

A cutterman of yesteryear

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A coastal path guides the ancient cutterman on a journey through bygone days. As he walks, memories of his time at sea rise—stirred by the sights, sounds, and sensations of the ocean.

Above, kindred spirits watch over the ancient with fondness. Once cuttermen themselves, they speak his name with reverence, for they sailed in service, just as he did.

The ancient's three dogs accompany him, coaxing him along the well-worn path, eager to share in their daily routine. They gaze at him with affection, aware that their beloved guardian is lost in thought, reflecting on his past life at sea.

The ancient's gaze drifts toward the vast, shimmering sea. As golden hour unfolds, the sky is painted in shades of poppy-red—a sailor's delight beneath Poseidon's watchful eye. The majestic hues of the sunset create a scene of timeless beauty.

As light filters through the clouds, like sunlight through the stained-glass windows of a grand cathedral, it stirs memories in the ancient—evoking the sundowns he once watched from his vigil at sea.

An unassuming man, the ancient carries the quiet pride of a life well-lived, his face etched with the tales of many years spent on Coast Guard cutters. His life at sea, marked by unforgettable events, is written on his face.

As he squints against the energy radiating from the horizon, the lines etched by age deepen. He lived a storied life at sea, written in the company of fellow cuttermen. The ancient has seen and experienced much alongside his cherished shipmates.

Though not overly religious, his faith in the service and in a higher purpose remained unshaken. He marveled at the majesty of the sea and shared tales of epic journeys with his shipmates. His time at sea, alongside his fellow cuttermen, was a defining chapter that shaped his character.

His body, weathered by time and the relentless motion of the sea, bears the weight of years spent standing watch on the steel decks of cutters. The pounding waves have left their mark, and now, each step he takes carries the weight of those many days at sea—a testament to his service and endurance. Though the years have taken their toll on his body, his spirit remains steadfast, fueled by the unbreakable bond with his fellow cuttermen, their shared missions, and the undying call of the sea.

As he ambles on, the ancient reminisces about his days at sea, sharing stories with his attentive pack in his gentle manner.

He speaks of his time as a man-at-arms, of how his allegiance was to country, recalling his readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect life, liberty, and the homeland—just as many others have done in the service's storied history.

He recounts the wonder of a blue moon kissing the ocean's horizon and seeing the fleeting green flash as the sun dipped below the western skyline, heralding dusk. He describes seeing the rings of Saturn through the big-eyed binoculars, marveling at the Milky Way illuminating the night sky when

the ship lay darkened. He tells of watching whales breach playfully by the dozen as the cutter glided through a tranquil sea, and of encountering other creatures of God and breathtaking sights that can only be seen at sea.

As the ancient recounts his stories, seagulls hover above, their squawking voices a familiar accompaniment. He welcomes their company, for the sight of gulls at sea always signaled land was near, the return from an adventurous patrol with tales to tell. They are drawn to one another—a bond forged by a fearless, persistent nature they both share.

The ancient speaks of sweltering heat in the tropics, freezing cold at higher latitudes, and being tossed by gale-force winds and thunderous seas. He recalls enduring sleepless nights, grueling watch rotations, cramped quarters, and long separations from loved ones. Yet, through it all, he pressed on, as a cutterman must—carrying out the service's noble missions with unwavering resolve.

His stories are vivid—sometimes joyous, sometimes tinged with sorrow. He recalls guiding vessels safely to port, rescuing mariners in peril, and guarding the country's shores from those who would do harm.

With the scent of the ocean in the air and the briny breeze upon his skin, the ancient regales his companions with tales of intercepting illegal drugs from reaching home shores, enforcing laws for country's welfare, preserving marine life for future generations, and exploring the world's wonders. His life, a purpose fulfilled, was spent in service to something greater than himself.

Amid the attentive gaze of his dogs, the old cutterman speaks of serving alongside the other branches of the armed forces, defending the country's blessings; helping set the

foundation and course of the service; and comforting the crew while retrieving the bodies of many lost souls who perished at sea. These stories, he proclaims to his audience—both those underfoot and those fluttering above—define what it means to be a cutterman, a title no others can claim.

Above, the angels listen with affection. They know these stories well, for they too have their own tales from a bygone era, when they sailed the seas in flesh.

The spirits understand how the ancient forged the inner compass that guided him through life's challenges—one anchored in the service's values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty. Never bending or wavering, the angels reflect on how these values give the service's keel its strength, and how they are engraved in the heart of every cutterman.

The spirits nod in agreement, knowing that a cutterman's service transcends the color of the ship's hull—white, black, or red. It is always a vessel of honor, serving both defense and compassion. The service's name, boldly embossed on the hull, preceded by its stripes and emblem, is recognized the world over—a mighty force, born and bred to sail the seas as sentinels, preserving the nation's interests as set forth in Alexander Hamilton's vision.

The ancient watches the waves approaching, mindful of the sea's unforgiving nature—cruel if treated recklessly, yet capable of both serenity and violent storms that shook the marrow in his bones.

The ancient speaks of how every cutterman of today is bound to the past, their duty rooted in the traditions of those who stood the watch before them. He, himself, is the service's living history. The ancient honors the ghosts of cuttermen past, knowing that standing

watch—whether on ships of old or new—is an unbroken tradition that transcends time.

Forged in tradition, the beliefs of a cutterman begin the moment one crosses the gangway, pausing to honor and respect the country's being. This rich heritage, shaped by those of yesteryear, empowers each cutterman—today and tomorrow—to dutifully stand the watch and fulfill their duty to the country.

The spirits reminisce about the vastness of the majestic oceans, where the horizon is seen but can never be reached. Being a cutterman is about yearning to know what lies beyond the curvature where heaven and earth meet, sparking a deep curiosity. It is a journey of discovery—of one's soul—driven by duty, honor, and courage.

The ancient embraced this calling, for he shared a deep connection with the sea. The briny adventure flowed through his soul with the shifting tides. Standing watch in the vast depths of the oceans was sublime—a perfect harmony between the crew's mission and the infinite expanse of the universe that surrounded them. It was not just a job; it was a profound mission, shared with his shipmates as they sailed the endless waters, facing the boundless challenges of the ocean.

The ancient spoke quietly of the demands of life aboard a cutter—both physically and mentally taxing. It tests one's character, revealing strength in some, while others break under the strain. For most, serving on a cutter is an arduous yet rewarding duty, one they fulfill as asked by the service. And though the work is grueling and the separation hard, they know that their time aboard the cutter has made them stronger, shaping them into something better for having answered the call.

The ancient tells of how a cutter and its crew carve their presence upon the ocean's waves,

their exploits immortalized in songs and sonnets of sacrifice, devotion, and brotherhood. The beauty in the crew's movement and the awe of their deeds are scribed in verses and passages, woven into the service's chronicles for all time.

As the briny sea sings its song with the waves coming ashore, the ancient hears the familiar symphony of a cutter underway—the hum of its engines, the creaking of the rigging, the rhythms of life at sea. Some sounds bring comfort, others signal action, but all serve to remind him of the watch he once stood.

Tough his time standing the watch has passed to a new generation, a wistful longing remains—to take the watch once more and feel that unmatched esprit de corps. Though his watch has ended, the ancient still yearns for the camaraderie of his fellow cuttermen, for the service is unparalleled, and the bonds formed at sea endure long after the final watch has been stood.

The ancient spoke to his attentive pack, remarking that the camaraderie forged in the unique crucible of service at sea aboard a ship of arms never truly fades. Once one has stood watch alongside seafaring men and women on a cutter, enduring the cramped quarters, harsh demands, and the ceaseless rhythm of the mission, the bond formed in those shared moments becomes forever etched in memory. This camaraderie, rooted in mutual respect and the solemn duty of the watch, becomes an intrinsic part of one's identity, surpassing time and distance.

The spirits stood alongside the ancient while he was at sea. He felt their presence many times—whether quiet in the stillness of night or loud in the heat of action—offering him comfort and strength. The spirits were there, too, when the ancient was relieved of the watch for the last time. They witnessed his

final departure as he was piped ashore. As the ancient made his way off the ship, his shipmates stood at the rails and lined the boards, paying their respects for a watch well stood and for being a true shipmate.

As a ripple fades into still waters, the ancient's deeds for his country slip quietly into obscurity. The angels observe that with each toll of the watch bell, marking the passing of a new generation of cuttermen, the ancient's noble acts—once recorded in the ship's log—sink deeper into the archives of oblivion. Yet, the angels also note that the legacy of a cutterman is never truly forgotten. It lives on in the hearts of those who carry the torch, with each new generation adding to the proud history of the service.

Though time may erase his name, the ancient's life at sea strengthened the service and the country, leaving a legacy beyond memory's reach. The old cutterman is content with the poignancy of how time fades past deeds. He proudly fulfilled the missions of a revered service alongside his shipmates, knowing that their work, though unseen, mattered.

He has no regrets about the sacrifices made as a sentinel for his country. Though he missed many of life's precious moments while away from home, the ancient stood watch so others could live those moments in peace. His impact on those he served with, and on those he served, brings him quiet pride.

The ancient cherishes his identity as a cutterman, for all it taught him through grit and the bond of standing watch alongside his spiritual kin. He holds the cutterman insignia in his heart, and its earthly form rests proudly in his shadow box.

The spirits reflect on how the old cutterman forged an unbreakable link in the chain of

service. The ancient sailed a course set by duty and love for his shipmates. The wake he left behind strengthened the country, allowing future generations of cuttermen to continue their service to the flag.

One day, the ocean's sirens will call the ancient's spirit, and he will join those cuttermen who have gone before him. As a guardian angel for those standing watch at sea, his presence—quiet and eternal—will merge with the voices of cuttermen past, offering strength to those who serve.

Blue hour approaches, and twilight gives way to the deepening dark. The painted sky fades, and heaven's lights begin to emerge. The ancient's daily walk nears its end. As he and his companions retreat for the evening, he casts one last glance toward the sea.

Over the horizon, the ancient knows that scores of cuttermen are still standing the watch for country. In his quiet way, he offers a prayer for their safe return and successful missions. He knows that, like him, they too will one day carry the fond memories of their shipmates and the nostalgic stories of yesteryear. They, too, will reflect on their time as cutterman when they are relieved of the watch for the last time, cherishing those memories forever.

Returning home, the ancient's thoughts linger on his time at sea, where every wave and every watch helped shape the man he became. His service may be behind him, but the spirit of being a cutterman endures, forever etched in the memories of those who sailed beside him. He knows that the bond he shares with his shipmates, forged in salt and sacrifice, will endure for all time.

As he greets his wife, their silent understanding speaks volumes. The love between them is palpable in the quiet

exchange of glances. She knows, without words, where his thoughts wander when he walks the coastal path. In her loving, unspoken way, she gifts him that time every day, offering him space to reflect, knowing he will always return to her.

The ancient knows he is blessed. He learned much in his years as a cutterman, and he feels the depth of his wife's love, unwavering through it all. He carries the weight of the sacrifices she made—tending to life's duties and bearing its burdens while he stood watch for country.

He fondly recalls how she was always there when the cutter returned, standing on the pier with the other families, smiling and waving. He remembers the warmth of her kiss and the comfort of her embrace after long months at sea, accomplishing deeds of service.

The angels nod in reverence as they watch the silent exchange of love between the ancient and his wife when he returns from his walks. She, too, sacrificed for service and country, supporting him in his dream of being a cutterman. And she, too, has the angels watching over her.

Tomorrow, the ancient will walk the coastal path again with his faithful companions, until the day he is called to stand a higher watch. But for now, the old cutterman cherishes the memories of his adventures at sea and the beloved shipmates he shared them with, breathing in the purity of the sea with each passing day.