

The America's Cup Race... by Robert Mead (62-64 LtJg)



15 September 1962 President Kennedy waves to the America's Cup crew of the "Weatherly". Aboard the USS Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., off Newport, Rhode Island. Photograph by Cecil Stoughton, White House



This years finalists

I was recently listening to the radio when a commentator began lamenting the pitiful performance of Oracle Team USA in the 34th America's Cup competition. He rambled on about the embarrassment of both failed technology and lackluster team performance that had allowed Emirates Team New Zealand to build up an 8 to 1 advantage. Obviously, the next day was only a formality in which Team USA would once again be trounced. Thus, I was really surprised on Wednesday when someone at the office started talking about the final race in the series and the unbelievable comeback of the American team. I had no idea! Oracle Team USA had reeled off seven straight wins to even up the match. Wednesday's event was the nineteenth and final race in this "first to win 9" competition. And to top it off, the Oracle team won on Wednesday in one of the most remarkable rallies in American sports history.

This news reminded me of my involvement in an America's Cup that took place over fifty years ago. I had recently reported aboard my first ship, the U.S.S. Hugh Purvis, a Sumner-class destroyer of World War II vintage. It was the summer of 1962 when we were in-

formed that we might be an escort vessel in support of the upcoming America's Cup competition to be held in Newport, Rhode Island, our home port. That year, the America's Cup competition would be run by the New York Yacht Club, since they were the current holder of the cup. They held a competitive regatta to determine which boat would represent their club. Bus Mosbacher's Weatherly, Paul Shields' Columbia, and Ted Hood's Nefertiti competed for the opportunity to defend the cup. Weatherly, a Phil Rhodes designed boat that had been originally built for the 1958 competition, won the right to face the challenger. Weatherly had undergone significant changes since the 1958 cup races. The challenger was Gretel, the first Australian-built 12-meter racing yacht. She would be helmed by Jock Sturrock (Is that not the greatest athlete's name ever???)

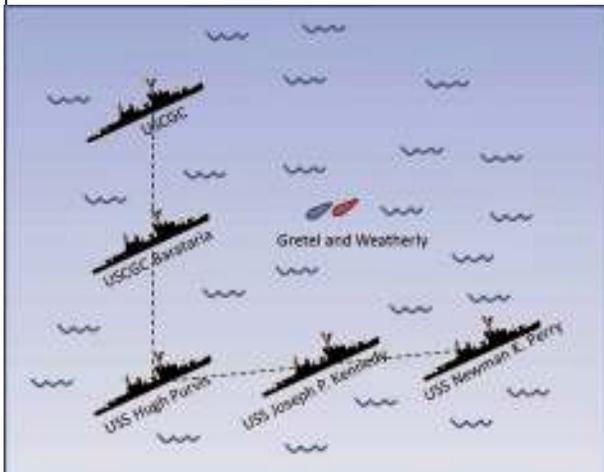
During these years, the race was a real gentleman's event. It took place off the coast of Newport, Rhode Island. Each morning, there was the ritual procession of vessels down the bay and past the old Brenton Reef lightship (about to be decommissioned, as the new Brenton Reef light tower was nearly finished and would soon be placed into service). This maritime entourage was made up of the escort ships (three navy destroyers and two Casco-class coast guard cutters), the judges' and officials' boats from the yacht club, the



Nefertiti – One of the ships eliminated during trials

competitors themselves, Weatherly and Gretel, and finally hundreds of pleasure craft of every description. The party atmosphere was palpable.

The navy and coast guard vessels had been scrubbed and painted and polished for weeks. After all, the President and First Lady would be among the spectators. The procedure each day was fairly straightforward. We would proceed to the "operating area" in which that day's competition would take place. The large government vessels would form a vee formation with the competing sailboats inside the vee and all pleasure boats outside. Only the judges and officials could be closer to the competitors than the navy and coast guard ships. My ship, the Hugh Purvis, was the flagship of the vee formation, which included the USS Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. (DD-850), the USS Newman K. Perry (DD-883), the USCGC Barataria (WHEC-381), and another cutter whose name I can't recall.



The ships formation

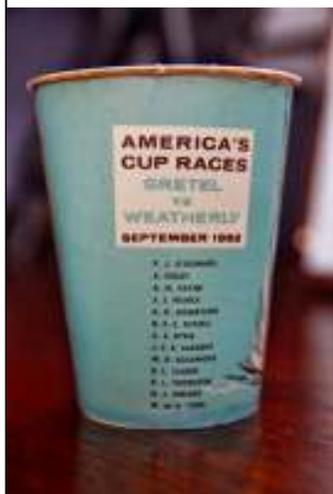
The President's entourage embarked each day on the Kennedy, named for the President's brother, a naval aviator who had died in an aircraft explosion in 1944. The navy had removed the #2 5-inch gun mount and created a "President's veranda" on the 01-level forward of the superstructure. The story circulated at the time was that the veranda had been planked with teak, but photographs taken on that platform lead me to conclude that a canvas surface was installed on the deck, probably to provide a non-slip surface.

Each of the escort ships was used to carry VIPs to the daily race. We had a few Medal of Honor winners, a couple of Congressmen and their parties, and an Indian Princess among our distinguished guests. I specifically recall Admiral Joseph James "Jocko" Clark, a veteran of both World Wars and Korea, and the first Native American to graduate from the Naval Academy. Admiral Clark was the recipient of the Navy Cross, the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, and the Navy Commendation medal. He was typical of the passengers that we had aboard for the Cup Races.

The White House had provided the chefs and stewards who fed our distinguished guests each day. Our ship, as well as the other two destroyers, had completed the Fleet Remodeling and Modernization (FRAM) program, during which a small helicopter hangar had been installed aft of the stacks on the 01-level. This hangar became the food service area, with a spectacular buffet each day. Nothing was spared.

The warships lined up in formation as we reached the site of the day's competition. Maintaining steerageway was a challenge because we were moving so slowly much of the time. Each day's competition involved a total course of 24 nautical miles, but some days' courses were triangular whereas others were windward-leeward. The first leg of each course was always into the wind.

At the end of each day's race, we'd proceed back into Newport Harbor up past Coaster's Harbor and Coddington Cove to the Navy piers, where transportation awaited our guests. The city of Newport awaited them and thousands of other spectators. There were dozens of parties each night, including many held at the renowned mansions of Newport. But that's a story for another time...



JFK and Jackie observe the race from the "veranda" aboard the USS Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. (DD-850)



Gretel surfs through to windward of Weatherly in the 1962 America's Cup - Maritime Productions Collection