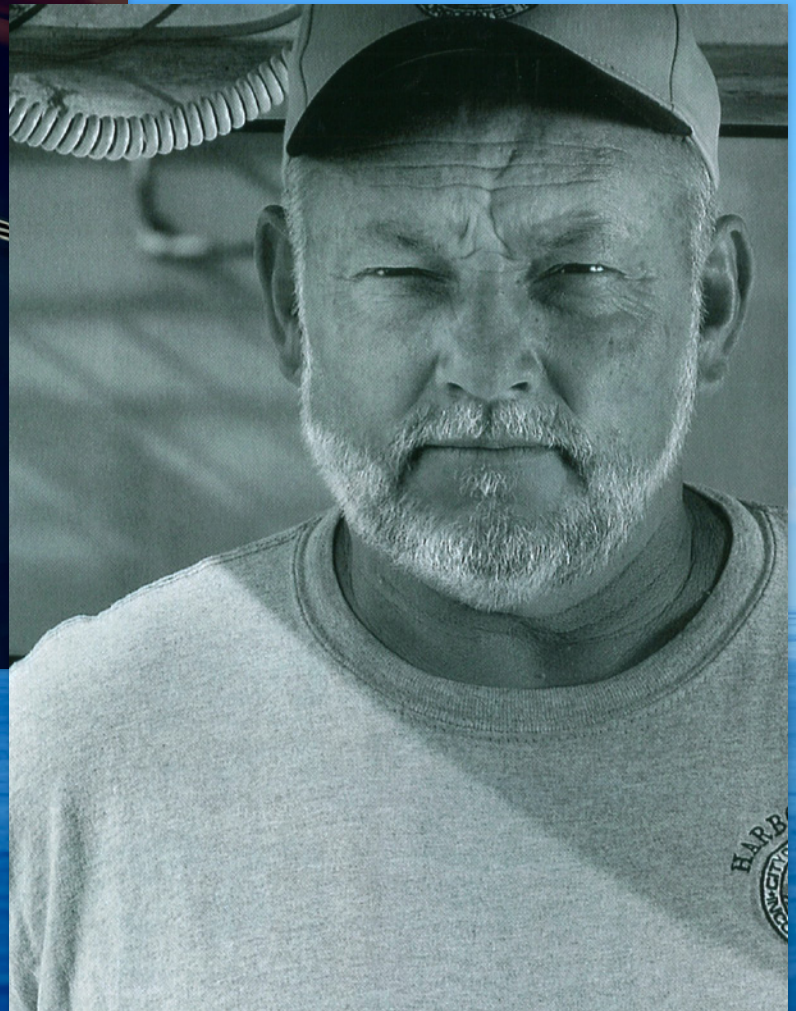




46 Years on the Water

by Jim Caulkett



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ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOS

Top Photo: Though he may look younger, Jim Caulkett was 19 in this boot camp pic at Cape May, NJ, April 1969. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Bottom Photo: Jim Caulkett as pictured in *Cape Ann Magazine*. Photograph by Mark Teiwes.

46 Years on the Water

BY JIM CAULKETT

In 1967, I graduated from high school and worked for Woolworth's (remember them?) Harvest House Cafeteria's managerial food program. I had transferred from the Pittsburgh area to Atlantic City, and by the spring of 1969, I was in Bethesda, MD. One day, my older sister called to tell me that my pre-induction physical notice from the Army had arrived. Having had an early interest in the U.S. Coast Guard (I had a third cousin who served in the Coast Guard), I drove home to Pennsylvania and enlisted.

After nine weeks of boot camp in Cape May, NJ, I was sent to Boston, MA, in June of 1969. A row of 378' Coast Guard Cutters were lined up along the dock. The Chief Yeoman (E7 in charge of orders/transfers) took me to the window and told me to pick a number. I chose USCGC 719 and reported for duty on board the cutter *Boutwell* as a new Seaman Apprentice (E2) assigned to the deck force. The ship made patrols in the Atlantic, going as far north as Greenland and south to Bermuda. On my first patrol, July 1969, which was called Ocean Station Charlie, in the North Atlantic, we listened to the broadcast over Armed Forces Radio Network of Neil Armstrong landing and walking on the moon. During these 30+ day patrols, we would perform routine ship maintenance, emergency drills, and stand deck watches.

One of the major reasons we were out there was to provide important navigational assistance to aircraft flying between Europe and North America, as this was well before today's current navigational capabilities and DGPS. We were also constantly sampling the ocean water for salinity and temperature at various depths (STD'S). At certain depths and tempera-



That's me at the helm navigating Port-au-Prince Harbor, Haiti, prior to my Gloucester assignment, 1970.

tures, the salinity is different, creating clouds that submarines can hide under from sonar. We were mapping the oceans for our Navy.

Early in 1970, having advanced to Seaman (E3) and with four patrols under my belt, I was very comfortable in my duties and began studying to become a 3rd Class Boatswain's Mate (E4). The ship then received orders for an 18-month tour of duty in Vietnam. We sailed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (GITMO), for five weeks of Navy Fleet Training. Upon returning to Boston, we learned that, after all that training, our orders were canceled.

The Coast Guard vs. the Milkmen

I had served long enough on the cutter and could now request a transfer, which was granted. In June of 1970, I was transferred to Gloucester Small Boat Station on Dolliver Neck. This was a completely different Coast Guard from what I had become accustomed to. A big eye-opener for me happened that first week. We had a volleyball court in the sideyard of the station, and one day, after the noon chow, the Commanding Officer and his wife set up lawn chairs next to it and in drove several Hood's Milk trucks. Being new, I was slightly confused but soon learned what was happening. It turned out they were not delivering milk but brought several cases of beer! Just about every Thursday during the summer, we would play the Hoodsie Milkmen in volleyball. That isn't to say we didn't also work very hard. I learned how to operate a small boat in various sea conditions, take disabled fishing vessels in tow, dewater sinking vessels, participate in safety patrols, and so much more. I would also like to mention the generosity of the fishermen; once we had them safely moored at their berths, they would more often than not pass over to us enough fish to feed the whole station crew.

Meeting My Future Wife

By September of 1970, I was well established in my duties as a Coast Guard radio watch-stander and boat crewman. One of the station's cooks had a part-time job at the local Friendly's at Grant Circle in Gloucester, and he suggested that I apply for



Judy wearing her Friendly's uniform, with me in 1971.

a job. After receiving permission from the Commanding Officer, I went in and applied. A young, pretty high school girl was waitressing behind the counter. Sitting down, I introduced myself to the manager and explained why I was there, and he handed me an application. I then requested a cup of coffee from the waitress. Unbeknownst to me, this waitress had recently been in an auto accident and had lost three of her front teeth, so she had temporary caps in place. As she served me my coffee with a smile, one of the caps fell out and into my cup! Thus, I was introduced to Judy Sanborn.

The second introduction I had to Judy came after I was hired. I was in the changing room in the basement at Friendly's getting dressed for one of my first shifts, and in walks Judy with her bicycle at a rather awkward moment—you might say I was caught with my pants down!

I was blessed. I had already fallen in love with Gloucester, and then I fell head over heels for Judy. We were married in November 1971 at St. John's Episcopal Church on Middle Street, and our first son was born at Addison Gilbert Hospital. Our two other children are also Cape babies, one born on Cape Cod and the other in Cape May, NJ. (After 50-plus years of a wonderful marriage, I don't need to say anything more!)

Getting Involved in Gloucester, the First Time

By then, I was already a Third-Class Boatswain's Mate (E4) and was one of the more senior personnel at Station Gloucester. In the 70s, St. Peter's Fiesta and the International Dory Races were held the same week; the Blessing of the Fleet took place in front of the Fisherman at the Wheel, and there were lobster boat races in the outer harbor. Roughly 300 fishing vessels were



Having fun with my pumpkin head, 1971.



Our wedding day at St. John's Episcopal Church, Gloucester, 1971.

in Gloucester, including the old 110' wooden hulled mine sweeper converted into a fishing vessel *F/V Rockaway*, which I had the pleasure of towing in once. Police Officer Keith Trefry operated the police boat, and Frank Quirk ran the pilot boat. There were always one to two vessels anchored in the outer harbor waiting for their turn at the Quincy Cold Storage to be offloaded. I would also like to point out that Coast Guard personnel did not wear weapons on boardings as they do today.

By the end of summer 1973, the new Coast Guard Station was under construction at Harbor Loop, and I was looking at a transfer. In January 1974, I was transferred to a ship in Woods Hole, MA. Judy, our son, and I moved to Otis AFB. For the next 20 years, Judy and I moved at the needs of the service to nine different assignments including two tours in Hawaii. The second tour was onboard the 378' cutter *Jarvis* doing fisheries patrols in Alaska. One of my assigned duties onboard the ship was the Flight Deck Safety Officer, and I accrued over 300 hours of incident free launches and landings. After 24 years and becoming a Senior Chief Petty Officer (E8) in the service, I knew it was time to seek my own command.



My own *Top Gun* moment. I'm in the helmet, launching a helicopter from the flight deck of the *USCGC Jarvis*, in the Bering Sea, Alaska, 1983.



Changing of the Guard, 1994: From left to right, Capt. Gregory Ketchen, Commander Coast Guard Group Boston; BMCS Fred Marion, outgoing Officer in Charge, Coast Guard Station Gloucester; BMCS Jim Caulkett, incoming Officer in Charge, Coast Guard Station Gloucester; and Commander Lee S. Clark, Chaplain Corp, USN.

In the fall of 1993, while stationed in Detroit, I requested and was rewarded/granted command of Coast Guard Station Gloucester, MA. We had come full circle and were coming back home. Memorial Day Weekend 1994, I assumed command of Station Gloucester. I felt comfortable and relaxed as I took command but was shocked at how small the fishing fleet had become. Teddy Costa, Jack Jenkins, and Steve Amaral ran the police boat, and Frank Quirk and the *Can Do* were tragically lost at sea in the storm of 1978. We now had Massachusetts Environmental Police patrolling the waters, and Bruce Tobey (a classmate of Judy's) was Mayor.

International Dory Races and St. Peter's Fiesta were now held on separate weekends, and the Blessing of the Fleet was held on a private yacht ferrying the Cardinal around the harbor. There were three new marine events: The Howard Blackburn Challenge held in July, the Schooner Festival held Labor Day weekend, and the Seafood Festival held later in September. A highlight of my tour is that Station Gloucester was assigned one of five prototype 47' Self-righting Motor Life Boats. During this time, some of my crew took the 47' Motor Life Boat to Lunenburg,

Canada, for a demonstration to the Canadian Coast Guard. This resulted in the Canadian Coast Guard purchasing the rights to have several boats built for their service. I then had the opportunity to sail south with the 47' Motor Life Boat, visiting various Coast Guard Bases and Stations through Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, demonstrating it to the commands that would receive them in the future. During this trip, we were called upon to rescue a disabled sailboat, *Carpe Diem*, safely towing it to Montauk Point, New York. During these three years of testing/evaluating the boat, the crew of Station Gloucester recommended over 90 changes, with 50 of those accepted by the Coast Guard Naval Engineering Branch.

The Collapse of West Wharf in 1996

In August of 1996, I had been the Officer in Charge of Coast Guard Station Gloucester for just over a year and a half and had submitted my retirement papers for July 1997. The testing of the Motor Life Boat was proceeding smoothly, and we were preparing for the upcoming Annual Schooner Festival on Labor Day weekend.

Our good friend's mother had just passed away, and my wife Judy, our daughter Jennifer (home for the summer from college), and I attended the wake. The wake was in Danvers at a local funeral home, and I had informed the Officer of the Day (OOD) at the station I would be out of town.

After about 30 to 45 minutes, my beeper went off (no cell phones in 1996) and I could not believe the message streaming across the little screen: **West Wharf—Collapsed—Contact Immediately**. I excused myself, found a phone I could use, called the station, and spoke with the OOD, who explained that a portion of West Wharf had collapsed into the harbor with people in the water, and the boat crew was responding, "**All hands on deck.**" I found my wife and daughter and explained what happened and that we needed to leave immediately. Informing our friend of the incident, we were off. The funeral home was not far from Route 128, and once we entered 128, we were back at the station in 10 minutes—no exaggeration. Judy and Jennifer never said a word about my speed; they knew I needed to be at the station.

West Wharf was a three-story residential building directly opposite the station on Rocky Neck. My crew was sitting on the back deck at the station and heard/witnessed the collapse. The

Gloucester Police Boat was underway in the same vicinity and also heard the pilings cracking.

Upon arriving at the station, we witnessed hundreds of people on the surrounding piers and wharves watching. We could see the collapsed wharf with Gloucester Police and Fire on the scene. In shock and injured, several people were sitting on the curb outside the station building. Judy, Jennifer, and several of the crew took them into the mess deck to comfort them and give them water and coffee. My crew was deploying the oil boom to contain debris in the harbor, and Massachusetts Environmental Police were on the scene assisting.

The miracle of this event is that there were only minor injuries. The natural gas line that ran the length of West Wharf was severed but never ignited, which would have led to a more serious event.



Judy and I at my Coast Guard retirement, Gloucester, 1997.

After three successful years as Officer in Charge (OIC), working with all the great people in this community having been stationed on four Cutters, four Search and Rescue Small Boat Stations, and three major bases, and with 28 years, three months, and 18 days given to service and country, I retired from the Coast Guard on July 1, 1997.

The 375th Anniversary of Gloucester, Harbormaster, and Beyond



Judy and I leaving for "Olde Gloucester Days," part of the 375th celebration in 1998.
That's Frank McCracken's vintage Rolls-Royce he allowed us to drive.

Gloucester was preparing to celebrate her 375th birthday, to occur in 1998. In 1997, I was invited to volunteer on the 375th Committee. I was thrilled to work again with many of the same great people I had met throughout my time as OIC and many new 375th volunteers. I had a wonderful time organizing the various events for that year's celebration. At the end of 1998, as all the celebrating was coming to a close, another wonderful opportunity presented itself to me. Gloucester had decided in 1995/96 to create a civilian Harbormaster position, which became open, and in January 1999, I was hired as the Harbormaster for the City of Gloucester.

For the next 17½ years, I continued working with the same great committees, planning waterfront events, and assisting waterfront property owners with permitting processes in the harbor and the Annisquam River. I also dealt with mooring issues, established an annual safe boating class, and assisted in creating the Massachusetts Harbormaster Training Council. Another big part of the job was applying for and receiving numerous federal and state grants for improvements to various public landings throughout Gloucester. After one last St. Peter's Fiesta, I retired on June 30, 2016.

I have watched the sun rise over the English Channel and set over Siberia. Judy and I have been fortunate to live and travel to some beautiful places, including six years in Hawaii, but nowhere is as beautiful as Gloucester, Massachusetts.



Me and my Harbormaster truck, 1999.

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