also a Coast Guard veteran and served on cutters *Basswood* (WLB-388) in the Western Pacific and *Vigilant* (WMEC-617) in the Atlantic and Caribbean Sea. In addition to being a proud son, as a Coastie John fully understands the extraordinary value of his father's story and the importance of its preservation in truly understanding the unique, valiant service and devotion to duty of the sailors of the United States Coast Guard Coastal Picket Force. Thank you, John!

Other Sources

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