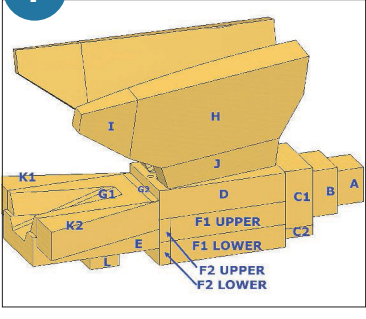



Making a figurehead In five not-so-easy steps

1




Design: Blocks of urethane foam were assembled using computer-aided design into what would become the figurehead's "master."

2



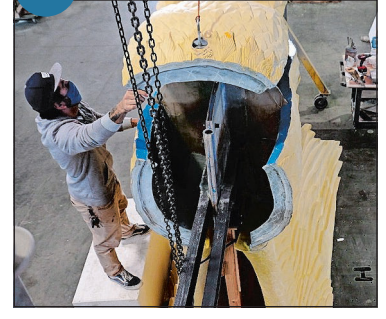
Carving: Gouges and chain-saws were used to carve the blocks, which could be taken apart and reassembled, into a finished sculpture.

3




Moldmaking: An experimental material was sprayed on the disassembled pieces and hardened into molds, which were filled with fiberglass.

4



Assembly: The fiberglass pieces were put together around a structure of supports, and "body work" removed seams between pieces.

5



Painting: Gold leaf was expensive and no existing gold paint looked right, so a paint that appears gold from all angles had to be invented.

GRAPHIC BY SCOTT RITTER AND JOHN RUDDY/THE DAY | PHOTOS COURTESY SHANE KINMAN AND DARREN SCHURIG

Eagle figureheads have a history of their own

FROM A1
help from a second sculptor, Alexandre Safonov, and tools ranging from gouges to chainsaws. The project also had a few more curveballs to throw him.

When the Coast Guard claimed what was then called the Horst Wessel as a war prize from Nazi Germany, its new name had nothing to do with the carved bird on its prow, the first of the ship's five figureheads.

"I thought it a rare co-incidence that the future *Eagle* should have such a figurehead," Gordon McGowan, the ship's first American captain, wrote later.

The eagle clutched a wreath in its talons, and inside the wreath was a swastika, which was removed. The owner of a shipyard in Bremerhaven, where the ship was prepared for the U.S. in 1946, approached McGowan with a large, flat package. Inside was a gift: a piece of teak, hand-carved into the Coast Guard shield, to replace the Nazi symbol.

"This final touch made our figurehead complete," McGowan wrote.

But the original eagle didn't last long. Around 1953, Henry Guilloz, a woodcarver at Mystic Seaport, spotted a different eagle figurehead on a wall at the academy. It was possibly from the *Salmon P. Chase*, a training ship of the Revenue Cutter Service, the Coast Guard's predecessor.

At Guilloz's suggestion, the older figurehead was installed on *Eagle* and the original sent to the Seaport for display. The decision soon looked like a mistake.

The *Chase* figurehead was only 5 feet long, a third the size of the original. It had been right for the smaller ship, but on the 295-foot *Eagle* it looked, by several accounts, "like a pigeon."

On Jan. 27, 1967, the pigeon escaped catastrophe. In fogbound Chesapeake Bay, *Eagle* collided with a freighter, smashing its bow. The impact should have destroyed the figurehead, but it had been removed for repairs.

The following year, the German eagle was returned by Mystic Seaport and a fiberglass replica cast from a mold. This third figurehead was installed in 1971 but almost immediately damaged by weather, and it lasted just a few years.

When *Eagle* entered New London Harbor on March 12, 1976, it was sporting a 13-foot mahogany eagle covered in gold leaf, finished in time for the nation's bicentennial. But the fourth figurehead (the one that was just replaced) got less attention than another change to the ship. For the first time, Coast Guard racing stripes



The new figurehead awaits installation on the *Eagle* after its predecessor, seen at rear, was removed last October at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore. The previous figurehead had been on the ship since 1976.

slashed across the hull, prompting sustained outrage from nautical purists.

As figureheads have come and gone, a recurring issue has been the appearance of the original, carved by an unknown artist in 1936. Charles Lansing, a University of Connecticut history professor specializing in the Third Reich, said the original shows a mix of traditional and modern styles typical of Nazi art.

A Coast Guard librarian once speculated that the availability of the pigeon was a convenient excuse to get rid of its predecessor.

"It is evident that a certain feeling of hostility toward the figurehead once existed based on imagined Germanic characteristics," he wrote in 1969.

When the replica was created two years later, the project's sponsor, an admiral's widow, expressed reservations about its "Teutonic design."

On the other hand, a 1979 op-ed in *The Day* proposed restoring the swastika and displaying the German bird as a reminder of Nazi evil.

Kinman knew the Coast Guard's wish to again return to the original style was a bad idea.

"It's just got that Nazi feel to it," he said.



The new figurehead leads the way as the *Eagle* passes New London Harbor Light on Monday, March 7.

From the start, Kinman was curious about *Eagle's* history, but no one could tell him much. So an email just as he started carving contained an unwelcome surprise. The Coast Guard was nervous because someone had learned a long-ago accident may have changed the bow shape.

That brought work to a halt, as it was uncertain whether the figurehead could be precisely fitted to the ship. A direct scan of the bow was imperative, and the added expense

required approval from Congress. Once it was done, minor alterations were made.

Other delays plagued the project, one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and another by government furloughs, which left the work temporarily unfunded.

When the master was complete, it was disassembled and spray-on molds made from its 50 or so parts. These were filled with a fiberglass composite that formed the quarter-

inch-thick skin of the final product. The pieces were put together as a shell around an internal structure of supports, the rest of the space filled with an expanding foam.

Gold leaf was supposed to cover the exterior, but this was yet another obstacle. Kinman said the price of gold had risen, making the cost prohibitive.

That left gold paint, and he considered thousands of varieties, but none looked like gold leaf. So he did something most people wouldn't think of: He invented a paint after much experimenting turned up a key ingredient that yielded the right look.

"I've never seen anybody pull a fake gold leaf off, and we did it," he said.

The climax of the project was the installation in Baltimore in October. Kinman shipped the figurehead, then bundled his family into a motorhome for a cross-country trip so they could share the big moment.

But things went wrong immediately. The motorhome broke down, and amid the delay, the Coast Guard moved up the work by a week. Kinman turned around and got on a plane, but it was too late.

"I completely missed the installation," he said.

Chief Warrant Officer Melissa Polson, *Eagle's* sailmaster, said the figurehead was raised into position with a crane at least five times over several weeks as yard workers struggled to get the right position on the bow. They also had to create new mounts to hold it in place.

"It wasn't going to be just a plug-and-play replacement," she said.

Kinman arrived in time to do a last-minute touch-up on the mounted figurehead, but his specialized tools had missed a connecting flight. With *Eagle* ready to sail for New London, he anxiously awaited delivery from the airline, finishing the work on the last possible day.

Then, "the grand finale was we were supposed to get some drone footage" as *Eagle* left the dock on Nov. 8, Kinman said.





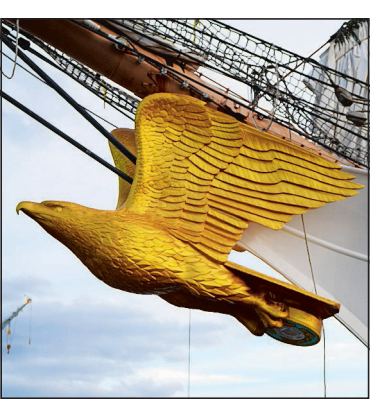
But the drone pilot backed out, nervous about operating over water. A replacement was found, but as he and Kinman set off in a boat, the drone rose a foot, caught on a railing, flipped over and sank.

Still, there was one perfect moment. No land or other boats were in sight, the light was ideal, and Kinman was able to simply admire the ship, "with my eagle just glowing on the bow."

"That was it," he said. "That was the moment. It was incredible." j.ruddy@theday.com

Five figureheads

Eagle's new figurehead is the fifth to grace the bow of the Coast Guard's training ship since it was built in Nazi Germany in 1936. Here's a brief history.

1936-c. 1953	c. 1953-1971	1971-1976	1976-2021	2021-
<p>Sculptor: Unknown Length: 14 feet Material: Mahogany Current location: CG Museum</p>  <p>After the first figurehead, which originally included a swastika, was replaced, it was displayed for a few years at the entrance to Mystic Seaport before being returned to the Coast Guard. (DAY FILE PHOTO)</p>	<p>Sculptor: Attr. to John Bellamy Length: 5 feet Material: Pine Current location: CG storage</p>  <p>A much smaller figurehead, possibly from the Revenue Cutter Service training ship <i>Salmon P. Chase</i>, has a murky history and was badly out of scale on the <i>Eagle</i>. Decorative "trailboards" that were installed on the bow to make the figurehead look bigger were destroyed in a 1967 collision. (COAST GUARD HERITAGE ASSET COLLECTION)</p>	<p>Sculptor: None Length: 14 feet Material: Fiberglass Current location: Uncertain</p>  <p>Eagle's third figurehead, a replica of the original, is hoisted into place in 1971. It might be the same eagle now at the entrance to the Coast Guard Foundation in Stonington. (U.S. COAST GUARD ACADEMY)</p>	<p>Sculptor: Robert Lee Perry Length: 13 feet Material: Mahogany Current location: CG storage</p>  <p>The fourth figurehead was created for <i>Eagle's</i> participation in OpSail 1976 and the nation's bicentennial celebration. Though overshadowed by the ship's "racing stripes" controversy, it lasted 45 years. This was taken in October 2020. (SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY)</p>	<p>Sculptor: Shane Kinman Length: 15 feet Material: Fiberglass Current location: Eagle</p>  <p>Shane Kinman spent three years creating the <i>Eagle's</i> new figurehead. But he was delayed in arriving for the installation at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore in October. By the time he got there, the work was already done. (TERRY KILBY)</p>