

(Continued from page 13)

the U.S. remained neutral through much of the war and faced few threats in the Pacific theater after it entered the conflict. Consequently, the *Bear* continued her Bering Sea Patrols as she had before the war. *Bear* also provided humanitarian relief to regions outside of Alaska. For example, the cutter was laid up in San Francisco when the 1906 Earthquake struck. In the quake's aftermath, *Bear's* men immediately set to work using the cutter's steam launch to transport goods to the waterfront and worked with local authorities in search and rescue and law enforcement. During this effort, *Bear* personnel worked closely with U.S. Army units then under the overall command of General Adolphus Greely. After the relief effort, President Theodore Roosevelt personally thanked the Revenue Cutter Service for its "prompt, gallant and efficient work."

By the mid-1920s, *Bear* had served Alaska for over forty years and over thirty Bering Sea Patrols. During that career, the whaling fleet had sailed out of the Arctic fogs into the mists of memory and waves of miners had come and gone. As Alaskan settlements developed, civilizing influences once provided from the sea by *Bear* became locally available



Appearing very different from her last Greenland visit in 1884, USS *Bear* returned in 1944 as part of the Coast Guard's Greenland Patrol. (U.S. Coast Guard)

on land. Life in Alaska had become more civilized as new technology shortened distances between Alaska and the lower forty-eight states. These improvements included modern aids to navigation and lighthouses, the telegraph, military bases, steel steamships, the submarine cable, reliable aircraft and the radio. The venerable cutter had witnessed many changes in the north and, in 1927, President Calvin Coolidge officially signed *Bear* over to the City of Oakland to become a historic museum ship.

But the venerable *Bear* was destined for greater glory. After her retirement by the Coast Guard and her brief career as a floating museum, Arctic explorer Richard Byrd re-activated the famous cutter. In 1928, Byrd used *Bear* as one of two ships for his first Antarctic expedition in which he established the well-known research base at Little America. He returned home in 1930 and used *Bear* on a second expedition in 1933. Byrd's expeditions were the first American scientific missions to the Antarctic and they resulted in advanced discoveries in weather, climate and geography. Meantime, *Bear* still relied on her 19th century sail rig and coal-fired steam engine.

Describing his trusted ice-ship, Byrd claimed: "There was a joy and spirit to the *Bear's* attack . . . She was built for the ice . . . She could lower [her] head and bore in. Therein lay the merit of the honorable and ancient *Bear* . . ."

In the late 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt placed Rear Admiral Byrd in charge of the United States Antarctic Service. And, in 1939, Byrd employed *Bear* once again to reach his base in Antarctica. Prior to this cruise to the Antarctic, technological change had overtaken *Bear's* original design and construction. Her new diesel power plant no longer required a tall coal-fired smoke stack and *Bear's* barkentine rig was altered to support a scout plane. By 1941, with war clouds forming on the horizon, *Bear* evacuated the scientific personnel stationed at the Antarctic bases and returned to the States.

Bear not only served a variety of populations, she carried an ethnically and racially diverse crew. Like other Pacific-based cutters, *Bear* proved to be a cultural and ethnic "melting pot"--much more so than the nation she served. *Bear* carried a crew whose native lands not only included U.S. natives, but also Asian and Pacific Island nations, Europeans and Scandinavians. *Bear* held the distinction of carrying not only Michael Healy, the first African American to take a ship into the Arctic; she also carried George Gibbs, Jr., the first person of African descent to set foot on the Antarctic continent.

In 1944, at seventy years of age, *Bear* was re-activated by the Navy for service in Greenland, where she undertook her first mission as a United States ship in 1884. *Bear* served in the Greenland Patrol as USS *Bear*, only this time she looked very different from her first year in the Navy. In 1941, the Navy cut down her masts to support radio gear, added modern armament and equipped her to carry an amphibious reconnaissance aircraft. And unlike 1884, *Bear*

(Continued on page 15)