

# RESTORING CG-83527: The Cutter and Her Stories

By Dan L. Withers



*Seen lying quietly, but ready to respond CG-83527 is, at the Municipal Dock in Tacoma in the late 1940s. The cutter served the city, the surrounding area, and south Puget Sound from 1945 to 1962. She and her crews participated in hundreds of rescues and other emergencies, performed boating safety inspections, navigation aids monitoring, and other additional duties during her 17 years of active Coast Guard service. Photo courtesy of Tacoma Public Library.*

SEA STORIES, TOLD BY THOSE WHO SERVED ABOARD HISTORIC VESSELS restored and preserved for public exhibit or as floating museums, have special significance in maritime history. However, those ships or boats with military heritages have particularly close personal connections with those who crewed them, during both war and peacetime service. Such is the case with the WWII-era Coast Guard cutter, CG-83527.

Based in Tacoma and serving central and south Puget Sound from 1945 to 1962, the 83-foot wooden patrol boat was decommissioned, sold as federal government surplus in 1964, and taken to northern California. For 40 years, before her 2003 re-discovery on the Sacramento River delta at Rio Vista, California, her Coast Guard stories were lost and forgotten.

As proud Puget Sound residents, it was then that my wife Roxane and I found the venerable cutter and her hidden history, and decided to purchase, restore and return her to her original Pacific Northwest active-duty waters. But in the process we discovered an even more important result—hearing the sea stories recalled by former crewmen of CG-83527 and also her sister 83-foot cutters, and recreating some of their amazing living history experiences.

One of these inspiring experiences was reuniting a survivor of the 1956 crash of a Northwest Orient Airlines Boeing Stratocruiser into Puget Sound with a crew member aboard CG-83527 who helped rescue him.

Through an incredible historical coincidence, another situation brought together a former WWII 83-foot Coast Guard sailor and his skipper with their actual cutter, CG-

83366, that both served on during the D-Day invasion at Normandy in June, 1944.

Its experiences and stories like these that have inspired me, and with Roxane's support, to restore our WWII-era Coast Guard cutter once based in Tacoma, CG-83527. While many maritime history articles describe the technical nature of the design and operation of a family of vessels, here we recall very personal events that occurred aboard this regionally historic Coast Guard cutter. It covers the lives of the people who served aboard during her active service, as well as those who have worked to save her as a military public exhibit and education vessel.

Personally, this need to preserve military history and "mess around" with boats must have been in my genes. My family lived on a farm near Salem, Oregon, and my mother had boxes of scrapbooks she had created from WWII, Korea and Vietnam—with magazine and newspaper articles about Oregon and Willamette Valley servicemen.

As kids, my sister and I were always playing in something resembling a boat. But I had another strong maritime influence too. My grandfather and dad had both served in the U.S. Navy and I have photos of myself in a kid's version of the blue Navy jumper. So it seems I was destined to follow in their footsteps.

In September, 1963, after I graduated from high school, I enlisted in the Navy in Portland, and after "Boot Camp" training went to U.S.S. ESTES, AGC-12, an Amphibious Force flag ship. I then transferred to Electronics Technician Class A School for one year, and was assigned subsequently to U.S.S. STODDARD, DD-566, a WWII Fletcher-class destroyer. Before long, we were underway for combat duty in Vietnam.

I first became interested in patrol boats in 1965, when I saw what we thought were WWII-type PT boats going out and into Da Nang harbor in South Vietnam. We were told that they were Central Intelligence Agency-operated "spook" boats; intelligence support craft headed for North Vietnam—carrying U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Special Forces commandos. They were fast and beautifully-designed, and I can still hear the distinctive whine of their engines' turbochargers when they throttled up for that night's mission. I would later learn that they were called PTF's, or "Patrol Torpedo Fast" boats, and powered by twin 2,100 hp British Napier Deltic diesel engines.

After returning from Vietnam at the end of my three year Navy enlistment, I was soon a freshman at Oregon Technical Institute, the state's polytechnic engineering college located in Klamath Falls. I graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a minor in mechanical engineering, with financial help from the federal GI Bill.

I had kept my interest in fast power boats during my college and early career years. First, I owned a series of gradually larger, more powerful and faster race boats—beginning with an eight-foot homemade plywood outboard and ending with a 27-foot offshore racer.



*The restored and fully flag-dressed CG-83527 makes her way along Ruston Way in 2005, as part of the "Tacoma Tall Ships" event. As a participant in the more than 30-vessel "Parade of Sail," the 83-foot wooden cutter was making a nostalgic return appearance in her long-time homeport, which she served beginning in 1945 at the end of WWII. Photo courtesy of Combatant Craft of America.*



*Dan and Roxane Withers, shown with CG-83527 in Rio Vista, California, in 2004; shortly after the former Coast Guard cutter was acquired by the nonprofit "Combatant Craft of America." This was the beginning of a several-year-long restoration process, which ended with her more than 1,000 mile return voyage to Puget Sound. Photo by Chuck Fowler.*

During my initial working years I had engineering and management jobs with leading-edge technology companies, including the early engineering of one of the Puget Sound cellular systems. Also, following marriage, Roxane and I started a computer maintenance and software support business that provided the resources to buy into several more technology start-ups in Seattle.

By 2000, the Internet was becoming a research tool for the general public, but I couldn't find any information about the speedy, stealthy PTFs that I had seen in Vietnam. However, a grant from the National Science Foundation for an engineering project that I was working on provided some tools to create websites. This allowed me to create a website that featured information and photos about my then-virtually-unknown Navy patrol boat. Soon emails were arriving from PTF veterans and others who sent photos and stories about



Top to bottom:

Dan aboard USS STODDARD, DD-566—in the South China Sea off the coast of South Vietnam—during the war. The WWII-era destroyer, built at Todd Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding in Seattle, was launched in November, 1943; and participated in the Aleutian Islands campaign against the Japanese in 1944, and early 1945. Photo courtesy of Dan Withers.

In this official photo, the vessel CG-83527 is shown standing off Dash Point, north of Tacoma. With Maury Island in the background, the cutter was a familiar sight; in from Commencement Bay to Olympia, more than 30 miles south. Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Historian's Office, Washington, D.C.

With both a father and grandfather who were Navy veterans, at an early age Dan was already destined to join the sea service. Photo courtesy of Dan Withers.



these boats. Now I was hooked. This expanded into chronicling the history of other smaller military patrol boats, and the [www.warboats.org](http://www.warboats.org) website was growing with additional historical photos and veteran's stories.

### Coincidental Connection: Finding Tacoma's Coast Guard Cutter

My interest in WWII PT boats continued and I discovered that the Vosper-designed PT-695, renamed PT-JOE after the war, had been a yacht in Newport Beach, California; and was now in the collection of the non-profit American Patrol Boats Museum in Rio Vista. I thought that I might be interested in buying her to finish the boat's restoration. But after a visit to the museum, I determined that this was a project beyond my capability and also specific interest.

However, during the on-site visit, I noticed a wooden 83-foot Coast Guard cutter, CG-83527, tied up to the PT boat. She looked to be in quite respectable condition, and she was available to another non-profit organization at a very reasonable price.

This purchase required Roxane's agreement and, because she also likes boats and boating, she was willing to help me with this major project. She took on yeoman tasks, including paint and glue scraping, bilge oil hauling, and exterior and interior painting. She and a friend also drove back and forth between Puget Sound and the San Francisco Bay Area delivering needed initial restoration materials.

The Coast Guard 83-footers were wood-hulled craft, designed by Walter J. McInnis who was hired in December, 1940, to develop the plans for the cutter class. The design was completed in March, 1941, and the first 40 of a total of 230 cutters were built under contract with Wheeler Shipyard, Inc. of Brooklyn, New York.

For Wheeler, the transition from civilian to military boat building was relatively easy, as the round-bilged 83-footer wasn't much different from the sport fishing boat they had designed and produced. Their Coast Guard boat, with its narrow, single-planked hull, 16-foot beam and straight keel; ending in a skeg that protected the running gear and rudder, were all familiar. But the engines were much different. They were twin Sterling Viking II TCG 8 gasoline engines manufactured in Buffalo, New York, and each inline 8-cylinder power plant produced 600 hp. This gave the cutter a cruising speed of 10-knots with a maximum of 15 for emergency response.

From 1941 to 1945, the versatile cutters were used for WWII antisubmarine patrol, coastal convoy escort, and search and rescue on the United States Atlantic Coast. Sixty of the earlier boats were shipped to Great Britain and became USCG Rescue Flotilla No. 1, based at Poole, England. The Flotilla deployed offshore during the June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion at Normandy, France in two 30-boat rescue groups. Their crews rescued more than 1,500 soldiers and sailors during these operations. Thirty of these boats were then returned

to the United States for stateside duty during the rest of the war. They were re-distributed around the nation to Coast Guard stations, and many were shipped to California, and some sent to the Pacific Northwest. Six of these 83-footers served in Puget Sound: one each in Port Angeles, Friday Harbor, Bellingham, and Tacoma; and two in Port Townsend. Incredibly, after decommissioning in the early 1960s, one of the former D-Day rescue boats sent to California, ended up in Seattle.

I kept thinking about the cutter CG-83527 and her Tacoma and Puget Sound history. In late 2003, I returned to Rio Vista to visit the cutter with some knowledgeable friends and we inspected the boat from stem to stern. While reading one of the forward engine room placards, I discovered a Coast Guard vessel Engineering Department document that read, "Engineering Room Safety Documents for the CG-83527, Tacoma, Washington." I immediately called my friend and fellow Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society member Chuck Fowler, a Tacoma native, to tell him about this hometown connection.

The surviving engine room notice led us to many other historical materials, including the federal surplus auction brochure, and the Coast Guard documents confirming her 1964 sale in Seattle to her first owner, Vernon Wilkie. He took possession of the boat in Seattle and took her down the Pacific Coast to Oakland - Alameda, California. She was renamed *FIRST LOVE*, and was moored as a live-aboard summer home until 1998. After Wilkie's death, the boat was donated to the non-profit American Patrol Boats Museum in Rio Vista, which acquired surplus military boats for Sea Scout education program use.

A survey of CG-83527 was completed and a deal made, transferring ownership to a certified Internal Revenue Service certified section 501 (c) 3 non-profit we had established, "Combatant Craft of America;" and through a website I had created, cg83527.org, the word got out to veterans. A Coast Guard 83-foot Sailors Association representative contacted me and said they were having an annual reunion during the summer of 2003 in Port Townsend. Soon I was in contact with many of the crew members who served aboard Puget Sound-based 83-footers, including CG-83527, and they were very interested in the restoration of the boat and the return voyage.

The first work party to get the cutter ready to come back up the coast to the Sound took place in August, 2003. Other work continued in September, November and December 2003, as well as February 2004. Finally in May, 2004, our early restoration work at Rio Vista was completed and we moved the boat to Bay Ship and Marine in Richmond in the San Francisco Bay area, where we hauled her and did an underwater survey. The survey revealed that some repairs we needed and they were completed. Two props and the port prop shaft were replaced. The bottom was scraped, caulked,

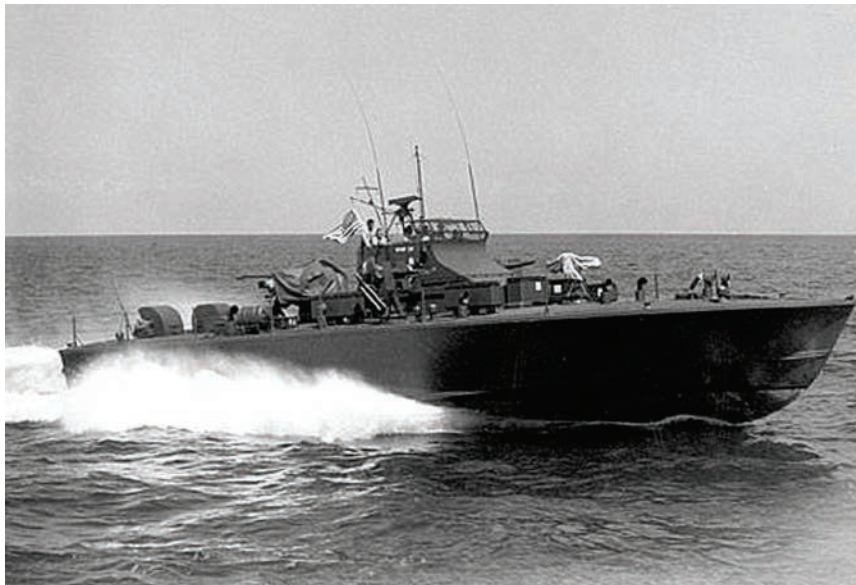


and new bottom paint applied. We then put together a crew of local Sea Scouts and made several hours of test runs in the Richmond channel and San Francisco Bay.

### The Voyage Home: Port-to-Port and Tacoma Homecoming

We started the final preparation for the trip North in early July, 2004. Mid-month we departed "Sugar Dock" in Richmond and passed under the Golden Gate Bridge at dawn, following the fishing fleet out into the Pacific. Our crew members were Royal Journey from Port Ludlow, and Wendell "Wink" Weber from Forest Grove, Oregon, who was at the time the president of the 83-Footer Sailors Association of Coast Guard veterans. Also, Roxane shadowed us in a shore-side support vehicle, driving about two thirds of our more than 1,000 mile return voyage to Puget Sound.

Our travels north included stops at Bodega Bay, as well as Fort Bragg, California—where we were guests at the Coast Guard Noyo River Station. This stop included a public open house and special tours, with many former and active-duty Coast Guard guests, including 11th District commander, Rear Admiral Kevin Eldridge. At this stop we also picked up retired



While in Vietnam in 1966, and 1967, Dan became enamored with the powerful 80-foot PT boat of the era, the Patrol Boat Fast (PTF). Seeing and hearing them go out on night patrols from Da Nang Harbor, the PTFs sparked his on-going interest in small combatant craft. Photo courtesy of Combatant Craft of America.

Chief Boatswain's Mate (BMC) Selby Drew, a former 83-foot skipper during the 1950s, who shared many great tales about life aboard the venerable boats.

After leaving Fort Bragg, we visited Crescent City, moved on to Coos Bay—and then Newport, Oregon, where we were guests of Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay. There we met legendary Coast Guard BMC Tom McAdams, who was also the final active-duty skipper of CG-83527. McAdams provided us with many photographs, taken in and around Tacoma and Gig Harbor, when he was her skipper in the early 1960s.

The next leg of our homebound voyage was the long reach from Newport to Westport, Washington, where we spent a month making needed engine repairs. In early August, we were underway again on flat seas to “turn the corner” into the Strait of Juan de Fuca—and we arrived at Neah Bay.

Our next port call was at Coast Guard Station Port Angeles, where we were guests—and many Coasties came aboard to see “how it used to be” aboard a WWII-era wooden patrol boat. During the trip to Port Angeles we made arrangements to exhibit the cutter at the Port Townsend “Wooden

Boat Festival.” Next, we left for our home at Port Ludlow, where we would finally arrive at our homeport—and tied up for a week to rest.

The next weekend we departed for Tacoma, and a public exhibit, during their annual “Maritime Fest.” Upon arrival, we celebrated the final leg of our 1,070 mile trip to the city where CG-83527 had spent 17 years of her active-duty working life.

### Humanizing History: Reconnecting Cutters with WWII Crewmen

One of the first guests aboard the hometown cutter after arriving back in Tacoma was Ed Young, from Puyallup, once one of her Coast Guard crew members. For years after his active-duty service he had wondered what had become of “his boat.” Then one day he picked up a copy of the Tacoma News Tribune, and saw that she was going to be tied up and on exhibit about a half-mile from where he had served aboard her, while based at the old Municipal Dock building.

Among his memories, Ed Young recalled that he had carved his name in the bottom of the crew table in

the galley. Some of us “old-timers” were all too “physically challenged” to look under there to see, but Ed’s granddaughter crawled under and excitedly exclaimed that his signature was there. She made a pencil rubbing of the personally “historic” carving.

In early October, the CCA held an “Old Crew Rendezvous” at the Harbor Master restaurant in Port Ludlow. Attending were her one-time skipper, Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Jake Annas of Sequim, Myron “Tike” Hillman of Port Ludlow, and Ed Young, all of whom had served together aboard the cutter CG-83527 in 1955 and 1956. They each told their share of “whopper” sea stories. In addition, Dick Craig of Shoreline, showed his Coast Guard veteran crew colleagues how his boat, CG-83464, which was stationed in Port Townsend, differed from CG-83527.

A special guest at the occasion was Al Kearn of Sequim, who had survived the Northwest Orient Airlines crash into the Sound in 1956. “Tike” Hillman had been on board the cutter CG-83527 at the time, and assisted with the rescue effort. Both survivor and rescuer had a great reunion, as well as sharing their own perspectives of the accident. Kearn brought photocopies of the April 2, 1956, issue of the *Seattle Times* which had extensive news coverage of the crash. He and other survivors had been taken from the crash site by the Tacoma-based cutter to a downtown dock, where they were driven by ambulance to a hospital.

As part of our CCA educational outreach mission, we continued to publicly exhibit the cutter throughout the Puget Sound region. These visits uncovered additional, and sometimes amazing experiences involving 83-foot Coast Guard cutters.

For example, we learned about the history and restoration of the former CG-83366 from Dave Coghill, a Puget Sound wooden-boat shipwright from Vashon Island. He had recently completed a restoration project on the boat for Ray Holland, a retired Boeing

worker from West Seattle. Holland's father had purchased the cutter 40 years earlier at a federal government auction in Alameda, California; then brought her up the coast to Puget Sound, and converted her to a family yacht, which he named TIBURON. Later, his son Ray became her owner, and he had her moored at the Lake Union Dry Dock in Seattle. While restoring the boat, the shipwright Coghill and his son had done some research, and discovered that the former CG-83366 had also been known as CG-11, and was one of the 60 Wheeler-built 83-footers that made up Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla 1 (RESFLO-1) during the D-Day invasion at Normandy. Among the more than 1,500 soldiers and sailors saved during the invasion and afterward, the cutter CG-11 was credited with saving more than 40 of them.

Adding some amazing living history to the boat's past, we soon discovered a surviving former crewman for CG-11 at Normandy, 84-year-old Signalman 3rd Class Wilfred "Bud" Eberhart. This incredible discovery inspired us to create a "D-Day Celebration" at the Lake Union Park Historic Ships Wharf on June 6, 2005. The event was to honor all Coast Guard sailors who had served aboard the 83-footers on June 6, 1944, and reunited Eberhart with his old wartime cutter. Eberhart of Mitchell, Illinois, and his family traveled to Seattle so he could see, board and stand at the helm of "his" patrol boat once again—after more than six decades.

When the celebration anniversary day finally arrived, Eberhart was put aboard CG-83527, which was moored on the Ship Canal at the Seattle Maritime Academy. Meanwhile, the unpowered TIBURON (aka CG-83366 and CG-11) had been towed from Lake Union Dry Dock to Lake Union Park with the cooperation of Mark Freeman and Freemont Tugboat Co. As CG-83527 approached the Historic Ships Wharf, Eberhart was overwhelmed to be reunited with his former D-Day Coast

Guard rescue cutter. When we were secure at the dock he crossed over to CG-11; knelt down and kissed her hull, and thanked her for getting him home from his wartime combat experiences. Later, a public celebration was held on the wharf, and Eberhart spoke about his time aboard and his appreciation for making this occasion possible.

Also on that day, to show the 60-year span of patrol boat history, the 13th CG District brought in the newest of its 87-foot Marine Protector Class patrol boats, U.S.C.G. TERRAPIN, stationed at Bellingham. And by absolute historical coincidence, the last three digits of TERRAPIN's number, CG-87366, matched those of her 1940s to 1960s active-duty predecessor, CG-83366. During this event, Eberhart was also able to spend time aboard TERRAPIN, sharing sea stories across the generations with the newer cutter's Coast Guard crew of young men and women.

Through subsequent research at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and on-line searches, we discovered that Eberhart was not the sole surviving crew member of CG-11. WWII Coast

Guard veteran and former Lt. (j.g.) Arthur Lehne, the boat's skipper during the D-Day invasion, was also alive. A retired Chicago Public Schools administrator, the then 85-year-old, was living in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

With this new discovery, we developed a similar CCA-sponsored event a year later on Armed Forces Day in May, 2007, when we reunited both Lehne and Eberhart with their D-Day Coast Guard cutter. Capt Earl McAuliffe, USCG (Ret.), a Bellevue resident and LCVI (Landing Craft Vessel Infantry) skipper during D-Day at Normandy was also honored; and Retired Coast Guard District 13 Commander Rear Admiral John Lockwood, presented commemorative medals to each of the three WWII combat crew veterans.

After a subsequent fall at his home in southern Illinois, "Bud" Eberhart passed away less than two years later. However, we were greatly honored to hear and tell his D-Day story before the end of his life.

Another particularly significant highlight of CG-83527's recent history was the 2008 "Coast Guard Heritage Fleet" parade. This event featured the



*The tired, virtually abandoned CG-83527, is shown at the American Patrol Boats Museum dock in Rio Vista in April, 2004—when on-site restoration began. Behind the WWII-era patrol boat is the former Coast Guard buoy tender FIR, once based in Seattle; and the focus of an extensive civic restoration effort which unfortunately failed. Photo by Chuck Fowler.*



Prior to her 2004 return voyage to Puget Sound, the cutter CG-83527 was hauled out for inspection, hull repair, and painting at Bay Ship and Marine in Richmond, north of San Francisco. Preparations and sea trials were completed in June, and the trip up the coast began. Photo by Dan Withers.



Left: Dan and his Air Force veteran friend Royal Journey are seen doing maintenance on one of CG-83527's twin General Motors 671 diesel engines. Originally powered by two 600-horsepower Sterling Viking gas engines, almost all of the cutters were re-equipped with less fuel-hungry diesels after they were decommissioned and sold in the commercial market. Photo by Marc Bracken.



Right: As part of the on-going CG-83527 restoration process, Roxane Withers repainted historically authentic numbers on the cutter when she arrived in Port Ludlow in mid-August, 2004. The historic Coast Guard patrol boat was on exhibit subsequently at the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival. Photo by Dan Withers.

cutter as the primary historic escort vessel for USCG Barque EAGLE, known as “America’s Tall Ship,” when it visited Seattle briefly enroute to the “Tall Ships Tacoma” event in the summer of 2008. It was a moving experience to see the majestic square-rigger followed by the historic fleet of retired and current Coast Guard vessels parading across Elliott Bay, and greeted by the Seattle fireboat LESCHI, with a full water-spray tribute. Also, a part of the parade was the Vietnam-era, 82-foot former POINT DIVIDE, WPB-82337—renamed MARITIME INSTRUCTOR—and owned and operated by the Seattle Maritime Institute; and the former 65-foot Coast Guard buoy tender BLUEBERRY, CG-66832, now a working and cruising tug owned by Coast Guard veteran Mark

Freeman of the Fremont Boat Company in Seattle. The 110-foot CG cutter ORCAS, WPB-1324, from Coos Bay, Oregon, EAGLE’s active-duty escort cutter while traveling in the Pacific Northwest, was also part of the parade.

### Conclusion: The Value of Preserving Military Maritime History

Historic military vessel restoration is exciting, fulfilling work. Through the years we have had some great volunteers that share our interest and commitment. Some of them have been veterans that served on 83-footers and on CG-83527 specifically. We have had some help from the Junior Navy Reserve Officers Training Corps students from Issaquah



Left: In 2005, the late Wilfred “Bud” Eberhart, a WWII Coast Guard Signalman 3rd Class, stood proudly in front of the very patrol boat he was aboard during the historic invasion at Normandy, France on June 6, 1944. Eberhart was reunited with his cutter, which had been converted as a family yacht named Tiburon, during D-Day commemoration ceremonies at Lake Union Park. Photo by Chuck Fowler.

Right: Al Kearl, left, and Myron “Tike” Hillman were both involved in the NOA airliner crash in 1956; Kearl as a passenger, and Hillman, as a crew member aboard CG-83527, who helped rescue him. They were reunited during a stopover in Port Ludlow by the 83-foot cutter, on her return voyage to Puget Sound almost 50 years later. Photo by Chuck Fowler.

School District, who had a chance to be part of the preservation of a WWII-era military vessel—and proudly, in full uniform, got to cruise with the Coast Guard veteran “old timers.”

The operation of any historic vessel, especially former military vessels, presents huge engineering challenges; such as figuring how modern materials should be used to restore the original wooden hull, decks and superstructure. Also, the conversion to diesel engines was a major safety factor, because it was not practical to risk a fire by using the original WWII gasoline engines. Insurance companies don’t want to hear the words “gasoline engines” when considering coverage; yet the costs of insurance and moorage for the cutter CG-83527 are still “big ticket” expenses each year.

Hosting the various military commemoration programs, honoring veterans for many years, has been a great experience—especially because almost the vast majority of the boat’s history took place in Puget Sound.

Some days, after a particularly tough CG-83527 restoration project, it seems like an impossible effort. But as the saying goes, “many hands make light work.” So we just take our massive task one step at a time. Overall, for the past ten years, it has definitely been worth the time, talent and treasure that have been put into the project.

The rewards are often unseen and difficult for others to comprehend. However, sometimes just watching a Coast Guard veteran who served aboard CG-83527, or another 83-footer, sit on his old bunk, hearing him tell his “own sea stories,” and adding them to this fascinating history is reward enough. 🇺🇸



#### About the Author: Dan Withers

A retired wireless communication executive, Dan Withers is also a Navy destroyer veteran of the Vietnam War. He is founder and president of Combatant Craft of America, a nonprofit group dedicated to preserving warboat history and patrol boats—including the restoration of the Coast Guard cutter CG-83527.

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