

Tropical Latitudes chronicles the life and experiences of a U.S Coast Guardsman during a career of over 36 years. From rescues at sea, to NASA operations, to Presidential security, these tales reveal the inside workings of America's smallest military service.

Tropical Latitudes - Tales of a Sailor

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TROPICAL LATITUDES

Tales of a Sailor

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Chief Gunner's Mate

U.S. Coast Guard Reserve (Retired)

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USCGC Ariadne WPC 101

Ariadne - The First Ship

Aside from occasional sail boating on Long Island Sound while I was a kid, the first time I ever went to sea was aboard the rolling deck of a 33 year-old Coast Guard cutter out of St. Petersburg, Florida. The ship, built in 1934 had a riveted steel hull, a very round bottom and twin oil-burning engines and propellers. She was named Ariadne after a character from Greek mythology. In myth Ariadne was the granddaughter to Zeus and her mother was in love with a bull so she was the half sister of

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the Minotaur. She later helped Theseus kill the Minotaur for true love. But he ran off and left her in a foreign port where she was rescued by Dionysos.

The Coast Guard Cutter *Ariadne* was classified as a medium endurance cutter, supposedly to indicate that she could remain at sea for up to two weeks before returning to port for supplies, water and fuel. At 165 feet long she was one of four remaining vessels of her type, with two of each stationed on the east and west coasts. Her remaining sister ships were also named after characters from Greek mythology: *Aurora*, *Nemesis* and *Triton*. In all there were originally 18 ships of her class that had been built as coastal patrol boats in the early 1930's. Their primary function at that time was to enforce prohibition laws on the coastal seas of the United States.

I later found out that this class of cutter had a long and storied history during World War II as convoy escorts in the North Atlantic, and later in the Gulf of Mexico as patrol craft along the Texas and Cuban coasts. One of her class, the cutter *Electra*, also served in the U. S. Navy as the Presidential Yacht *Potomac* from November 1935 through November 1945.

I had reported aboard on Memorial Day 1966 after having spent the previous five months at Gunner's Mate School

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in Groton, Connecticut. We called Groton “rotten Groton” because it was home not only to the Coast Guard Academy and Training Center, but also to the Navy’s Atlantic submarine fleet. As a result the town was populated with nothing but sailors, making it difficult, if not impossible, to find female companionship when we had weekend liberty.

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