CHAPTER II

HISTORY

The United States Coast Guard was formed in 1915 by merging two government maritime agencies: the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service and the U.S. Life-Saving Service. The Revenue Cutter Service was formed in 1790 as an oceangoing police to enforce America's tariff laws. The Life-Saving Service was organized in 1871 to protect the lives and property of citizens along the nation's coastline. In 1939, the U.S. Lighthouse Service was blended into the U.S. Coast Guard. With the merger of these three government services, the Coast Guard's role as protector of the mariner was complete, a tradition that continues today.

United States Revenue Cutter Service

The origins of the U.S. Coast Guard can be traced back to 22 April 1790 when Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, requested ten boats to enforce the Tariff Act of 1789. The Act's intent was to protect American goods and to raise money for the new, cash-strapped country. The boats were needed to stop the smuggling of merchandise into the United States. The Continental Navy had been dissolved in 1785 so an entirely new group was created within the U.S. Treasury: the United States Revenue Marine.

On 16 December 1831, Secretary of the Treasury John McLane ordered the Revenue Marine's cutters to ". . . render assistance to vessels in distress and to save life and property at sea by patrolling areas near their stations during the winter."[2] In 1837, Congress authorized the use of government ships to cruise the East Coast in severe weather and give aid to distressed vessels. This was augmented six years later when the Revenue Marines were instructed to assist in the preservation of property found onboard wrecked ships and to save cargoes for their owners. Thus, the primary function of maritime law enforcement was supplemented by that of providing maritime safety.

In the Act of 2 March 1798, Congress ordered the Revenue Marine to cooperate with the newly formed U.S. Navy ". . . whenever the President shall so direct."[3] This was done to augment the Navy with the Revenue Marine's cutters against French privateers. Since then, the Revenue Marine, and later the Coast Guard, has fought alongside the U.S. Navy in every one of America's wars at sea.

By 1894, the Revenue Marine had taken on a new moniker: the Revenue Cutter Service.[4] In 1912, following the sinking of the *Titanic*, an International Ice Patrol in the North Atlantic was established to help prevent further disaster. This was yet another responsibility for the Revenue Cutter Service. Simultaneously, a government reform movement was at work behind the scenes. The Revenue Cutter Service was viewed as

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[2]Malcolm F. Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1957), 4.

[3]Ibid., 3.

[4]T. Michael O'Brien, *Guardians of the Eighth Sea: A History of the U.S. Coast Guard on the Great Lakes* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1979), 3.

archaic and in need of an overhaul. It was felt that its mission was becoming redundant and its bureaucracy too large. To pacify all political groups, the Revenue Cutter Service was merged with the Life-Saving Service in 1915, ending its 125 years of independence.

United States Life-Saving Service

The United States Life-Saving Service was born out of public sentiment rather than law enforcement. Like fire departments, the Life-Saving Service was spawned out of the national need for public safety. The roots of the U.S. Life-Saving Service can be traced back to 1785 and the founding of the Massachusetts Humane Society (Figure 4). It was found that many shipwreck victims died of exposure after reaching shore, so the Massachusetts Humane Society built small "houses of refuge" to provide shelter. Lifeboats started to be added to the houses in 1807 to allow volunteers to aid in offshore rescue attempts.

The Massachusetts Humane Society was modeled on Britain's Royal Humane Society, a volunteer group whose main objective was to aid shipwreck survivors. The Royal Humane Society in turn found its model in China's Chinkiang Association for the Saving of Life (1708), the first life-saving institution in the world. The Chinese developed both privately funded rescue services and government-funded services prior to any other nation. Both America and Britain relied on the volunteer method, but in the late 1840s, America began to turn toward governmental funding.[5]

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[5]Ralph Shanks, Wick York, and Lisa Woo Shanks, ed., *The U.S. Life-Saving Service: Heroes, Rescues and Architecture of the Early Coast Guard* (Petaluma, CA: Costaño Books, 1996), 1.

Figure 4. Early Photograph of a Volunteer Crew of the Massachusetts Humane Society. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service Photography: Surfboats File).

In 1848, Congress bowed to public pressure for the federal government to assist in the life-saving business. Through Representative William Newell of New Jersey, Congress appropriated $10,000 for the construction of eight boathouses along the New Jersey shore. These unmanned and unkept stations were run by volunteers and are considered the first life-saving stations. In 1849, 22 more stations were built along the coasts of New Jersey and Long Island. They quickly proved their value in saved lives and property. During the 1849-50 season, 354 persons were rescued by the equipment at these stations.[6]

[6]Frederick Stonehouse, *Wreck Ashore: The United States Life-Saving Service on the Great Lakes* (Duluth, MI: Lake Superior Port Cities, 1994), 9.

On 16 April 1854, the emigrant ship *Powhatten* wrecked only five miles from a life-saving station at Beach Haven, New Jersey, yet more than 200 perished.[7] Congress again responded with more money, designating a superintendent for the Long Island and New Jersey coasts, and a man at each station. Stations up until that time had been "unkept," and equipment and boats frequently disappeared. Once the federal government had built the buildings and equipped them, they passed into the ownership of the local community. The government provided no funds for maintenance. With the appointment of paid "keepers" for each station after the passage of the Act of 14 December 1854, theft was stemmed. Unfortunately, the positions of superintendent and keeper often became political appointments.

The infant system languished during the Civil War. In 1869, paid crews were finally added to the system, but only during winter months and only at alternate stations. However, this small improvement was not enough. During the winter of 1870-71, a series of wrecks on the Great Lakes and East Coast illustrated the system's shortage of adequate personnel and equipment. The *1876 Annual Reports of the Operations of the Life-Saving Service* (hereafter cited as *Annual Reports*) admitted that, "The loss of life [in 1870-71] was largely due to the lack of proper attention to duty on the part of the employees of the Service and the inefficient conditions of the boats and apparatus."[8] The public and press called for reform, and Congress again responded and appropriated a

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[7]Dennis L. Noble, *That Others Might Live: The U.S. Life-Saving Service, 1878-1915* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 22.

[8]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *Annual Reports of the Operations of the Life-Saving Service 1876* (Washington: GPO, 1876-1914), 48.

generous $200,000 to provide proper equipment and experienced, paid surfmen to live at the stations. At the same time, the Secretary of the Treasury, George Boutwell began cleaning house. It seems the Revenue Marine was also rife with political appointees. He brought in a ten-year veteran of the Treasury Department, Sumner Increase Kimball, to head the Revenue Marine Bureau, which also oversaw the federal life-saving stations. His selection in February 1871 marked the end of the volunteer era of life-saving.

What Kimball did was take a disorganized volunteer system, infuse it with men and money, and organize it into an internationally-acclaimed, federal organization that guarded all of America's coastlines. This did not happen overnight, however. Kimball's first order of business was to take a current inventory and assessment of the stations. He sent Revenue Marine Captain John Faunce to examine all of the stations and compile a report. Faunce found keepers, crews, stations, and equipment all to be in poor condition. He uncovered the fact that the politics of keepers and surfmen often had more to do with their position than life-saving ability. Faunce revealed that ". . . every portable article had been stolen from many stations and the money Congress had appropriated had been practically wasted."[9] Even with such a system, Kimball stated that the volunteer service had rescued 4,163 lives and saved $716,000 worth of property.[10]

Kimball started building new stations and extended protection to Cape Cod and Rhode Island. He sought to site stations no more than five miles apart so that patrols would more likely detect wrecks. New keepers were hired, and new rules were made for

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[9]J.W. Dalton, *The Life Savers of Cape Cod* (Privately printed, 1902; Chatham, MA: Chatham Press, 1967; Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1991), 28.

[10]Noble, *That Others Might Live*, 30.

the selection of crewmen. Instructions were provided for the proper use and care of the station and its equipment. Regular inspections were started to make sure crews and stations were in good condition. Beach patrols by surfmen were instituted.

Structuring the Life-Saving Service was a major priority of Kimball's. The Service operated within the Treasury Department since its duty was closely related to commerce. The head of the Service was the General Superintendent, whose appointment was made by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The General Superintendent was Sumner Kimball, who retained the post for the entire span of the organized Life-Saving Service, from 1871 until 1915. Serving him was the Assistant General Superintendent, in addition to a "corps of clerks," a civil engineer, a topographer and hydrographer, and a draftsman. They were all based in Washington, D.C. There was also a Board of Life-Saving Appliances, composed of experts within the Life-Saving Service, to help investigate life-saving improvements and inventions.[11]

Directly below the General Superintendent was the Inspector. He was headquartered in New York City because much of the life-saving apparatus was made there. He was in charge of inspecting the stations and had an Assistant Inspector. There was also an Assistant Inspector in each district. They were in charge of auditing each station in their district every month and investigating shipwrecks where there was loss of life. All of the inspectors were detailed from the Revenue Marine Service, demonstrating the close ties between the Life-Saving and Revenue Marine Services.

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[11]Sumner I. Kimball, *Organization and Methods of the United States Life-Saving Service* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1912), 11.

Kimball divvied up the nation into districts, growing eventually to fourteen districts, and then consolidating to today's nine districts. The entire Pacific Coast was the 12th District, renumbered the 13th District on 6 June 1900, and then trimmed during the Coast Guard era so that Oregon and Washington alone became the 13th District. Each district typically had a Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. They were in charge of disbursing pay and ordering supplies. The District Superintendents also acted as inspectors of customs when ships wrecked within their districts.

Kimball promulgated instructions down to the keepers for the running of the life-saving stations. The instructions described what was expected of keeper and crew. The keeper was in charge and had the final say at "his" station. Kimball held the keepers in the highest regard. "The position held by this officer will be recognized at once as one of the most important in the Service," wrote Kimball.[12] The keepers were usually nominated by the District Superintendent. "The indispensable qualifications for appointment are that he shall be of good character and habits, not less than 21 nor more than 45 years of age; have sufficient education to be able to transact the station business; be able-bodied, physically sound, and a master of boat craft and surfing."[13] However, once in the position, age was not a determinant and only physical condition was considered. Keeper Joshua James "fell dead at his post" after stepping from a surfboat at the age of 74.[14]

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[12]Kimball, 13.

[13]Ibid.

[14]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1902 Annual Reports*, 14.

The keepers were nominated by the District Superintendent since the District Superintendent was intimately familiar with and personally responsible for his district. Every effort was made to select a local keeper, as it was felt that, "In the vicinity of nearly all the stations there are numbers of fishermen and wreckers who have followed their callings from boyhood and become expert in the handling of boats in broken water."[15] Typically, a keeper was chosen from the ranks of the surfmen (Figure 5).

The keepers ran their stations like a ship. They exercised absolute control over their crew as their "captain." In fact, the title "keeper" was rarely used by the crew or local citizens, who preferred to use the title "captain."[16] The keepers were entrusted with the "care and custody" of the station property and were required to reside at the station. They were charged with leading the crew and to ". . . share their perils on all occasions of rescue, taking always the steering oar when the boats are used, and directing all operations with the apparatus."[17]

Keepers were required to keep daily logs, with weekly transcripts sent to the District Superintendent. Wreck reports were required as soon as possible after a shipwreck. "Any false statement made in the books or reports subjects him to instant dismissal."[18] The daily log books for the Oregon stations are today stored at the National

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[15]Kimball, 13.

[16]Noble, *That Others Might Live*, 60.

[17]Kimball, 14.

[18]Ibid.

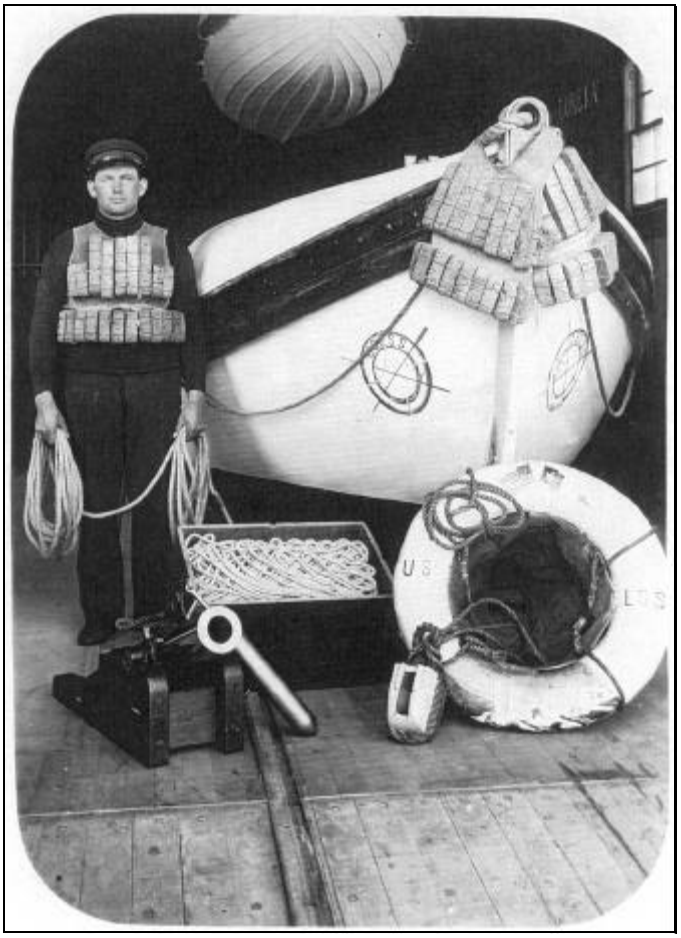

Figure 5. Clarence W. Boice at Coquille River Life-Saving Station Eventually Rose to Keeper at Coos Bay Life-Saving Station. Source: Bandon Historical Society.

Archives Regional Center in Seattle and provide a wealth of information about the routine life at the stations.

Stations on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts were manned from September through April. Stations on the Great Lakes were open during the shipping season, usually from 15 April through 15 December. Only on the Pacific Coast were stations manned year-round.[19] It was found that shipwrecks on the West Coat occurred ". . . more frequently from local causes than from stress of weather, and are about as liable to happen at one season as to another."[20]

The size of the crew was determined by the number of oars required to pull the largest boat at the station. Since lifeboats with eight oars were typical in Oregon, stations had a crew of eight (Figure 6). On the Atlantic, crews as small as six were needed to row the surfboats. The crew was chosen personally by the keeper from local members of the populace. This demonstrates the autonomy and responsibility given to the keepers by Kimball. Kimball wrote of the ". . . necessity for mutual confidence between a leader and his followers in hazardous enterprises involving their own lives and the lives of others."[21] Early in the history of the Life-Saving Service, it was found that this policy created a situation where crew members were often selected based on political, social, and family lines. However, in 1882, Congress straightened out this situation and made "fitness" the sole requirement and extended the selection process to include a review by

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[19]The one exception was the floating station on the Ohio River at Louisville, Kentucky. It was also staffed year-round.

[20]Kimball, 15.

[21]Ibid.

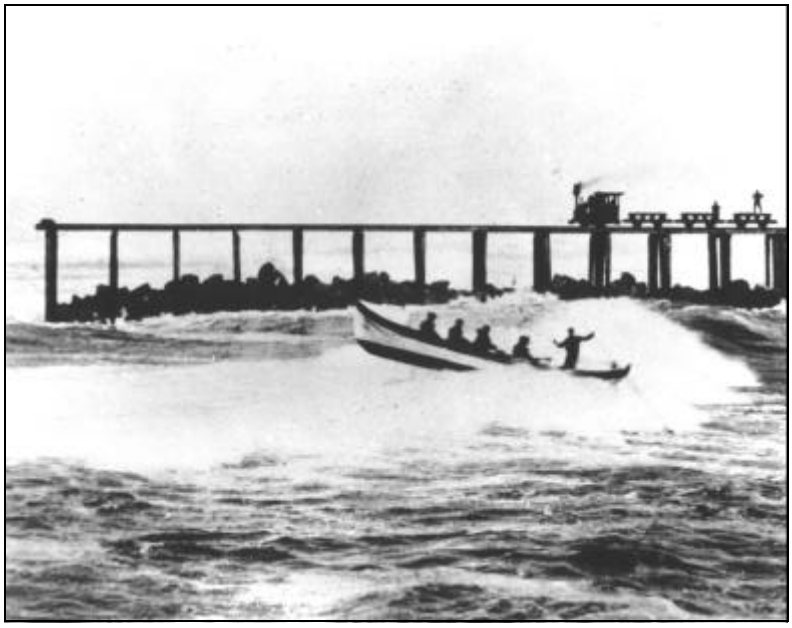

Figure 6. Dobbins Lifeboat During Training at Coquille River Bar. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Surfboats File).

the District Superintendents and Inspectors. There was still a loophole for family members to serve together, in that it was written that they could not serve together, "except where adherence to the rule would be detrimental to the Service."[22] Family served together more frequently on the Atlantic Coast. The extreme example was the Midgett family, who at Gull Shoal Life-Saving Station, North Carolina, had five family members serving together.[23]

Influenced by statistics and Kimball's advocacy, Congress gave Kimball another $100,000 in 1873. In the same year, the U.S. Army Storm Signal Service began running

[22]Ibid.

[23]Noble, *That Others Might Live*, 61-62.

telegraph lines between the New Jersey stations. Kimball got Congress to pass the Act of 20 June 1874 to require owners of all ships to report wrecks. This statistical and locational data helped to justify and site new stations.[24]

From 1871 to 1878, Kimball developed the Service and laid a foundation that lasted well into the Coast Guard era. The Act of 18 June 1878 established the U.S. Life-Saving Service as a separate entity from the Revenue Marine and made the Life-Saving Service its own agency within the Treasury Department. President Hayes appointed Kimball to the head position as General Superintendent of the new agency.

There were three types of stations being built by the Life-Saving Service: houses of refuge, life-saving stations, and lifeboat stations. The houses of refuge were built only along Florida's east coast by the Service. The houses of refuge were outmoded elsewhere but still functional in the warmer south. They were manned by a keeper and his family.

Life-saving stations were the standard of the Life-Saving Service. They were manned by a crew and led by a keeper. Here the keeper, his family, and the crew would live, during the storm season on the East Coast and year-round on the West Coast. When a shipwreck occurred, survivors would often be sheltered at the station and given succor (i.e., aid, food, and shelter) until they were well enough to leave. The stations were fully equipped with rescue devices and two surfboats. On the West Coast, stations were similarly equipped but with a surfboat and a lifeboat.

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[24]Ibid., 28-31.

Lifeboat stations had a less distinct definition. In the early days of the Life-Saving Service, the term lifeboat station was used for stations manned by a keeper only and relying on volunteers for crew. The Cape Arago Life-Saving Station at Coos Bay, Oregon, was referred to as a lifeboat station in its early years.[25] However, the term quickly fell out of use as all stations became manned with paid crews by 1890. If it was left at that, the term would be fairly clear; however, the term was revived by the Coast Guard in 1915 when they began designating the old life-saving stations and new stations, "motor lifeboat stations" or simply, "lifeboat stations." Therefore, after 1915, there is a universal resurgence of the term "lifeboat station" which is still used today.

Stations were ". . . located at selected points of danger to shipping, and vary somewhat in character, according to their environment and the nature of the service demanded of them. On some portions of the coast they are placed only at long intervals, while upon others they form chains of contiguous posts within communicating distance of each other."[26] Obviously, due to the disproportionate number of stations on each coast line, the East Coast adopted the method of a contiguous chain and the West Coast stations were placed far apart at "points of danger." This was not necessarily a circumstance of politics. The East Coast was dotted with harbors and ships tended to hug the shoreline. On the West Coast, harbors were few and far between and ships tended to stay further away from shore and then turn toward shore when a harbor was reached.

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[25]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1879 Annual Reports*, 12.

[26]Kimball, 5.

In 1889, Kimball was of the opinion that, "The Pacific coast is not a dangerous one."[27] He did allow that, "There are, however, a few extremely dangerous points, mostly situated at the entrances to the important ports."[28] These were the locations at which life-saving stations were erected in Oregon. Later on, after several tragic wrecks on the Oregon and California Coasts, Kimball reformed his opinion and lobbied hard to get stations erected on the Pacific Coast.[29]

The first station to be built in Oregon was the Cape Arago Life-Saving Station in late 1878, situated to protect the entrance to Coos Bay. It was actually a lifeboat station, in the early use of the term, in that it had a keeper only and no crew. During the late 1880s, Oregon Senator John Mitchell and Oregon Representative Binger Hermann fought in Congress to have life-saving stations built in Oregon. In 1889, a station was added at Point Adams to help guard the Columbia River with its sister station at Cape Disappointment on the Washington side. The big year for life-saving in Oregon was 1891: the Cape Arago Station was abandoned, a new station was erected on the north side of the Coos Bay, receiving a permanent crew in the process, and stations were erected at Coquille River and Umpqua River. Gradually the Life-Saving Service added a station at Yaquina Bay (1895) and then at Tillamook Bay (1907) before the formation of the Coast Guard in 1915.

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[27]Kimball, 7.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ralph Shanks, phone interview by author, transcript, Eugene, OR, 26 May 2000.

Each station was home for keeper and crew, though more so for the keeper. The keeper's family was accommodated within the station. There was, however, no provision for the families of the crew. When the station was located near a town, the surfman could visit his family on his one day off a week, "from sunrise to sunset." In more isolated locations, such as the Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station at South Beach, the crew members erected small dwellings for their family near the station. In Oregon, most stations had a small group of dwellings nearby (Figure 7). Often the small community was dubbed, "Little America."

The station complex itself is fully described in later chapters. Suffice it to say, there were quarters provided for the surfman where he was housed and fed, at least until it was his turn to cook. Some stations pooled their money and hired a cook. A bed and locker was provided for each crewman. Pay was considered fairly low for the era, though a pension was enacted in 1882, albeit a meager one. When uniforms were first required in 1889, the surfmen had to buy their own.[30] It is surprising that anyone would want to be a life-saver considering the high risk of death and disease associated with the profession (Figure 8). The desire to be altruistic was strong in the surfmen.

When wrecks were not being attended to, there was a weekly routine to keep the surfmen fit and well-practiced. Mondays were reserved for drill and practice with the beach apparatus, along with the overhauling of the boats and the rescue equipment. Tuesdays were designated for practice with the boats which involved launching, rowing, and landing either a surfboat or lifeboat. Capsize drill was sometimes included at the

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[30]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1889 Annual Reports*, 66.

Figure 7. Umpqua River Lifeboat Station with Station Buildings at the Bottom and "Little America" at the Top, 1945. Source: University of Oregon Map Library (53VV16PI-M516-PS 26 Sept 45 5M-167).

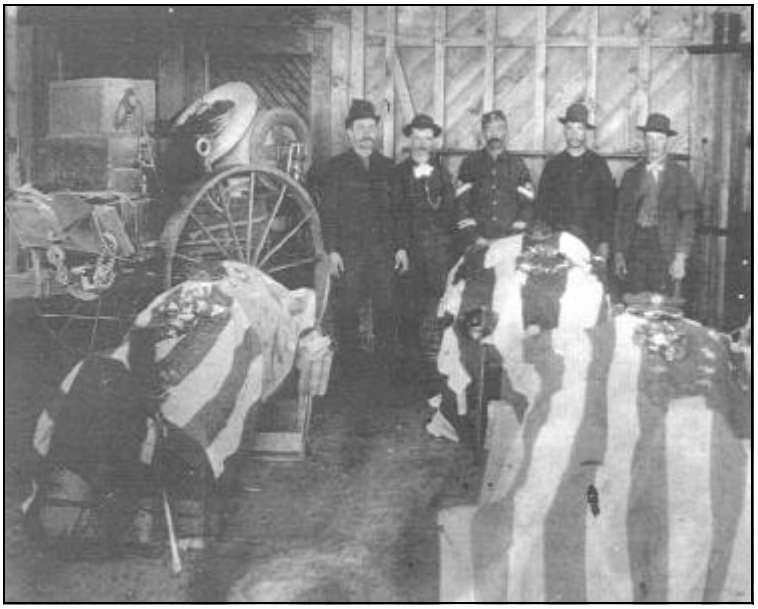

Figure 8. Three Life-Savers Died in a Training Accident on the Coquille River Bar, 1892. Source: Bandon Historical Society (BHS #1476).

discretion of the keeper since it was so hard on the equipment and crew. Wednesdays were signal practice with flags. On Thursdays, there was more drilling with the beach apparatus. Friday was reserved for practice of "restoring the apparently drowned" and training with the medical kit. Saturday was house cleaning day.[31] By repeating the drills endlessly, the use of the equipment became automatic for the surfmen, allowing them to react mechanically in times of actual rescue.

The beach apparatus drill, performed on Mondays and Thursdays, was meant to get the crew so used to erecting a breeches buoy that they could do it in the dark. The breeches buoy was a device by which a person could be moved from ship to shore on an aerial line. All the equipment for the breeches buoy was stored on a beach apparatus cart. This cart would be "hitched" to the crewmen and dragged to the drill field (Figure 9). At the end of the drill field 75 yards away would be a wreck pole, representing a mast on a stranded vessel. The keeper would fire a small cannon called a "Lyle gun" which would send a 17-pound projectile trailing a shot line over the wreck pole (Figure 10). Various mortars, cannons, and rockets had been experimented with over the years, and the Lyle gun was the final solution. It could fire the projectile over a distressed ship with accuracy up to an extreme range of 695 yards.[32]

The life-savers "on shore" would tie a block to the shot line and run a whip line through the block, holding on to both ends of the whip line. The crew on the ship would then pull the shot line with the attached block onto the ship. A tally board would be

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[31]Kimball, 18.

[32]Ibid., 25.

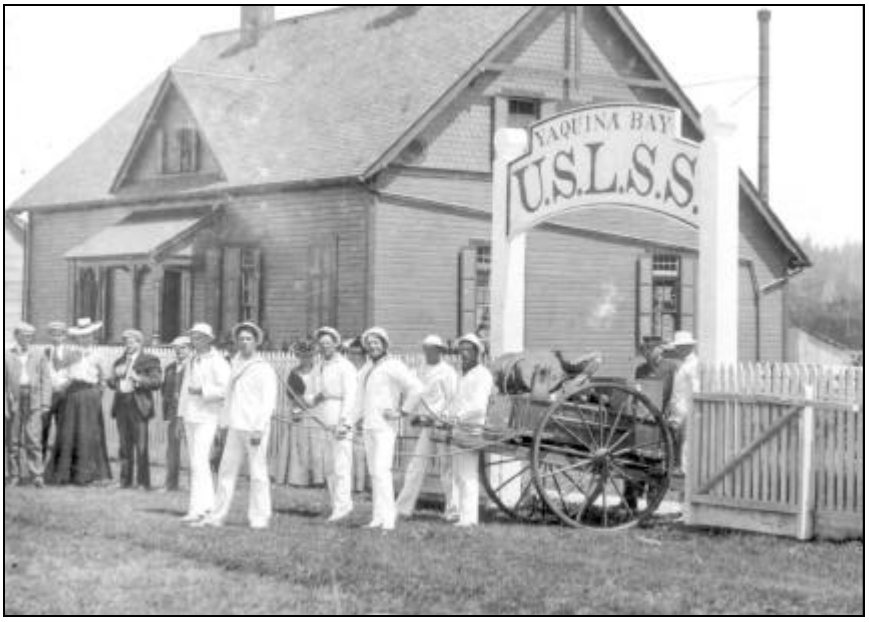

Figure 9. Crewmen Hitched to the Beach Apparatus Cart, Circa 1905. Source: Lincoln County Historical Society (LCHS #1099).

Figure 10. Crewmen Drilling with the Beach Apparatus, Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station, Circa 1910. Source: Author's Collection.

dangling from the block instructing the stranded crew what to do next. Following the instructions, the stranded crewmen would tie the block high on a mast. The life-savers would then attach a large line, or hawser, to the shot line, and the shipwrecked mariners would haul the hawser out to the ship. The wreck survivors would then tie the hawser to the mast above the block. The life-savers would tighten the hawser via a series of pulleys tied to a sand anchor and an X-shaped fulcrum. Once taut, the life-savers would pull a breeches buoy out to the wreck using the whip line. The breeches buoy was basically a life-ring with an attached pair of pants suspended from a pulley. A survivor would get into the breeches buoy and be pulled to "shore" (Figure 11). The crew was required to set up the breeches buoy in less than five minutes, and if they could not, it was assumed that ". . . they have been remiss in drilling or that there are some stupid men among them."[33] Some crews became so proficient at the drill that they were able to perform the procedure in two minutes and thirty seconds.

On occasion, a lifecar would be substituted for a breeches buoy. A lifecar was basically a metal torpedo with a hatch (Figure 12). When the hawser could not be raised high enough above the water or if a shipwreck victim was injured, a lifecar could be pulled out to the wreck on the same rigging as the breeches buoy. Several people could squeeze into a lifecar, seal the hatch, and then get dragged through the surf to shore. Only a few rescues were performed each year using the lifecar, though it was a piece of equipment issued to every station.

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[33]Ibid., 19.

Figure 11. Crewmen Drilling with the Beach Apparatus, Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station, Circa 1910. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #654-A 98317).

Figure 12. Lifecar Rigged from Ship to Shore. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Surfboats File).

The most common pre-1915 method of rescue was the pulling boat. The oar-powered pulling boats came in two varieties: the light-weight surfboat or the heavy-weight lifeboat. On Tuesdays, the life-savers would participate in boat drills to perfect their handling of the pulling boats.

There were three principal types of surfboats used in Oregon: the Beebe, the Beebe-McLellan, and the Monomoy. They measured 25' to 27' long and weighed 700 to 1,100 pounds. Surfboats were relatively light-weight so that they could be pulled along the beach on a carriage (Figure 13) and then launched directly into the surf (Figure 14). Six crewmen were needed to row the surfboats with the keeper manning a long steering oar at the stern. They were highly maneuverable and excellent for short distances when only a few people were imperiled. Surfboats were ideal for work on the Eastern Seaboard. None of the surfboats were self-righting, but the Beebe-McLellan was self-bailing.

To give some understanding of how often surfboats were used, from 1871 until 1889, the Life-Saving Service launched them 6,730 times to assist people and landed 6,735 persons from shipwrecks. In all those trips, the surfboats only capsized 14 times. However, on six of those capsizings, 41 people died, 27 of whom were life-savers.[34] In other words, capsizing was serious and that is why the surfmen trained for it. A capsize drill would start with the men seated, they would then grab lines, pull to one side of the boat, and flip the boat upside down (Figure 15). The crew would then lift one side of the boat in unison while still in the water, flip the boat right side up, pull themselves in, and

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[34]Ibid., 21.

Figure 13. Tillamook Bay Life-Saving Station Crew with Surfboat, Circa 1910. Source: Author's Collection.

Figure 14. Tillamook Bay Life-Saving Station Crew in Surfboat, Circa 1910. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #654-A 98318).

return to their seats on the thwarts. The fastest time ever recorded to capsize a surfboat and returned to the seated position was 13 seconds.[35] The righting procedure was so quick that a keeper could actually step over the stern and not get wet (Figure 16).

On the West Coast, the heavier lifeboat was often used. There were two principal types: the heavy English lifeboat and the lighter Dobbins lifeboat. The English lifeboat averaged around 30' long, roughly equivalent to a surfboat but weighed four times as much. This heavier weight was due to its iron keel which gave it self-righting capabilities. It was powered by eight crewmen and steered by the keeper with a tiller. The lifeboat also had self-bailing capabilities and could be outfitted with sails. Because of its weight, the English lifeboat could only be launched directly into the water. Only 37 of the English lifeboats were put into service, all on the Great Lakes.[36]

The Dobbins lifeboat, on the other hand, was a compromise between the surfboat and lifeboat. It was developed by David P. Dobbins, Superintendent of the Ninth District, in 1881. The Dobbins lifeboat was roughly the same length as the English lifeboat at 24', but more than half as light, weighing from 1,600 to 2,000 pounds. It was cheaper to build, was self-righting and self-bailing, and could still carry 33 people safely.[37] Because of its light weight, the lifeboat could be launched like a surfboat directly from the beach (Figure 17) or from a marine railway (Figure 18). It was rowed by eight and steered by the keeper with a tiller (Figure 19). A Dobbins lifeboat appears

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[35]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1907 Annual Reports*, 21.

[36]Stonehouse, 97.

[37]Ibid., 98-100.

Figure 15. Point Adams Life-Saving Station Crew During Capsize Drill, Circa 1910. Source: Author's Collection.

Figure 16. Keeper Walking Around Stern During Capsize Drill at Lewis and Clark Exposition, 1905. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #9999Y387-79857).

Figure 17. Laboring with Dobbins Lifeboat at Klipsan Beach, Washington. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #654-A 45281).

Figure 18. Dobbins Lifeboat Hurtling Down Launchway at Coquille River Life-Saving Station. Source: Bandon Historical Society (BHS #1104).

Figure 19. Dobbins Lifeboat at the Coos Bay Bar, 1910. Source: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (Life-Saving Service: Surfboats File).

in many of the photos on the Oregon Coast, and it is believed that every Oregon station by 1900 had one in addition to their surfboat.

As early as 1899, the Life-Saving Service began to experiment with putting a gasoline motor in a 34' lifeboat. The weight of the motor proved unsatisfactory in a pulling boat, so an entirely new 36' lifeboat was designed around the engine. The first 36' motor lifeboat in the country went to Waaddah Island Life-Saving Station at Neah Bay, Washington, in 1908. The Pacific surf and vast area that the Waaddah Island station covered precipitated the need. The motor lifeboats were accepted as a godsend. They more than doubled the range of the life-savers and allowed them to arrive fresh at the

scene.[38] Soon, the 13th district had a higher percentage of motor lifeboats in use than any other district in the country (Figure 20). By 1914, there were 147 motor lifeboats and surfboats in service.[39]

The 36' motor lifeboats went through many incarnations throughout their long history. The boat was an extremely successful design that continued to be produced as late as 1956. The last active 36-footer in America was retired from Depoe Bay, Oregon, in 1987. The boat is now on display in Newport News, Virginia, at the Mariner's Museum.[40] Tillamook Bay, Yaquina Bay, Umpqua River, and Port Orford all have their 36' motor lifeboats on display near their respective Coast Guard stations (Figure 21).

Beyond the weekly schedule of drills as set forth by the Life-Saving Service, the crew was also responsible for patrolling the beaches. A lookout was mounted from sunrise to sunset, each crewman taking a watch. On the Oregon Coast, most watches were stood in a lookout tower away from the station which provided a wide view of the surf and beach. Even on Sundays, when there were no drills, the beaches would have to be patrolled. From sunset to sunrise, the surfmen would walk the beach. Two crewmen would operate a four-hour shift no matter what the weather. Each one would walk away from the station in opposite directions to scan the shore watching for signs of distress. On the East Coast, patrolmen would meet up with surfmen from other stations also on

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[38]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1908 Annual Reports*, 23-24.

[39]Shanks, *The U.S. Life-Saving Service*, 111.

[40]Ibid., 113.

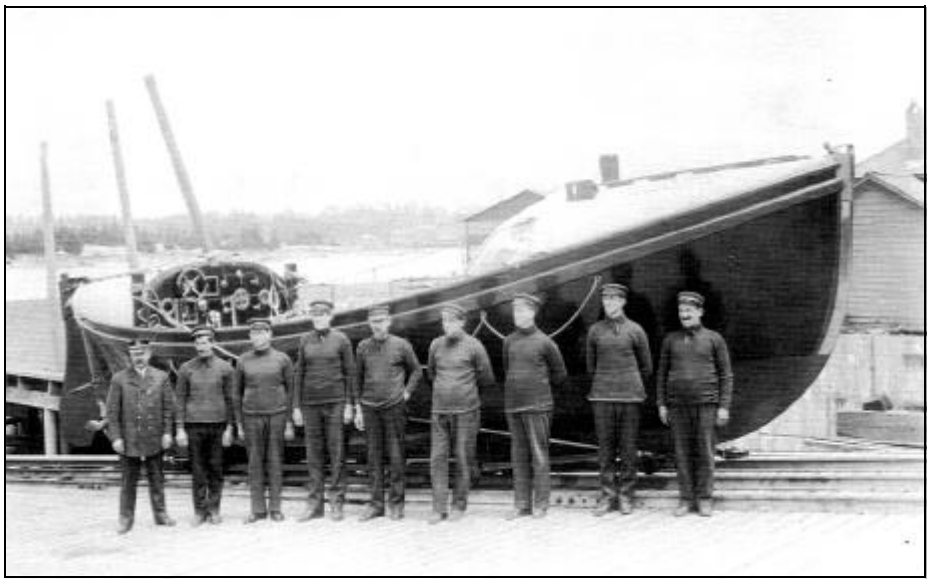

Figure 20. New 36' Motor Lifeboat at Coquille River Lifeboat Station, Circa 1915. Source: Bandon Historical Society.

Figure 21. Motor Lifeboat Display at the Yaquina Bay Lifeboat Station, 1999. Source: Author.

patrol and exchange tokens to show that they had completed their assigned "beat."[41] On the Oregon Coast, since the stations were so isolated, a life-saver would walk until he reached the end of his beat where there would be a post with a key attached. He would insert the key into a patrol clock that he carried (Figure 22), marking the time in which he reached the end of his patrol. If a crewman spotted a ship either too close to shore or aground, he would burn a red Coston flare to either ward off the ship or to signal the ship that help was on the way.

Besides saving lives, the other component of the Life-Saving Service's mission was to save the property of the shipwrecked mariner. The surfmen did this by warning off ships too close to shore, extricating ships from dangerous situations, and refloating vessels once stranded. A major partner on the West Coast in this work were the tug boats (Figure 23). Tugs rescued survivors, towed disabled ships, pulled vessels off of shoals, and often towed life-savers to the scene of wrecks before the advent of power lifeboats. Frequently, the tugs were the first ones on the wreck scene. Nearly all wreck reports on the Oregon Coast mention the assistance of tugs, as part of the mariner's duty to render assistance at sea.

Once a wreck did occur, the keeper of the station was entrusted with the protection of the cargo. Sometimes the shipload was a total loss; however, often the cargo washed or was brought to shore practically unscathed (Figure 24). There are many reports on the Oregon Coast of crewman standing watch over goods waiting for the ship's owner or representatives to arrive at the scene. During the history of the Life-

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[41]The stations on the south shore of Lake Superior and at San Francisco Bay also met up with crewmen from adjacent stations and exchanged tokens.

Figure 22. Patrol Clock, Point Allerton, Massachusetts. Source: Author.

Figure 23. Tug Assisting Schooner over Coquille River Bar, Circa 1910. Source: Author's Collection.

Figure 24. The *Marconi* on 23 March 1909. The Crew was Rescued by Breeches Buoy. Source: Author's Collection.

Saving Service, the agency saved ". . . many more times in cost in property . . ." than what it cost the Service to operate.[42]

Public perception was high on Sumner Kimball's list, and he did many things to promote the Service. Since all progress in life-saving had been brought about through public pressure, Kimball needed to keep the service in the public eye. Starting with the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, Kimball had the Life-Saving Service represented at each of the large expositions. Kimball was not satisfied with a mere display. He had an entire life-saving station, fully operational with crew, built on each of the exposition grounds. The crew performed breeches buoy and capsizing demonstrations daily ". . . to afford the general public a fairly accurate idea of the serious work of the Service. . . ."[43]

At Oregon's Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition held in Portland in 1905, there was a life-saving station (Figure 25). A keeper and a crew of eight manned the station from May through October and mounted daily exhibitions (Figure 26). Located on an island in the middle of Guild Lake, sharing space with the U.S. Government Building, the Life-Saving Station continued the Spanish Colonial architectural theme of the island. During its 4-1/2 month run, more than 2.5 million people attended the

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[42]Kimball, 36.

[43]U.S. Life-Saving Service, *1907 Annual Reports*, 20-21.

Figure 25. Life-Saving Station at the Lewis and Clark Exposition, 1905. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #9999Y397-79867).

Figure 26. Capsize Drill in Front of Life-Saving Station at the Lewis and Clark Exposition, 1905. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #9999Y349-79819).

exposition and many local, national, and international visitors were exposed to the Life-Saving Service.[44] The station, unfortunately, no longer stands.

Kimball made sure the story of the Life-Saving Service reached the public in other ways. The *Annual Reports* put out by the Life-Saving Service starting in 1876 are considered some of the most exciting writing ever produced by the federal government; it helped that the raw material was equal to the task. Kimball had brought in William D. O'Connor as his assistant in 1878. It seems as to be coincidence that O'Connor was an experienced writer who wrote previously for the Philadelphia *Saturday Evening Post*. O'Connor's writing brought the exploits of the Life-Saving Service to life for people across the country. Magazines and newspapers of the day carried the message even further and christened the surfmen "storm warriors" and "heroes of the surf."

When rescues did occur, the image of the heroic keeper did not always go unsullied. On 29 January 1883, the *Tacoma* went ashore four miles north of the Umpqua River. A volunteer crew of eight arrived from Empire, but Keeper Desmond of the Cape Arago Life-Saving Station was unwilling to "aid the unfortunates on the wreck" and was roundly censured by the *Coos Bay World*. The newspaper and apparently the community felt ". . . there is no excuse, and it is only a pity that our laws cannot reach him and hang him for the lives of the men who were sacrificed through his pusillanimity and cowardice."[45] This was, of course, an exceptional incident rather than the norm.

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[44]Carl Abbott, *The Great Extravaganza* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society, 1981), 54.

[45]"Wreck of The Tacoma in 1883, North of the Umpqua," *Coos Bay News*, 2 February 1916.

Promotion of the Life-Saving Service went all the way down to the local level. Life-saving stations became social centers to their coastal communities. The keeper and crew usually came from the locality and were held in great esteem by the citizenry. In many surfmen training photos, there are locals looking on (Figure 27). On Yaquina Bay, non-surfmen got a ride in the new, 36' power boat *Undaunted* when it arrived at Newport in 1914 (Figure 28). Events were often held at the stations. For example, a May Day dance was announced in Newport in 1901:

> A good time will be had at the Life Saving Station on May Day. Everyone is invited to go down, and bring their lunch baskets. Captain Clark and his gentlemanly crew will entertain you royally. All those who wish to remain for the evening dance, will find abundance of the delicacies of the land, at the station, to satisfy their appetites. The old and young, the bachelor, the old maid, and the fellows with their sweethearts — All are welcome.[46]

The surfmen of the Life-Saving Service were often looked upon as selfless Samaritans in the locality. Many of these small coastal communities had limited police and fire response. It seems that each *Annual Report* mentions at least one fire that Oregon surfmen assisted in putting out. This may have taxed the crew, but they were deeply embedded in the local community. The Point Adams Life-Saving Station crew was constantly recovering gillnets from the Columbia River and returning them to owners. On 20 April 1894, the Coquille River crew discovered a cow wedged between some logs, so they freed it and returned it to the owner.[47] Kimball pointed out that the life-savers provided ". . . many other services inuring to the public benefit which it has

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[46]"May Day," *Yaquina Bay News,* 25 April 1901.

[47]Ernest L. Osborne and Victor West, *Men of Action: A History of the U.S. Life-Saving Service on the Pacific Coast* (Bandon, OR: Bandon Historical Society, 1981), 72.

Figure 27. Yaquina Bay Life-Saving Station Crew with Lifeboat. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #654-A 52372).

Figure 28. Aboard Yaquina Bay's Motor Lifeboat *Undaunted*, Circa 1914. Source: Lincoln County Historical Society (LCHS #2265).

incidentally rendered," from the collection of rare marine specimens for science to the prevention of robberies.[48]

By 1915, the Life-Saving Service was a well-oiled machine. Kimball had been at the helm of the Life-Saving Service for 44 years. There were 279 active life-saving stations along the nation's coastlines. The Service was responding with its own motorized craft, following the maritime industry's evolution from sail to engine. The Service had 80 motor lifeboats and nearly 150 motorized surfboats by 1915.[49] All of Oregon's stations had one powerboat, though it was a mixed fleet of 34-footers, 36-footers, and motorized surfboats.[50] Almost all stations were connected via telephone. The first radio distress call by an American vessel was sent on 10 December 1905, marking the dawn of ship-to-shore radio communication. By an Act of Congress of 4 May 1910, every ship carrying more than 50 people was required to have a radio.[51] However, with the life-saving system functioning better than ever, there was a political machine working behind the scenes in an attempt to dismantle the Service.

The Progressive Movement was afoot in the 1910s seeking to curb the excesses of government growth. All agencies came under scrutiny starting around 1910, including the Life-Saving Service, but the Revenue Cutter Service was soon to be seen as the most

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[48]Kimball, 36.

[49]Stephen H. Evans, *The United States Coast Guard: 1790-1915; A Definitive History* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1949), 187-88.

[50]U.S. Coast Guard, *Annual Reports of the Operations of the United States Coast Guard 1915* (Washington: GPO, 1915), 67.

[51]Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II*, 141.

wasteful. Various mergers and consolidations were proposed, including a merger with the Lighthouse Service, but finally an agreement was hammered out to merge the Revenue Cutter Service with the Life-Saving Service.[52]

United States Coast Guard

On 20 January 1915, Congress passed the Act to Create the Coast Guard which merged the Life-Saving Service with the Revenue Cutter Service. The new military organization was called the United States Coast Guard. Maritime safety, law enforcement, and military readiness were instantly rolled into one group and remain the three principles of the Coast Guard today.

The major impact of the merger was that the old Life-Saving Service converted from a military-like group within the Treasury Department to an independent military organization. Life-saving station keepers became warrant officers, surfmen became enlisted men.[53] A long-sought retirement system was finally implemented. A whole new bureaucracy was instituted that made the stations less autonomous. However, the stations did retain their traditional routine, especially on the Pacific Coast, and little changed in the day-to-day lives of the surfmen.

During World War I, Coast Guardsmen were attached to the Navy. However, the war was in Europe and on the Atlantic Ocean, and had virtually no impact on operations on the Pacific Coast other than to make funding even scarcer. The 1921 *Annual Report*

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[52]Noble, *That Others Might Live*, 149-52.

[53]Ibid., 152-53.

states, "The state of dilapidation into which some of them [stations] have fallen, through age and usage, should not be permitted to continue longer. The establishment of a number of stations has been specifically authorized by law, but their construction can not be proceeded with in the absence of the necessary funds."[54]

The passage of Prohibition in 1920 gave the Coast Guard a new law to enforce and funding with which to do it. The Volstead Act of 1920 was an unpopular law, dangerous and unpleasant to enforce. However, funds for its enforcement allowed the Coast Guard to grow at an unprecedented rate to halt "rum running." The "Rum War" began in 1920 with four years of incidental activities, then heated up for the next ten years, until operations were curtailed in 1933, and the 18th Amendment repealed in 1934.[55]

Liquor smuggling along the Oregon Coast was never as big as along the Atlantic Seaboard. Most of the West Coast rum runners came out of Vancouver, British Columbia, and headed for the big ports of Seattle and San Francisco. However, some rum runners did use the relatively small Oregon ports, the very ports where the Coast Guard was stationed. To counter the smugglers, the Coast Guard stations were augmented with additional patrol craft and personnel. Like the beach patrols, the offshore patrols watched for signs of activity; however, in this case, they were watching for small, fast boats darting into harbors at night to unload their illegal cargo.[56]

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[54]U.S. Coast Guard, *1921 Annual Report*, 30.

[55]Malcolm F. Willoughby, *Rum War at Sea* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1964), 157.

[56]Ibid., 75-76.

The Coast Guard found itself with a new role, intelligence gatherer. Intelligence data played an important role in intercepting liquor shipments. The Coast Guard was fairly successful in stemming rum running along the Oregon Coast, and much of that was due to information gathering. Toward the end of Prohibition, most of the alcohol in Oregon was coming overland.[57]

Near the end of the Depression, Public Works Administration (PWA) funds came into Oregon to build Coast Guard stations. Created in 1933 by Franklin Roosevelt as one of his New Deal programs, the PWA was developed to reduce unemployment and to restore people's purchasing power through construction projects. At least one station, the Point Adams Lifeboat Station (1938), and the Yaquina Bay Lifeboat Station lookout tower (1936) were built with PWA funds. The PWA's sister program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) begun in 1935, may also have had some role in Oregon station construction. Three additional stations were built in Oregon in 1939, and it is likely that they received PWA or WPA funds also.

Motorized lifeboats were not the only shakeup in the rescue equipment of the life-saver. As early as 1915, Coast Guard officers on the East Coast began experimenting with air patrols to search for ships in need of assistance. On 29 August 1916, the Coast Guard was authorized to build ten air stations; however, they were not funded until 1924. The funding finally arrived in the generous form of $13,000,000 to enforce the Volstead Act. By 1936, there were 45 planes in the Coast Guard. An air station was built at Port

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[57]Ibid., 76, 83.

Angeles, Washington, in 1935 (Figure 29), but no air stations were commissioned in Oregon until after WWII.[58]

The rescue range of the surfmen continued to increase with new and more powerful boats. As a result, fewer stations were needed, so the Coast Guard closed and consolidated stations, mainly on the East Coast. No stations were closed in Oregon and in fact, two new stations were added, one at Siuslaw River (1917) and one at Port Orford (1934). This demonstrates just how far behind Oregon was in station construction.

Just as commercial shipping started to become safer with the advent of radio communications and direction finding, there was a new group for the Coast Guard to deal with, recreational boaters. The recreational boater hovered close to shore and was often relatively inexperienced in coastal waters. Starting with the arrival of small gasoline powered boats, the numbers of incidents involving small craft began to increase.

On 1 July 1939, the U.S. Lighthouse Service was folded into the Coast Guard, allowing it to take over the maintenance and operation of aids to navigation. Originally, lighthouses were built and operated locally, but in 1789, the U.S. Treasury took over the role and established the U.S. Lighthouse Service. The merger in 1939 completed the Coast Guard's full-service role of protecting life and property along the nation's coastlines.

Statistics show that the Coast Guard saved 203,609 lives during the 70 years from 1871 to 1941, including the work of the Revenue Cutter Service. Property valued at $1,784,738,124 was saved from the sea. In addition, succor was afforded to 48,023

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[58]Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II*, 37-38.

Figure 29. Amphibian at the Port Angeles Air Station. Source: Author's Collection.

persons. The annual averages for these 70 years were 2,868 lives rescued, $25,137,157 worth of property saved, and 676 persons afforded succor.[59]

A National Emergency was declared by Franklin Roosevelt on 8 September 1939 in response to Germany's invasion of Poland. During the two years before the U.S. entered WWII, the Coast Guard became very active with the neutral convoys in the Atlantic. The Coast Guard was given the duty of supervising the loading of dangerous cargoes, which included explosives and fuel headed to Europe. In Oregon, replacement stations were being constructed at an unprecedented rate. Point Adams, Umpqua River, and Coquille River all received brand-new stations in 1939.

[59]Ibid., 6.

The Coast Guard Reserve and Auxiliary Act was passed on 23 June 1939, laying the groundwork for organizing civilian motorboats and yachts into the Coast Guard Auxiliary. The Coast Guard Auxiliary was quite active along the Oregon Coast. In February 1941, they were organized into the Temporary Reserve, which worked to patrol the coasts of the nation during the emergency years. Several "TR" groups were organized at Oregon's major harbors. By the start of the war, the Temporary Reserve had 5,205 members and 4,524 boats. On 1 November 1941, President Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 8929 that put the Coast Guard under the jurisdiction of the Navy "for the duration of the emergency."[60]

Throughout WWII, Coast Guard personnel retained their identity as "coasties" by a shield worn on their sleeve to distinguish them from Navy personnel. They served in combat roles in all of the amphibious operations in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. They hunted for enemy submarines, piloted landing craft, and rescued many from the sea. The Coast Guard also monitored and protected all of America's ports and coastlines from attack, sabotage, and accident. In Oregon, this last role of monitoring the ports and coastline was the most evident. Beach patrols were augmented soon after Roosevelt declared a state of emergency in September 1939. Blackouts were enforced up and down the coast. Mounted patrols, jeeps, and war dogs were brought in to bolster the beach patrols (Figure 30). All of the Oregon stations packed additional patrolmen into the existing barracks. Many temporary buildings, such as barracks, barns, and kennels, were erected just before and during the war to support the beach patrol. In the Summer of

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[60]Ibid., 7-8, 22.

Figure 30. Beach Patrol, Lake Tachkenitch Near Reedsport, 1942-43.
Source: Lincoln County Historical Society (LCHS #317).

1943, as the war waned, patrols were cut back. At the close of WWII, the beach patrols were deactivated entirely.[61]

Starting with 12,000 in September 1939, the ranks of the Coast Guard rose to 25,000 in December 1941, and finished out with 176,000 at the end of the war.[62] Another 50,000 temporary reservists had served in non-combat situations, releasing Coast Guardsmen for duty at sea. The Women's Coast Guard Reserve, whose members were known as SPARS, provided an additional 10,000 for the home front.[63] After August

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[61]Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II*, 45, 53.

[62]Walter C. Capron, *The U.S. Coast Guard*, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1965), 169.

[63]Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II*, 8-10.

1945, the Coast Guard began working quickly to demobilize personnel to pre-war levels. On 1 January 1946, the Coast Guard reverted back to the Treasury Department.[64]

After WWII, the Coast Guard saw the advent of new navigational techniques that made ships less susceptible to running aground. Radio direction finding had been perfected during the war making it easier for ships to plot their positions and stay further from danger. Radar and sonar were refined.

Since a demonstration of the Sikorsky XR-4 helicopter in 1942, the Coast Guard had become interested in the capabilities of the helicopter. The first helicopter humanitarian mission occurred in January 1944, with the first hoist rescue taking place in November 1945.[65] The helicopter was soon perfected and quickly made its way into the Coast Guard's rescue arsenal (Figure 31).

The National Air-Sea Rescue Agency was established in 15 February 1944. This agency was placed under the Coast Guard and started the development of Coast Guard air stations where planes and helicopters were integrated for search and rescue. In Oregon, an air station was built at Astoria and one at North Bend.

The Coast Guard's current role may involve more duties, but their principal task is still to protect people along the nation's coastlines. From wooden boats to steel, from breeches buoy to helicopter, the techniques may have changed over the years, but the mission remains the same: To protect the lives and property of "those that go down to sea."

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[64]Capron, 169-70.

[65]Barrett Thomas Beard, *Wonderful Flying Machines: A History of U.S. Coast Guard Helicopters* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 48-49, 104.

Figure 31. Major General Jackson Transferring from Helicopter to Ship in 1963. Source: Oregon Historical Society (OrHi #0091P340-011163).