

The United States Coast Guard

1790 To The Present

A History

Revised Edition

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To the men and women of the USCG
who have served with honor and courage.

Thomas P. Ostrom, Rochester, Mn.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1961, I accompanied two Wisconsin friends from Superior to the office of the United States Coast Guard recruiter in Duluth, Minnesota. The Duluth-Superior Harbor serves commercial shipping on the western terminus of Lake Superior. The Great Lake's expanse, frightening storms, and extremes of humid continental climate challenge the U.S. Coast Guard personnel so appropriately stationed there.

Port security, aids to navigation, search and rescue, law enforcement, marine inspection and ice breaking duties are among the responsibilities of this element of the U.S. armed forces. The Coast Guard meets those challenges daily in U.S. waters and overseas.

My friends, William Frels and Harvey Hoven, and I had just graduated from college and were about to embark on exciting ventures in the USCG Reserve. We entered basic and advanced training at USCG Base, Alameda, California. After rigorous training and some ocean going experience, we returned home to continue USCG monthly meetings, summer training and education, and our civilian careers.

I subsequently taught secondary and college courses in history, geography and anthropology. Bill and Harvey went on to successful careers in banking, finance and investment. Our USCGR obligations ended in 1969, but our interest in the USCG prevailed. I continued to monitor the history and contemporary activities of the proud service.

It is from that experience that the idea for this history of the United States Coast Guard germinated. The research completed and knowledge gained made me all the more appreciative of the Coast Guard motto, "Semper Paratus." Indeed, the Coast Guard, throughout its complex history from the time of the Revenue Marine Service to the present, has confirmed its gallant motto, "Always Ready."

CHAPTER 1

COAST GUARD ORIGINS

The U.S. Revenue Marine and Life Saving Services (1790-1915)

The United States Coast Guard traces its origins to 1790, but the official USCG name was designated in 1915. The Coast Guard is the product of the assimilation of several government agencies over a long period of time.

When America was a British colony, the first lighthouse was built in Boston Harbor on Little Brewster Island in 1716. The lighthouse was an aid to navigation to guide ships along the rocky Atlantic coast. In August of 1789, the first Congress federalized the lighthouse that had been built by the colonists, and funded the construction and maintenance of buoys and lighthouses. These early lighthouses were sturdy stone structures with thick walls whose lights under the care of keepers guided mariners into dangerous ports. Oil wick lamp lights were amplified by large optical lenses, reflectors and prisms.

Where lighthouses could not be placed, government lightships were stationed at strategic locations in coastal waters. The first lightship was located in Chesapeake Bay in 1820 under the supervision of the Lighthouse Service. Storms sometimes blew lightships off location and other ships sometimes sunk them. On May 16, 1934, “the Olympic, sister ship of the ill fated Titanic, struck and sank the Nantucket Shoals Lightship (No. 117) in fog and drove the vessel to the bottom with the loss of seven (of eleven) crewmen.” Hundreds of these floating lighthouses guided mariners until the 1980’s when the vessels were superseded by sophisticated electronic buoys

(“A Historical Overview: Aids to Navigation; Lightships...,” CGHO, January 1999).

Upon winning independence from the United Kingdom in the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the former British subjects governed themselves by a states rights oriented union of former colonies stretching from the southern boundary of British Canada to Spanish Florida. The first constitution of the United States was the Articles of Confederation which was designed to maximize the autonomy of each state.

The Articles by definition failed to forge national unity. To remedy the situation, the Constitutional Convention, with representation from each of the states, met in Philadelphia in 1787 and created the federal Constitution which was ratified by the states in 1788 and went into effect in 1789.

Revolutionary War general and first U.S. president, George Washington, was determined to put the fledgling nation on a strong political and financial footing. On August 4, 1790, President Washington signed an Act of Congress “to regulate the collection of duties imposed by law on the tonnage of ships or vessels, and on goods, wares and merchandise, imported into the United States.”

Ten boats “for securing the collection of revenue” were built, and officers and men were hired in this first U.S. navy to operate the vessels in coastal waters and on the high seas. During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress authorized a navy to battle the British fleet, but it was disbanded at the end of the war.

The first navy of the United States consisted of the ten “revenue cutters” built to enforce customs laws, save lives at sea, and apprehend smugglers and pirates. The origins of the U.S. Coast Guard began with the Revenue Cutter or Revenue Marine Service formally inaugurated by act of law in 1790.

Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton recommended the creation of the Revenue Service, and sent a detailed “Letter Of Instructions To The Commanding Officers of the Revenue Cutters” explaining their duties, powers of enforcement, and the professional traits (“prudence, moderation, and good temper”) they should exhibit. Hamilton manifested those leadership qualities as a brave Revolutionary War officer and in his service as President Washington’s treasury secretary, during which time he laid the financial and commercial foundations of the new Republic. Hamilton enunciated many of the political philosophies that define the basic principles of the federal republic.

Hamilton required “that a regular journal be kept in each cutter” describing “all occurrences relative to the execution of the laws” and that “the coasts, inlets, bays and rivers of the United States” be studied and described in such ways “as may be useful in the interests of navigation” (“Hamilton’s Letter...,” Office of Coast Guard Historian).

The Revenue Cutter (or Revenue Marine) Service of 1790 set the stage for the dual role of the future United States Coast Guard: military service with the added responsibility of serving the civil function of law enforcement and the protection of life and property.

For the first years of the U.S. Republic, the Revenue Service “was the only Navy we had...this little collection of cutters, with their swivel guns, muskets, pistols and cutlasses” (Halberstadt, p. 4).

President John Adams was determined to strengthen the military forces of the United States. The U.S. Navy had been disbanded at the end of the Revolutionary War, so when North African Algerians waged war on U.S. merchant vessels (1794), only Treasury Department revenue cutters were available for defense. Congress authorized the arming of larger ships, a plan not fully completed when the conflict ended (1796). Congress authorized a new Department of the Navy (1798), and the U.S. built more than 30 ships by 1799, in time to do battle with France on the high seas in the Undeclared Naval War of 1798-1800 (Tindall , pp. 330-31).

During the war (1799) Congress set the precedent followed ever since and authorized the placement of the Revenue Cutter Service (Revenue Marine) under the U.S. Navy in time of war. The cutters captured several French vessels in the conflict.

The Revenue Marine and the future Coast Guard fought gallantly in several conflicts and wars on the high seas, covered in subsequent chapters. In 1832, South Carolina nullified federal tariff laws, and refused to collect duties on imported goods. President Andrew Jackson ordered five cutters to Charleston Harbor “to take possession of any vessels arriving from a foreign port, and defend against any attempts to dispossess the Customs Office of her custody.” The former general defiantly added, “if a single drop of blood shall be shed there in opposition to the laws of the United States I will hang the first man I can lay my hands on, upon the first tree I can reach.”

Piracy plagued merchant ships well into the 1800’s. Revenue Service cutters Louisiana and Alabama captured a pirate ship operating out of the New Orleans (1819) and demolished the headquarters of the sea faring bandits. Not confined to the tropical waters of maritime North America, the cutter Louisiana joined vessels of the U.S. Navy and Royal Navy of Britain and “swept the Caribbean, capturing five pirate vessels (and) intercepting contraband... the Coast Guard’s most controversial commerce protection responsibility.”

In the pre-Civil War period (1794-1860), revenue cutters were ordered to prevent the importation of African slaves into U.S. ports. Cutters captured slave ships and released hundreds of slaves (U.S. Coast Guard: A Historical Overview; Law Enforcement, CGHO, January 1999).

Cutters were responsible for the enforcement of President Jefferson’s unpopular Embargo Act (1807) which was intended to stop the British seizure of U.S. commercial vessels during the Napoleonic Wars. The law prevented American overseas trade and cost Jefferson the support of manufacturing and shipping interests, unemployed workers, and export-sensitive farmers in the South and West. Jefferson suffered a damaged reputation “caused by the miseries of the embargo and the often cruel and disreputable attempts to enforce it.” A defeated Jefferson signed a repeal of the Embargo Act in 1809 (Paul Johnson, pp. 255-57).

The diverse duties assigned to the Revenue Service are illustrated by an 1833 law which required the mariner police to enforce what are now called environmental regulations, and protect forests on public lands from illegal logging operations. This duty stemmed from an 1822 act of Congress which created a timber reserve for the U.S. Navy to be protected by cutters designed for shallow water service.

With the acquisition of Alaska from Russia (1867), the Service assumed the duty of protecting fur seals from being hunted to extinction. Revenue Service personnel camped on the Pribilof Islands. In 1885, the Revenue Service began to assist the Bureau of Fisheries in enforcement duties. In 1908, the Revenue Marine was given the power to enforce Alaskan game laws. Pollution control and clean water have long been an interest of the Coast Guard. The Revenue Cutter Service joined the Army Corps of Engineers in enforcing the Refuse Act of 1899 (USCG Historical Overview, OCGH, 1999).

In 1832, Treasury Secretary Louis McLane directed Revenue Service cutters to cruise the oceans and seas during the rigorous winter months and assist vessels in distress. The duty was legislated by Congress in 1837. The Great Lakes region was added in 1870.

Rescues of ships wrecked close to shore and the saving of life and property were important and dangerous tasks relegated to private organizations, underwriters, and state appointed “wrecking personnel.” Among these

organizations was the Massachusetts Humane Society (1786). By the mid-nineteenth century, eighteen life boat stations with line throwing equipment were located at strategic locations on the state coastline. In 1847, Congress appropriated money to equip “lighthouses and other exposed places where vessels are liable to be driven on shore, with boats and other suitable means of equipment.” These stations were extended along the New York and New England shores, the Gulf Coast, and the Great Lakes under the supervision of Revenue Marine Corps officers.

In 1843 Captain Alexander Fraser was appointed by the Treasury Secretary to lead the new Revenue Marine Bureau. Fraser modified the administrative structure along military lines and met the challenges of the Mexican War (1846-48). In 1871, Sumner I. Kimball became the chief of the Revenue Marine Division and expanded the lifesaving service to 189 stations along the Pacific, Gulf and Atlantic coasts, and on the Great Lakes. In 1878, Congress created the U.S. Life Saving Service and Kimball was its superintendent. The life saving stations were gradually equipped with surfboats and lifeboats and the necessary support systems and equipment.

U.S. and British warships jointly patrolled the Bering Sea in 1891. U.S. Navy gunboats were joined by Revenue cutters. Treasury Secretary William Windom appointed Captain Leonard G. Shepard to head the Revenue Marine Division in 1889.

Shepard established the Bering Sea Patrol Fleet in 1895 (Johnson, R.E., pp. 3-7, 9, 17).

The cutter Lincoln was sent to Alaskan waters in 1867 to establish coaling stations, lighthouse and custom house sites, and collect oceanographic and floral and faunal information. Subsequent cutters continued the explorations and were the base of operations for scientific expeditions.

Dangerous life saving missions were performed by cutter crews. In the late 19th century, the cutters Bear, Corwin, Jeannette and Wayanda distinguished the early Coast Guard in the icy northern waters. In the courageous tradition of the service, Public Health Surgeon Samuel J. Call, and Lieutenants Ellsworth Bertholf and David H. Jarvis were awarded Congressional gold medals for carrying out a 1500 mile rescue mission (1897-98) to the Barrow region of northern Alaska to rescue an ice-bound whaling crew, bringing with them a large reindeer herd!

Law enforcement duties in the Arctic and Subarctic regions were fraught with peril. River exploration in turbulent Alaskan waters was dangerous. Policing alcohol, ammunition, firearms and fish and game laws, and assisting the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Education Bureau were enough to keep the Service busy. The difficulties were compounded by the chaos and lawlessness that ensued during the Klondike-Yukon gold rushes (1896-99) in northwestern Canada and Alaska.

Abandoned and wrecked ships were a menace to navigation which cutters assumed responsibility for the disposition of. Derelict duty could be dangerous in rough seas and icy weather, and along rocky shorelines and surging rivers. The disabled vessels were towed into port for salvage, beached, or destroyed by explosives, gunfire and ramming, methods of which posed specific dangers to crews (Evans, chp. 9, and pp. 100-01, 111-15, 147-48).

The competency and reputation of the Revenue Service was determined by the quality of the officers and crew. Experienced seamen initially came from merchant ships, state and the Continental navies and the civilian privateer forces of the Revolutionary War. Initially, each revenue cutter was manned by officers (a master and subordinate mates), mariners (sailors) and “boys.” Naval ranks (captain, lieutenant, and enlisted seamen) evolved after 1799.

Between 1799 and 1832, officer ranks were filled by political appointments and transfers from the U.S. Navy. Secretary McLane ended that practice, and directed that junior officers be promoted by competence and seniority. In 1845, legislation required that cutter officers be appointed upon demonstration of seamanship and navigation skills. During the Civil War (1863) Congress gave the president the authority to appoint the commissioned officers of the service “with the advice and consent of the Senate.” Revenue Service chief Sumner Kimball, along with military and political figures, established a School of Instruction for officers to commission third lieutenants after two years of nautical instruction (Johnson, R.E., p. 14).

The origins of the present U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, began with the School of Instruction for the Revenue Marine in 1876. The cadets commenced training on the schooner Dobbin, and sailed from Fisher Island, New Bedford, Massachusetts. In 1878, the Chase replaced the Dobbin in the home port of Arundal Cove, Maryland, where shipboard training was complemented with classroom instruction in shore facilities. In 1910, the cutter Itasca trained the cadets from Fort Trumbull, a former Army post in New London, Connecticut.

The Hamilton became the service training ship in 1914, and the school name changed to the Revenue Cutter School of Instruction. The merger of the Life Saving Service and Revenue Cutter Service (1915) marks the origin of the Coast Guard and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, which moved to its present New London site in 1932.

After World War Two, the barque Eagle, acquired as a war reparation from Germany (1947), was used to train sea-going Coast Guard cadets (“Academy History and General Information,” OCGH, July, 1998).

The curriculum of the Revenue Service cadets in the first decade of the School of Instruction featured summer months cruising the Atlantic, and a pragmatic schedule of history, mathematics, geography, seamanship, navigation, French, and English (Evans, pp. 95-96, and Johnson, R.E., p. 14).

The United States Lighthouse Service has a proud tradition from its origins in 1716 to its union with the Coast Guard in 1939. Typical of the dedicated and courageous service personnel was Frank Albert Drew, Keeper of Green Island Station, from 1909 to 1929. Drew was born on the island, four miles off Marinette, Wisconsin, in Green Bay, an arm of Lake Michigan. Drew’s father, Samuel, was the first keeper of Green Island Light.

Frank Drew left the island to serve as a cook on a schooner which sailed to Chicago. He worked on other boats and earned the rank of captain on a passenger and package boat at age of 25. In 1909, Drew emulated his father and joined the lighthouse service, becoming the head keeper on Green Island. Between 1912-14, Drew rescued more than 30 individuals in storms, fires and accidents on boats and ships, and the entire crew of one vessel. Drew received several lifesaving citations in his glorious career.

The United States Coast Guard Cutter Frank Drew pays proper tribute to the distinguished lighthouse keeper. The Frank Drew (WLM 557) is a 175 foot coastal buoy tender with a crew of one officer and 17 enlisted personnel. The technologically advanced aids to navigation vessel was built by Marinette Marine Corporation in Wisconsin, and commissioned on June 17, 1999. Satellite navigation and automated engineering controls enable this coastal tender to efficiently serve from its Portsmouth, Virginia port, north to Washington, D.C., and south to North Carolina, including the Potomac, York and James Rivers.

The Frank Drew crew services buoys and carries out the Coast Guard missions of maritime law enforcement, environmental protection and search and rescue (“Welcome Aboard” brochure, USCGC FRANK DREW, 1999).

The Coast Guard motto, “Semper Paratus” (Always Ready) and the slogan, “You have to go out, but you don’t have to come back,” aptly describe the traditions of the Revenue Marine Service and the Coast Guard. The 210 year old service is proud of its history. The early life saving “Surf Soldiers” exemplified those traditions on U.S. coasts and rivers and on the forbidding interior Great Lakes. In their day, the lifesavers were called “Soldiers of the Surf” and “Storm Warriors.” Life Saving Service chief Sumner Kimball proudly called his mates “storm soldiers.” The surfmen, and subsequent Coast Guard sailors and aviators, have saved thousands of lives and lost hundreds of their own in the process.

Richard K. Kolb researched the history of the costs and courage involved in the life saving duties of the Revenue Service and Coast Guard from the 19th century to the present, in war and peacetime. Memorials dedicated to Coast Guard personnel can be found throughout the nation, but Kolb believes that is not enough. “Considering the nation’s mania for monument building, perhaps someday, “ the journalist suggested, “the Coast Guard will receive its due in the form of an all inclusive, public memorial in the nation’s capital” (Kolb, Richard K., “Surf Soldiers.” VFW, August, 2000, pp. 26-30).

The last years of the Revenue Cutter and Life Saving Services were significant as the clock ticked toward the amalgamation of the two services into the United States Coast Guard in 1915. Captain Commandant Worth G. Ross requested retirement status for health reasons. Secretary of the Treasury Franklin MacVeagh reached well down the seniority ladder and nominated Captain Ellsworth Price Bertholf to succeed Ross. It would be Bertholf, the commander of the cutter Bear and recipient of a gold medal for his part in the rescue of ice-bound Alaskan whalers, who bridged the transition from the Revenue Service to the Coast Guard from 1911-19.

Upon a delayed Senate confirmation, Bertholf immediately used his administrative talent and economic expertise to block an attempt by efficiency experts to abolish the Revenue Cutter Service and assign its functions to the U.S. Navy and the Department of Commerce and Labor, and merge the Bureau of Lighthouses into Commerce and Labor.

The Captain Commandant appeared before congressional committees and argued persuasively that the dispersal of Revenue Service functions to Commerce and Labor would require other government agencies which had coordinated services with the RS to form their own navies; that the U.S. Navy mission and training would suffer with the added responsibilities; and he presented statistics which indicated that the present system was efficient. In fact, Bertholf argued, increased costs and inefficiencies would prevail with the abolition or mergers of the Revenue and Life Saving Service with other agencies and departments.

Merchant associations, a grateful public, and supportive newspapers defended Captain Bertholf, and “the sinking of the British White Star liner Titanic with the loss of some 1500 persons focused even more attention on a service that listed saving of life and property at sea among its principal duties (but was) now threatened with dissolution (Johnson, R.E., pp. 18-21).”

To ensure the survival of his organization, Captain Commandant Bertholf prepared a memorandum for the Treasury Department which explained the necessity of the Revenue Service to assume the North Atlantic Ice Patrol to track ice bergs and warn vessels of their location to prevent the kind of collision that sank the Titanic. Bertholf explained that in 1906 Congress authorized the construction of the cutter Seneca and assigned it derelict destruction duty, so, by implication, the Revenue Cutter Service should track the floating iceberg threat. Bertholf suggested that the cutters Miami and Seneca be assigned ice patrol duty for several weeks each year because they were large enough to store the necessary provisions and withstand heavy seas.

President Woodrow Wilson’s Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo issued the orders on March 29, 1913, for the Revenue Service to commence the ice patrol. The International Conference on the Safety of Life at Sea convened in London in November of 1913, attended by 14 maritime nations. The U.S. delegation included Captain Bertholf. The final report recognized the significance of the U.S. Ice Patrol, asked that it be continued, and designated a division of expenses among the nations to support the patrol and life saving operations.

The outbreak of World War I (1914-18), called The Great War at the time, interrupted international cooperation because several of the signatories were at war with each other and ships threatened by submarine attacks chose to maintain radio silence. The Revenue Service made iceberg sightings and offered its maps and reports for publication.

Suspended during the war, the Ice Patrol was resumed in 1919. Another International Conference on the Safety of Life at Sea convened in London in 1929, where it was agreed to define the parameters of the financial contributions for the cost of the service, and the United States should continue the mission.

World War Two (1939-45) caused another interruption of the Ice Patrol, but the mission was resumed in the post-war period.

In the 125 year record of the Revenue Cutter Service, it has been estimated that at a minimum, 14 of its ships were lost at sea.

In 1913, the Treasury Department sent its proposal to merge the Revenue Service with the Life Saving Service to Congress. The Senate approved the measure in 1914, the House in 1915. President Wilson signed the bill on 28 January, 1915.

The combined service was named the Coast Guard. The name comes from the Spanish vessels known as “guarda costa” which tried to prevent illegal trade with the Crown colonies in the New World during the protectionist period of Mercantilism. The name “coast guard” was also used in 19th century Britain where coast watchers reported vessels in distress and smuggling. Members of the British “Coastguard” also served as a naval reserve force.

In the Civil War period (1865), Treasury Secretary Hugh McCulloch referred to “the duties of a coast guard” in a discourse about the Revenue Cutter Service. The enabling congressional legislation stated that the Coast Guard constituted “a part of the military forces of the United States...under the Treasury Department in time of peace (and) as part of the Navy, subject to the orders of the Secretary of the Navy, in time of war, or when the President shall so direct.” Revenue Service Captain Commandant Bertholf added his description of the duties of the new military branch he now headed: “The Coast Guard occupies a peculiar position...and necessarily so from the dual character of its work, which is both civil and military. More than 120 years of practical experience has demonstrated...by means of military drills, training and discipline, that the service (is able) to maintain that state of preparedness for the prompt performance of its most important civil duties.....”

Life Saving Service personnel were now in military service. District superintendents gained commissioned officer status; station keepers became warrant officers; and surfmen joined the enlisted ranks. Promotions came from within the service, based on performance and seniority. For the first time, Life Saving crews were eligible for Revenue Cutter Service retirement benefits that were enacted in 1902 and now provided to all members of the United States Coast Guard “at three quarters pay upon completion of thirty years of service” (Johnson, R.E., pp. 22-33).

The Coast Guard embarked on its many faceted mission in an era of the new “motor propelled boats” in use as pleasure and commercial vessels. Reason enough to keep life saving surfmen busy.

The United States was divided up into 13 districts under the supervision in order of authority of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Assistant Treasury Secretary, and a captain commandant who administered five divisions: operations and materiel (headed by civilians), construction repair, engineering and inspection. Each of the 13 districts was run by a district commander. Customs collectors no longer directly supervised cutters in their districts, but the Coast Guard closely cooperated with them.

A government report issued in 1915 recorded that the Coast Guard consisted of about 2,000 sailors and 2,300 lifeboat station surfmen.

The far ranging duties and dangers of Coast Guard missions are illustrated by two CG vessels, one in the North Atlantic, the other on Bering Sea Patrol and the Alaskan Gulf between 1915-17. The Ungala, commanded by Captain Francis G. Dodge, was assailed by heavy winter seas and snow and freezing fog and water vapor. In subzero temperatures, the Ungala lost her radio antennae which snapped under ice, and an estimated 150-175 tons of ice gave the cutter a starboard list of 20 degrees. A hot water hose, axes and coal shovels were wielded by crew members to even the keel and get to the security of the port of Yakutat. When in port, the cutter officers boarded and inspected fishing and other commercial vessels, and requested that they stay in port during the inclement weather. The ship surgeon treated crews and civilians in the area and shared his medical knowledge with a missionary.

The Androscoggin was a small hospital ship staffed with a Public Health Service physician-surgeon and staff which sailed from Boston to serve deep sea fishing vessels of any nationality. A flag on a schooner mast alerted the medics that attention was needed. Between 1915-16 the Androscoggin treated more than 200 fishermen and came to the aid of ships in other ways. Ice Patrol cutters usually had a surgeon on board and a sick bay with appropriate medical supplies.

In 1915, President Wilson signed the Seamen’s Act into law which required that U.S. merchant and passenger ship crews be adequately trained and able to handle life boats. The Steamboat Inspection Service licensed merchant sailors but was unable to ascertain the proficiency of all of the thousands of mariners who required training and testing. The Department of Commerce asked for Coast Guard help in ports containing CG district offices. Competent Coast Guard officers and enlisted personnel, including lighthouse keepers, rose to the

occasion and licensed or rejected hundreds of merchant seamen. Thus, another function was given to the Coast Guard which eventually assumed the full responsibility for the licensing process (Johnson, R.E., pp. 34-41).

Orville and Wilber Wright changed transportation, warfare and search and rescue with their mechanical skills, intuition and courage. The two bicycle mechanics and manufacturers experimented with gliders and motor powered aircraft. In 1903, they launched the first piloted, heavier than air, motor powered aircraft at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. In 1909 the U.S. Army purchased one of their air planes. Glenn Curtiss Company made a flying boat (1912), and the U.S. Navy purchased a few aircraft and started training pilots from their Pensacola, Florida base. Aircraft were used as fighter and surveillance craft in World War I (Evans, p. 188).

Coast Guard aviation began in 1915 when Lieutenants Norman B. Hall and Elmer F. Stone, stationed on board the Norfolk, Va., based Onondaga, convinced their skipper, Captain Benjamin M. Chiswell, to let them use borrowed aircraft on search missions (Johnson, R.E., p. 42).

Hall and Stone secured the assistance of a famous balloonist, Captain Baldwin, who loaned them an aircraft "in which they flew scouting missions for the Onondaga through the summer of 1915." Air and sea rescue tactics evolved from the experience.

Lieutenant Hall was sent to study aeronautical engineering at the Curtiss Airplane and Motor Company. Lieutenant Stone, with several other officers and enlisted men, was assigned to formal flight training at Pensacola.

Wintry North Atlantic gales inflicted rudder and mast destruction upon coastal sailing schooners which could not report their positions in an accurate or punctual manner without benefit of radio communication. Rescue operations by the Onondaga and sister cutters were therefore often delayed at risk to vessels and crews because of the necessarily extended search patterns. The advent of air search and rescue proved to be of inestimable value (Evans, pp. 188-89).

Coast Guard ship and air station construction were put on hold. On April 6, 1917, the United States issued a declaration of war against Germany. "PLAN ONE ACKNOWLEDGE" was the official notice to all Coast Guard units that they were now assigned to the United States Navy for a dangerous and extended mission (Johnson, R.E., p. 43)

CHAPTER 2

U.S. REVENUE MARINE

(1790-1850)

The War of 1812; The Seminole Wars; and the Mexican War

The Revenue Marine Service fulfilled its naval military functions in operations with the United States Navy in several wars as mandated by law. The first military conflict was the Undeclared War With France (1798-1800), reviewed in Chapter One. Having served gallantly in that conflict, the Revenue Marine was called upon to augment the U.S. Navy in other military conflicts.

The War of 1812-14 challenged U.S. naval forces. They had to face the formidable British fleet on the high seas and inland waters in what some historians have called The Second War of Independence. The United States declared war on the United Kingdom because the British had not yet withdrawn from all U.S. territory at the end of the Revolutionary War, as required by the Treaty of Paris (1783). And British ships had used force to prevent U.S. commercial vessels from engaging in free trade during Britain's blockade of France in the Napoleonic Wars. In the course of searching U.S. merchant vessels, the British forcibly impressed some U.S. seamen into the King's Navy.

The theaters of war were along the Atlantic Coast, Great Lakes, and Lake Champlain (New York). The competence of American naval forces was quickly illustrated on September 10, 1813 on Lake Erie. United States Navy Commodore Oliver H. Perry suspended his ship building activities and engaged the British Navy. When his flagship was destroyed in the battle, Perry transferred to another ship and continued the fight. When the British surrendered, Perry sent his famous message to General William H. Harrison, his colleague in arms in

the Ohio theater: “We have met the enemy, and they are ours.” Securing the Lake Erie region forced the British to leave Detroit and retreat to the northeast. It also facilitated the defeat of Britain’s Indian allies and the formidable Shawnee warrior, Tecumseh, and put the Northwest back in American control. U.S. forces, however, were soundly defeated in the unsuccessful invasion of British Canada (Tindall, pp. 362-67).

The U.S. Navy and Revenue Marine waged war against the British Navy as state militia and federal troops clashed with His Majesty’s troops in New England, along the Atlantic Seaboard, and in Southern waters at the port of New Orleans.

The U.S. frigate Constitution (Captain Isaac Hull) defeated HMS Guerriere in Canadian waters off the coast of Nova Scotia. The U.S.S. Wasp conquered the British warship Frolic off the Virginia shore. Captain Stephen Decatur in the frigate United States brought the British vessel Macedonian into New London, Connecticut as a war prize. Despite these defeats, the British Navy achieved several victories and maintained a coastal embargo which dislocated U.S. commerce and decreased federal tariff revenues (Johnson, Thomas H., pp. 830-32).

Internal dissent threatened the war effort. The Federalist political party strongly opposed Republican President “Madison’s War,” as they called it. Anti-war leaders even threatened the secession of the New England states from the Union.

British troops challenged American forces after landing soldiers at Cape Cod (Massachusetts) and on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. They defeated U.S. troops at Bladensburg, Maryland. British troops swept through Washington, D.C. and burned several buildings, including the Capitol and White House, forcing President and Mrs. Madison to abandon their meal and flee to Virginia. The British Navy sailed to Baltimore and bombarded Fort McHenry, an event which stimulated Washington lawyer Francis Scott Key to write what became the U.S. national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner” (Tindall, pp. 362-74).

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Congress (1809) fortuitously authorized the construction of 12 new Revenue cutters which averaged 125 tons, crews of about 20, and several light guns, a significant addition to U.S. naval forces in the War of 1812. Among the new cutters was the Eagle, built for the New Haven station to, as Treasury Secretary Gallatin described, “prevent the escape of vessels.” In October 1814, Captain Frederick Lee sailed the Eagle in a mission to rescue the U.S. merchant vessel Susan from capture by the Dispatch, an 18 gun English brig. In a battle off Long Island, the outgunned Eagle was driven ashore but continued the fight from an island bluff with muskets, and guns taken from the cutter. The British ship withdrew. Captain Lee refloated the Eagle the next day, only to be surprised and captured by the enemy after waging battle.

In June 1812, Captain William Hamm on the USRC Jefferson captured a British ship and brought it into the Virginia port of Norfolk. On July 4th, the Surveyor further distinguished the Revenue Marine by capturing a British ship which had sailed from Jamaica. In 1813, the Surveyor, on Virginia’s York River, was outgunned, out manned, and boarded by the crew of His Majesty’s frigate Narcissus. Royal Navy Captain John Crierie was so impressed with the gallantry of his outnumbered foe in the bloody sword-wielding, musket firing, hand to hand deck battle, that he returned a captured sword to Captain Samuel Travis and stated in writing, “You have my most sincere wishes for the immediate parole and speedy exchange of yourself and brave crew.”

In July 1812, the cutter Madison, under the command of Captain George Brooks, captured the 6 guns and 16 men crew of a British brig on the high seas, but was lost to the British fleet later in the year.

In 1813, Captain John Cahoone searched out a British sloop which had seized more than 20 American ships in Long Island Sound. With a crew of Navy volunteers the cutter captain maneuvered his heavily outgunned Vigilant against the privateer Dart. After a cannon duel, the crew boarded and captured the British ship.

Because of the courageous service of cutter crews, Revenue Marine casualties were awarded Navy pensions which “for almost a century remained the only provision made for the retirement of disabled cutter men” (Evans, pp. 18-22).

Revenue Service captures of British vessels not only boosted the morale of the Americans in their battle against British military forces, but deprived the enemy of vital supplies and finances. In just one instance, when the cutter Madison captured the schooner Wade, \$20,000 in silver and gold was acquired by the captors. When the

U.S. Revenue Cutter James C. Madison took control of the Shamrock in July 1812, it escorted a 300 ton warship carrying 16 men and 6 guns into Savannah harbor and removed that military threat from the sea.

The skill and courage of cutter crews is exemplified by the fact that they often went into battle heavily outgunned and out manned. In the clash between the USRC Eagle and H.M.S Dispatch, the cutter carried six four pound cannons against the British warship's eighteen thirty-two pound weapons (Kaplan and Hunt, pp. 5-8).

The inconclusive war drew to a mutually desirable close on December 24th, 1814, when diplomatic representatives from the United States and United Kingdom signed the Treaty of Ghent (Belgium). The "status quo antebellum" was achieved. Neither side claimed victory or conceded defeat. New lands were not acquired.

General Andrew Jackson defeated strong British forces at the battle of New Orleans (8 January, 1815), unaware the Treaty of Ghent had been signed weeks earlier. The battle did, however, influence post-war interpretations and applications, and forced the international community to recognize U.S. control of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) from France. The Battle of New Orleans proved the United States matched British military might and was a player in international diplomacy. The victory paved the way for military hero Andrew Jackson to claim the presidency in the Election of 1828 (Johnson, P., pp. 275-79).

Andrew Jackson's military exploits also sparked the Seminole Wars (1816-18; 1835-42) which can be traced to the incursion into Spanish Florida by U.S. troops in search of escaped slaves who fled into Indian territory and merged with the indigenous populations. The Seminole bravely defended their lands. A youthful General Andrew Jackson led a retaliatory expedition into Florida which stimulated Spain to cede East Florida to the United States. Military pressure forced the Seminoles across the Mississippi River. Seminole leader Osceola refused to migrate and led his followers in a long war against U.S. military forces sent into the Everglades swamps by then President Andrew Jackson. Osceola was treacherously captured at a truce conference and imprisoned in Fort Moultrie in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, where he died (Tindall, pp. 387-89; 324-25).

The Revenue Service got involved in the Seminole wars when the customs collector at New Orleans sent the cutters Dallas and Jackson to relieve the Gulf coastal towns of St. Marks and Tampa from Seminole warriors.

In his dispatch, Captain Webb, commanding the U.S.S. Vandalia, commended the crews of the 10 revenue cutters who participated in the Seminole Wars: "Their prompt and ready cooperation (with the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army) called forth the highest commendations. Their light draft (permitted operations which) no frigate could have accomplished in the shallows off the Florida west coast." The cutters, continued Captain Webb, "carried guns...supplies...soldiers and marines to strategic points (and) landing parties of revenue men went to the relief of beleaguered settlements" (Evans, pp. 25-26).

Cutter crews were offered homestead lands by grateful officials. Among the distinguished war vessels was the cutter Washington which landed men and guns in time to save Fort Brook, an operation chronicled by historians as "the first amphibious landing by combined forces in U.S. history" (Kaplan and Hunt, pp. 9-10). The years between 1812 and Civil War placed other duties upon the Revenue Marine which was ordered (1815) to protect merchant shipping, save lives and property, and suppress piracy and the slave trade. The cutter Active captured pirates ("privateers") in Chesapeake Bay. The Dallas performed similar operations off the Georgia coast. The Florida Keys and waters off New Orleans were other pirate haunts. The Revenue Marine had to respond to piracy on the high seas to protect domestic and foreign trade routes.

Cutters Louisiana and Alabama were constructed in 1819 to battle the pirate fleets. The cutters were 6 feet in depth, 17 feet abeam, and had a length of 57 feet. They were assisted by other cutters which shared patrol duties in the Gulf of Mexico and off the Florida coasts. Piracy, thanks primarily to the Revenue Service, was virtually driven from U.S. waters by 1840.

In 1843, Captain Alexander Fraser was appointed by the Treasury Department to be Captain-Commandant of the Revenue Marine Bureau. Fraser was an early advocate of the iron and steam powered vessels which eventually eclipsed the graceful, wooden sailing cutters. Initial engineering and mechanical problems in the steam fleet caused conflicts between Fraser and his supervisors which for a time damaged his career. Captain Fraser's experience on both merchant vessels and Revenue cutters in peace and war gave him the credibility

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