

Washington Island Military Archives

James Gau

Born: 1927 DeKalb,
IL

Died: 2014, Island

Period of Service: US Coast
Guard Auxiliary 28 years,
Navy WWII

Sources: *DCA 1/17/2004*

Jim Gau's first military training was in high school at Northern Teachers College. In 1944, at age 17, he enlisted in the Navy, and was sent to boot camp in California. After that he was sent to Great Lakes for basic and advanced engineering, including diesel engines. His first choice was submarine duty but he was rejected because he was considered too tall, and also the service needed him more as an instructor than as a submariner. Later he was sent to Mare Island, CA to become a submariner in the Mariannas Islands just as the War ended. Then he was sent to Guam to assist in building fire protection for docks.

His sub was called *Pomfret* and he was one of 74 young men in the crew who had to sleep on steel beds atop the torpedoes. They were involved "in some battles,...but it was just a job." He and a friend oversaw Japanese prisoners who helped dig ditches for the water system. At that time Guam was just a lot of coral dust. It was there he recalls that he saw his first jet plane roaring over the mountains. Jim's outfit was recalled on 24 hour notice when the Korean War broke out, but his name wasn't called. His friend did go, though, and his ship had a hole shot in the side. He wrote Jim saying "Wish you were here."

Jim's commanding officer gave Jim special recognition, saying "he has performed his regular duties in an outstanding manner and has shown great initiative in assuming other duties not required of him. His untiring efforts, long hours of work and thorough knowledge of the machinery installed have resulted in excellent performance of this machinery far beyond its expected duration of operation."

James Gau was recognized as 'Auxiliarist of the Year' in 2004 at the Division Change of Watch by Vice Captain David Given. In that time Jim "held many of the flotilla staff positions, bringing to each of them the same high level of dedication and enthusiasm that he has for his present position of flotilla commander. His list of qualifications reads like a "Who's Who" of individuals. He is the flotilla commander. He is the membership training officer, helping members who want to better themselves. He is crew qualified on regular Coast Guard boats. He is coxswain qualified. He is a master instructor. He has served as the ADSO for Auxiliary Air Operations. He runs the 9th Western Air Observer Program.

"He is Watchstander qualified. He is known as Keeper of the keys for Coast Guard Station Washington Island. Anyone needing access to the station during off hours can contact Jim for help. He has been... very involved in boating skills and seamanship classes and other use of boater safety.

"Finally, despite the fact that Jim is firmly entrenched in the uppermost part of the state, on an island, it is a rare occasion when he does not attend monthly division meetings in Green Bay, even though doing this is costly and time consuming for him.

James Gau

“Auxiliarist Gau’s diligence, perseverance, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.”

Jim’s wife, Marilyn, was also a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. She also wrote regular columns in the Washington Island *Observer* on nature as observed from their home on Little Lake.

