

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 228:

USCGC INGHAM (WHEC-35)

Key West Quay

www.uscgcingham.org/

Saturday, October 11, 7 PM



Shipyard Export Ale (draft) "\$0.00"

This was a DCH, baby, a DCH. Barhoppin' a U-nited States Coast Guard Cutter! Hell, yeah. The USCGC INGHAM, in an effort to bring more people, more attention, and more money to their maritime museum, decided earlier this summer to institute Sunset Happy Hour on the foredeck. What a concept.

[The CG prefers all upper case letters for their boat names; I'm not just shouting it out to be theatrical.]

I first heard of this gig at work quite a few weeks ago. A retired Coast Guard dude came in to get some stuff, and he mentioned it was for the bar on the cutter. This, obviously, caught my attention. They had not yet started doing it yet; it would commence in a few weeks.

So, now it was a few weeks past that first few weeks, and this Hop was overdue. I might have hit it sooner, but there was some coordinating to do. There were a few nights when I was outa work in time and thought about biking my ass over there, but I knew Jan really wanted to be in on this Hop, so I couldn't just wing it.

Even this night was a scramble. We threw it together at the last minute and had to rush from different starting points to get to the ship before sundown. We texted back and forth with our respective progresses, and finally met up behind the County Courthouse. It would have been sooner -- J&B and Double-A were calling my name for about a block or so -- but I had my earbuds in, with Buffalo Strange's *Brighten My Day* crankin' and, well, you know how that kinda thing goes.

Time was of the essence, though -- whatever that means -- and we were in serious Hurry Mode. It wasn't Emergency Rush Mode -- we were not about to break into a run or anything stupid like that -- but we were long-stridin',

for sure. Trouble was, my long-stride and Jan's long-stride are on vastly different scales. It was all good, though; we approached the ramp with four minutes to spare.

USCGC INGHAM has essentially been put out to pasture. Done with its tour of duty, replaced by newer technology, the noble ship has been turned into the aforementioned "floating museum." Tours are offered daily, and all that. At the bottom of the gangplank (if that's what it's called), a young Coast Guard dude intercepted us to ask for money. There was a \$5 donation required (I always get a kick out of the required donation concept), BUT it included a free drink, on the house. So, for just five bucks, I get a *free drink?* Where do I sign up??



Again, all good. We forked over the fanners and boarded the boat.

The bar was a very loose and temporary set-up. Pretty much just a kegerator and a big white wooden box that served as the actual bar. A bowl of snacks sat on the top

of a big trash barrel. It was obvious that a foredeck bar was not part of the original blueprint for this vessel. Dunno why. Seems like the crew would have been all for it.

Beige plastic chairs were set out along the west-facing railing. Lawn furniture on a boat, gotta like it. We procured our beverages -- appropriately a Shipyard for me, light beers for B and Aa, and the Sangria for J -- from Fritz, the very good-natured barkeep (and the man who had been in my shop) and pulled a few chairs over to the rail.



I'd say there were about 20 other people here. I just did say it, in

fact. We made it an even two dozen. \$120 in come-a-board cash. Not a windfall, but it will add up. Plus all the not-free refills and such.

The sunset itself was tame this day. Clouds blanketed the horizon and Old Sol had cuddled down into them by the time we seated ourselves. The afterglow was very cool, though, as it almost always is. Some crepuscular rays streaked over the cloud tops, giving that Fingers Of God look to anyone who grew up a Catholic, with the Chuck White comics and all that dumbass brainwashing bushwa. (That might be kinda harsh. Ehh. Screw it. I blew my chance at Heaven long ago.)



I strolled a bit to snap some picky-wicks, but mostly it was a sit-and-gaze-to-the-west experience. The breeze was awesome, and it was just one of those damn-glad-to-be-here-in-KW things. The couple beside us were Okies who were pretty damn happy to be here too.

B&J and Aa decided to head off to parts unknown after one drink, but I was digging it too much to leave. I ordered up a second bev and took a new seat up near the bow as the dusk slowly turned to dark. Quite a few others departed, but almost half the crowd stayed. It was just so damn nice there, and it was so freaking cool to be hanging out with a cold beer on the deck of a cutter.

The inevitable hit-the-head aspect involved a negotiation of a steep flight of stairs (virtually a ladder that you walked down forwards). They make 'em like that for the fit and nimble crew members. There had been no concern by the designers for the fumble-stumble of senescent downbound drunks.

The digging continued and I ordered up a third beer. There was music in the air, too, with some cool jazzy tunes being piped across the deck. Sooooo relaxing.

I was not the last to leave. A half-dozen people outlasted me. I gave the barkeeps a big thumbs-up and headed off down the ramp.

It really was a Damn Cool Hang (DCH).

