

(Vince!)

Barbour, Alphonzo (502)

People

mediately translated into 45 languages for rebroadcast.

The cutter left Washington, D.C., two days later and arrived in Rhodes Aug. 22.

Raye said it was difficult to figure out the different languages at first.

The cutter would receive broadcasts in Tartan, Turkish, Arabic, Armenian, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian and Bulgarian, in addition to other languages, and try to match up what they were hearing with printed information.

"About the time you got it going, a Russian jammer was on the transmission," he said.

Raye left the service after eight years, three of them on active duty. He remained in the electronics field and now works as a broadcast engineer for KSHB, a Fox affiliate in Kansas City, Mo.

The cutter left Rhodes in July 1964 and sailed to Yorktown, Va., where it was decommissioned and converted to a freighter used to train reserve units.

In the early 1970s, the vessel was again decommissioned and sent to the dead-ship fleet, where it remained until it was scrapped.

Three crewmen from the Yorktown area were at the reunion. BMCN Bill Smitley, an instructor at BM "A" school at Reserve Training Center Yorktown joined former quartermasters Sam Dalton and Richard Knoepfler.

CAPT Oscar C. Wev, the *Courier's* first commanding officer, hand-picked the cutter's first crew.

"I was the daddy of the ship," he said. "I put it together."

Personally interviewing each man selected for the pre-commissioning crew, he decided who went and who stayed.

At the reunion, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, R. Jay Lloyd, representing the commandant, presented the Coast Guard

Unit Commendation Ribbon to Wev.

MCPO Stanley Ferro, from the Reserve Training Center, presented each *Courier* crewmember with the Unit Commendation Ribbon, 40 years after their cutter's commissioning and subsequent 12-year deployment to the Mediterranean.

— PA1 David Oney, 5th Dist.

**SM2 Alphonzo Barbour  
100-year-old veteran**

Retired **Stewards Mate Second Class Alphonzo Ferdinand Barbour** waited patiently for the knock on the door from two Coast Guardsmen who stopped by to pay him a visit. The men were greeted by his housekeeper, Emma. She smiled and pointed, "Mr. Barbour is anxiously awaiting you."

Barbour was waiting in his white messman's uniform, proudly displaying his Good Conduct Medal and other awards, sitting at attention.

Barbour retired from the Coast Guard Sept. 1, 1941, and was just a few days shy of his 100th birthday (Aug. 22).

He represents the earliest living linkage of black history in the Coast Guard. He endured a Coast Guard career in which seeing blacks above the rank of first class petty officer was unique, if not surprisingly odd.

Barbour enlisted in the Coast Guard June 10, 1924, in his hometown of Washington, D.C., after spending almost four years in the Navy, serving in World War I as a mess attendant first class (E-3).

"I really loved the sea, especially after spending a few months

working on my sister's farm near Richmond, Va.," Barbour said. "I wasn't afraid of hard work, but the smell of those animals and getting dirty all day was not too thrilling for a city boy like me."

Before he joined the Navy, Barbour had completed chiropractor's school in Washington.

After having a difficult time trying to find work as a chiropractor, he convinced a Navy recruiter to let him enlist by offering him a free chiropractic treatment.

That's where his love for the sea began.

After serving aboard a destroyer in World War I, where he was a mess attendant for the officers' wardroom, Barbour began reading fascinating stories of the Revenue Cutter and Lifesaving Services.

Barbour said he became intrigued with the numerous rescues and law-enforcement missions of the two services.

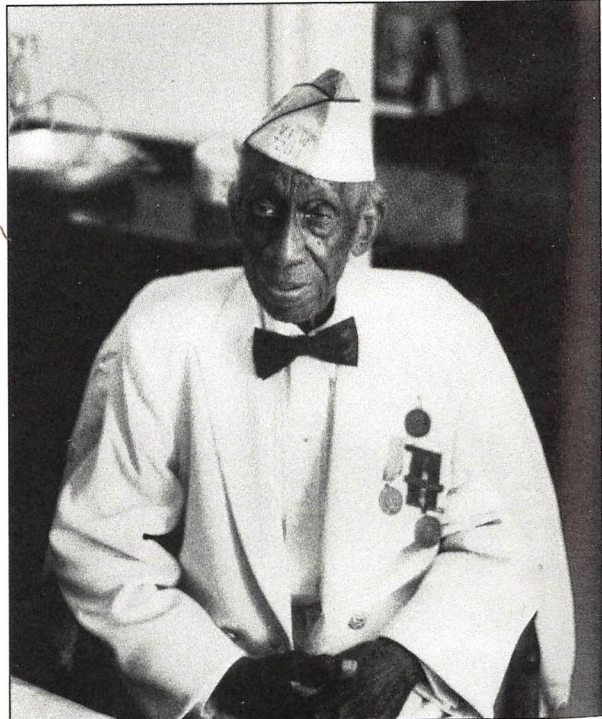


Photo by YNCS Vince Patton

**Barbour displays his Coast Guard medals on his steward uniform.**



"I read about this station on the outer banks manned completely by coloreds," Barbour said. "If I didn't read it myself, I would have never believed it. Imagine that, a lifesaving station with nothing but coloreds. I used to wonder what the people who were saved by them thought."

The station was the former Pea Island Lifesaving Station in North Carolina.

Within months after reading that story, the Lifesaving and Revenue Cutter Services merged to become the Coast Guard. Barbour started setting his goals on becoming a Coast Guardsman.

"I kind of knew that I might end up as a messman, but at least I knew that I could someday meet those guys at that lifesaving station," he said.

Barbour's initial experience in the Coast Guard wasn't so pleasant.

"I used to go down to (the recruiting office at) the old post office downtown, and see if they would let me in," he said. "I would go down at least once a week, sometimes every other day."

This went on for a couple of years until finally the recruiter allowed him to enlist.

"I guess he wanted to know how bad I wanted to join," Barbour said.

Life in the Coast Guard was difficult for blacks during the 1920s and '30s, Barbour said.

"I had a hard time trying to get along with the crew, mostly because I was usually the only colored man in the unit," he said. "Sometimes it bothered me, but most of the time it didn't. There was a sort of a code during those times when the rest of

the crew would deal with the messman. It was usually strictly business. I got used to it, because that was the

way it was back then. Sometimes I felt like I was treated better than if I was a civilian. Because I would work directly for the captain, some of the white fellas would almost treat me with the same respect

as the captain, except I didn't get any salutes."

Since his retirement in 1941, Barbour lost his eyesight to glaucoma. However that hasn't slowed him down.

He's been very active with the Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Washington, reminding everyone that he is and always will be a Coast Guardsman.

He keeps in touch with the happenings of the Coast Guard by having his friends and housekeeper read articles from magazines and newspapers about the Coast Guard.

Barbour said he "never heard of

Alex Haley until after he wrote that book [*Roots*], which was kind of surprising since he came in in '39. There were probably a handful of us that we could count on both hands and feet. I would talk with some of the stewards from the other cutters and units whenever our

ship pulled in somewhere. We would trade names and addresses as our form of camaraderie. Haley's name never came up back then. Besides, he was a young sea pup at that

time, and didn't get into our system yet."

During his career, Barbour served on the CGCs *Ericsson*, *Corwin*, *Diligence*, *Frederick Lee*, *Antietam*, and the *Willow*, and at Station Wilmette Harbor, Ill., and Bases in Norfolk, Va., Nantucket and Woods Hole, Mass., and Biloxi and Pascagoula, Miss.

Although he worked primarily as a steward, Barbour said he enjoyed taking part in the various seagoing evolutions during missions.

"It was very exciting during the rum-running wars," he said. "I would be one of the guys that would handle the ammo for the guns, or help to get the small boats over for a boarding. I don't remember how many rum boats we stopped and seized, but they were all exciting."

Another assignment he had was on detached duty at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.

"I was one of about six or seven stewards picked out from the Navy and Coast Guard to take care of some Japanese students in '31," Barbour said. "We had to cook and clean for them. Neither one of us understood a lick of Japanese, but somehow we figured out what they

wanted. At some of the receptions on the fort, I would see and even serve Generals MacArthur, Patton and Eisenhower, and even Admiral Halsey."

Barbour said his only regret in his Coast Guard career is that, "I never got to meet those colored boys

at the lifeboat station.

"I met several people who knew them, and their stories would always get me going," Barbour said.

"If I was young enough today to

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*"It was very exciting during the rum running wars. I would be one of the guys that would handle the ammo for the guns, or help to get the small boats over for a boarding."*



join, I would tell the recruiter that I want to be sent to that station," he said. Going out on a surfboat is exciting, and I wanted to be a part of it."

— YNCS Vince Patton, G-PRF

## GM1 Mike Pohl GM2 Lance Walton D2's only gunners mates

The Coast Guard's 2nd District is unique in many ways — the only cutters are river tenders, there are no search-and-rescue stations and there's only one base. Then there are the gunners mates, both of them.

GM1 Mike Pohl and GM2 Lance Walton serve 76 units, both active duty and reserve, within the 22-state area.

Located in the district's armory at Base St. Louis, Pohl and Walton provide arms and training for more than 800 Coast Guard members. They have a little help along the way though.

"I'm the district supervisor," Pohl said. "I have 22 other coaches that work for me as collateral-duty small-arms instructors."

All are reservists.

Each spring Pohl and Walton load up their specially outfitted van they call their war wagon and hit the road.

Their travels take them from Colorado to Pennsylvania, where they train nearly every marine safety of-fice and reserve unit along the way.

"When I have people on the range, I think I have, at times, more responsibilities than the district commander," Pohl said.

The times of responsibility Pohl referred to are those when he trains units in areas such as Pittsburgh, where he could have as many as 80 people shooting, loading or standing by.

"I'm responsible for them," Pohl

said. "Whether they're shooting or 50 yards away eating lunch, they're still my responsibility."

The dangers involved in the range are not restricted to just people with weapons, Pohl said.

He's been hit a number of times by ricochets and shrapnel coming back off the range.

I got hit in the head once," he said.

Pohl was transferred from the 2nd District armory in July, to the *CGC Vigilant*, homeported in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

— PA3 W. Scott Epperson, 2nd Dist.

## CAPT Ross Bell Began at the bottom

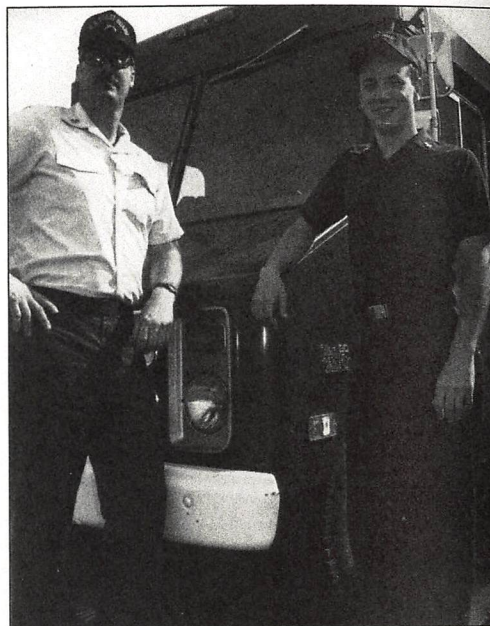
As a rambunctious teenager in Newton, Mass., Ross Bell discovered that sometimes it's easier to live by someone else's decisions than your own, especially if yours get you into trouble with the law.

To this day, Bell is glad for a judge's order 36 years ago that he join the military; he enlisted in the Coast Guard.

Bell retired as a captain from active-duty service after a change-of-command ceremony on the *CGC Rush* June 19. He was commanding officer of the 378-foot cutter, and the *Jarvis* before a renovation project, for the last three years.

What seems most impressive is not that he made his way to such a high rank before retiring after starting out in boot camp as an E-1, or even that he stayed in the service so long (32 years active service, four years reserve); nor that he attained such a position after entering the Coast Guard somewhat involuntarily. What's most striking becomes apparent after speaking with crew members on the *Rush*, his last command.

His retirement not only meant he was leaving a job he loved, it also meant his crew was losing a leader



Pohl (left) and Walton

Photo by PA3 W. Scott Epperson

they loved and worked hard to please. Bell said the feeling was mutual.

"He's probably one of the most respected captains (by a crew) in the Coast Guard because of his genuine concern for each individual on the ship," said RM3 Edward Porner of the *Rush*. "He was always willing to bend over backward to help people in their career or with personal problems."

An informal survey of crew members on the *Rush* elicited many positive impressions of the man whose life experiences and easygoing demeanor made him an easy person to visit for personal counseling. Crew members say he got along with and cared about everybody; rank was not a concern.

Looking back on a long career, which included sea time on seven different ships and spanned a tour as executive officer in Vietnam where he and his crew on the *CGC Point Welcome* were attacked and wounded by "friendly" U.S. Air Force fighter planes, Bell said he enjoyed it all. Certainly he didn't enjoy being



