

Chief Motor Machinist Mate Jack W. Read

Chief Motor Machinist Mate Jack W. Read of the United States Coast Guard hails from Brooklyn New York. Currently residing in Erie Pennsylvania, CMoMM Read enlisted in January 1942 shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. After completing basic training and schooling in gasoline and diesel engine mechanics at Brooklyn Automotive Trades and the Sterling Engine Company in Buffalo New York, Mr. Read was assigned to the #83464 boat of a new 83 foot class of cutter in July of 1943 and quickly rose in rating from MoMM2c to MoMM1c and then to Chief MoMM.



Coast Guard Cutter #83464 on Anti-Submarine Patrol

In early 1941, the Coast Guard found it necessary to replace their 75 foot cutters for a boat that was larger and more modern than its prohibition era counterpart. 230 new cutters were eventually manufactured no more than a few miles from Jack's Brooklyn home by Wheeler Shipyard. The boats were very effective and deployed in several theaters of WWII, specifically Atlantic coastline anti-submarine duty and coast watch patrols.

Yet the effectiveness of this new boat design and the crews that sailed them stood their biggest test on that Day of Days, D-Day, June 6th 1944. The wooden hull of this cutter made this the ideal boat for close in support where the threat of magnetic mines would be thwarted by the lack of its own resonance. Lessons taught by previous amphibious landings in North Africa and the Italy told invasion planners that casualties to ships and landing craft would continue for several days if not weeks after the initial assault. Hence a "Rescue Flotilla" organized by the United States Coast Guard would be serve as the life boat to sailors and soldiers alike who found themselves in peril on the sea. The dangers to mines, torpedoes, enemy shore batteries, landing obstacles and the occasional accident were far too great to dismiss.

President Roosevelt fostered this idea and Coast Guard subsequently responded by reassigning sixty 83 footers to the European theater and to Operation Overlord. Transported aboard Liberty and cargo ships across the Atlantic Ocean, the boats and their crews found their new home along the southern coast of England in Poole. "Rescue Flotilla One" was now operational and given the nickname of the "Matchbox Fleet" due to the wooden construction and gasoline powered engines of their craft.

After arriving in Poole the cutter crews lived on their assigned boats. The hardships endured by the civilian population were quite evident to the men. After nearly 5 years of rationing and under the threat of an air attack, the British citizens earned the great respect of the men. Despite the rationing, townsfolk welcomed the returning "colonials" into their homes for an occasional home cooked meal. The air of confidence was building.

With only days to spare prior to D-Day the flotilla fulfilled their compliment of sixty boats. Half were assigned to the Commonwealth beaches codenamed Gold, Juno and Sword and the second half to the American beaches codenamed Omaha and Utah. Jacks cutter, CG-43/#83464, was assigned to escort and protect the Canadian troop ship, the Queen Emma, which was ferrying troops of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division to their assault along Juno Beach. After the boats rescue duties were fulfilled, the crew and cutter were assigned to mine clearing, harbor security and defense of Le Harve.

On D-Day alone, more than 500 souls were pulled from the frigid waters of the English Channel. Most of these rescues occurred at Omaha and a surprising number off of Utah. Although there were far fewer casualties on the beaches at Utah in comparison to Omaha, for ships in the channel the danger was much greater. Mines and coastal batteries took their toll on transports of all types and from the skies enemy bombers and mine layers did their best to pen up the allied armada. The #16 boat rescued the most of all; 126 men. All told, the Rescue Flotilla One rescued 1438 people; 1437 men and one woman, a Royal Army Medical Corps nurse who was rescued from hospital ship which hit a mine and quickly sank.

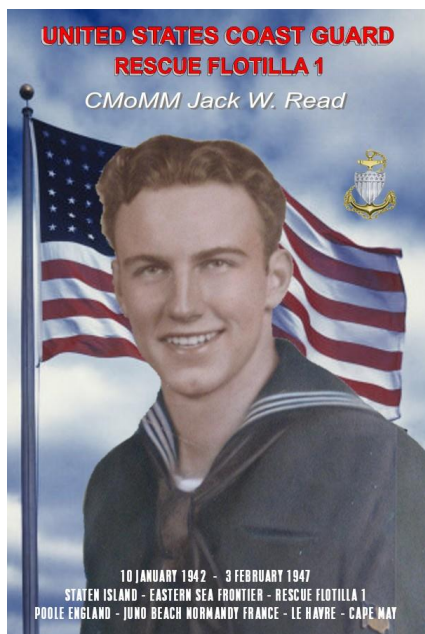
After WWII ended, Jack remained in the Coast Guard until February of 1947. He returned to Brooklyn and went on to raise his 8 proud children in southern New Jersey. Interested in his children's education, Jack served on the school board for 12 years, 6 of which as president. He is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Coast Guard Combat Veterans Association and the Patrol Craft Sailors Association. He returned to Normandy for the 40th Anniversary and to Poole for the 50th where he and fellow Rescue Flotilla shipmate Jack Campbell helped dedicate a plaque honoring their group on the site of their 1944 moorings along Town Quay in Poole.

On June 6th 2011, at the D-Day Memorial in Bedford Virginia, Jack met Eric Montgomery, a relative of a sailor who was killed on Omaha Beach. From that moment on Jack and Eric have been close friends. Montgomery spent 5 years researching the death of his great uncle, Amin Isbir, a member of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion whose date of death was misdated to June 8th not June 6th. Using the testimony of his shipmates in 2009, Isbirs' headstone was excavated and replaced at the Normandy American Cemetery. In 2012, the National D-Day Memorial added Isbirs' name to their Necrology Wall. Isbir became the 2499th American listed as being killed on D-Day. Montgomery delivered the keynote address which chronicled the efforts needed to correct the misdating. After the address, Read and Montgomery placed a wreath at the foot of newly dedicated plaque bearing Isbirs' name.

In 2014, the friends will mark another milestone in friendship with their return to Normandy for the 70th Anniversary of the invasion. The pair will leave Erie International on May 30th and after a brief stop in Philadelphia, fly onto London. On the 4th of June, Jack will get under way again for Normandy leaving Poole England exactly 70 years from the very day that Rescue Flotilla One departed for Portsmouth, one of the naval rally points for the pending invasion.

As if this moment can be eclipsed, certainly the highlight of their journey will most undoubtedly be presentation of the French Légion d'Honneur to Mr. Read. The Légion d'Honneur is the highest decoration that a serviceman from outside of France can receive. The honor is scheduled to be presented to Mr. Read at the International Ceremony in Ouistreham on June 6th. The President of France himself, François Hollande, is rumored to be personally presenting D-Day veterans during this ceremony. Other dignitaries on hand will be President Obama, Queen Elizabeth and numerous other heads of state and military leaders of the Allied Forces. It is expected the hundreds of D-Day Veterans will also attend.

Lastly, French National Television Channel 3 journalist Anne-Charline Lambard will begin documenting Read and Montgomery's journey beginning with an interview in Erie on April 25th. A few days prior to D-Day, Lambard will rejoin with Read and Montgomery and accompany the two as they cross the English Channel by ferry to Cherbourg. Once in France Mr. Read will attend numerous veteran gatherings and official presentations at the Normandy American Cemetery on the 6th of June, the previously mentioned International Ceremony, the Canadian Ceremony at Juno Beach, the landing beach where Jack's cutter patrolled on D-Day, an airborne demonstration parachutist drop into Sainte Mere Eglise on the 8th and other points of interest along the way. Read and Montgomery return to Erie International via Philadelphia on the 14th of June after departing from Paris earlier that day.



CMoMM Jack W. Read



CG-43/83464 Crew – D-Day Morning



Jack W. Read & Eric P. Montgomery
National D-Day Memorial June 6th 2012

