

## Chapter Two: An Evolving Coast Guard

The Coast Guard's evolution parallels that of the United States, an "island nation" heavily dependent upon the seas surrounding it for commerce, resources, and a buffer against external threats. The predecessor agencies of the Coast Guard were created in response to threats to our nation's vital interests that arose as the nation grew. As those threats evolved, so did the agencies' duties and their relationships with each other. The eventual result was consolidation, beginning in 1915 with the merging of the Revenue Cutter Service and Life-Saving Service to form the U.S. Coast Guard. By 1946, the Coast Guard had assimilated the remaining agencies as well.

Since that time the Service has continued to add responsibilities. The result is that today's Coast Guard, which carries out civil and military responsibilities touching virtually every facet of the maritime environment, bears little resemblance to its collection of predecessor agencies. Yet the process of integrating these agencies, each with its own culture and characteristics, has shaped the Coast Guard in lasting ways. Understanding the evolutionary process that led to the modern Coast Guard thus provides insight into the unique nature of our Service and the principles of Coast Guard operations that flow from it.

Coast Guard history can be divided into six distinct periods. Our ability to uphold and protect the nation's enduring maritime interests expanded—though not always evenly—during each of these periods.

### Coast Guard Predecessor Agencies (Year Established)

Merged to Form the Coast Guard in 1915:

U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (1790)\*  
U.S. Life-Saving Service (1848)

Assimilated into the Coast Guard:

1939: U.S. Lighthouse Service (1789)  
1946: Steamboat Inspection Service  
(1838) and Bureau of Navigation (1884)\*\*

\* Congress gave the service originally known as the Revenue Marine this statutory title in 1863.

\*\* The Steamboat Inspection Service and the Bureau of Navigation had been combined to form the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation in 1932.

### 1790 TO 1865: REVENUE PROTECTION AND MORE

The founding of the Revenue Marine was stimulated by the financial needs of a new nation. After the Revolution, the United States was deep in debt and its emerging industries were under tremendous pressure from British imports. The American merchant marine, a mainstay of the colonial economy, had been weakened by losses in the war. To secure its political independence, the United States had to secure its financial independence. To accomplish this imperative, Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, proposed a bold economic plan relying heavily on income generated by customs duties and tonnage taxes that discriminated against foreign goods and ships.



Alexander Hamilton

Hamilton understood that in order for his plan to succeed “the Treasury needed a strong right arm”<sup>2</sup> to suppress smuggling and ensure duties and taxes were paid. He thus sought

authorization from Congress to build “so many boats or cutters, not exceeding ten, as may be employed for the protection of revenue.”<sup>3</sup> Enacted on 4 August, the Tariff Act of 1790 authorized the building of ten cutters, but did not define their exact specifications. The majority of those built were “Baltimore Clipper”-type, two-masted schooners: “light, fast, easily-managed, seaworthy vessels, handy in beating in and out of harbors and through winding river channels.”<sup>4</sup> The Tariff Act also authorized a professional corps of 100—the Revenue

Marine—charged with a single duty: assistance in the collection of customs duties and tonnage taxes.<sup>5</sup>

Hamilton also understood that for the new nation to earn customs duties and tonnage taxes, ships had to make it safely to port. Essential to that end were lighthouses, of which there were twelve in 1789, each erected and maintained by local interests.<sup>6</sup> Hamilton realized that lighthouses were of national value; therefore, he proposed to Congress that responsibility for all aids to navigation be given to the central government.



Boston Light is the site of America's first lighthouse, built in 1716. The first light was burned by retreating British forces during the Revolution. This is the second tower, built in 1783 and modified in 1859.

### Periods in Coast Guard History

- ◆ 1790-1865: Revenue Protection and More
- ◆ 1865-1915: The Road to the Coast Guard
- ◆ 1915-1916: Establishment of the U.S. Coast Guard
- ◆ 1917-1946: A Service Forged by War, Crisis, and Consolidation
- ◆ 1946-1972: Sorting Out Roles and Missions
- ◆ 1973-Today and Beyond: A Unique Instrument of National Security

Congress agreed, and on 7 August 1789 the Treasury Department was given responsibility for constructing and maintaining all of the nation’s aids to navigation.<sup>7</sup> In just its Ninth Act, the First Congress thus accepted that safety of life at sea is a public responsibility and “launched the national government upon its course of guarding the coast in the interest of safety and security afloat.”<sup>8</sup>

Revenue Cutters for National Defense

For nearly seven years, Revenue Marine cutters were the only armed ships the

United States possessed, the Navy having been disbanded after the Revolution. Consequently, when the Quasi-War with France loomed in 1797 the Revenue Marine was available for duty, and Congress assigned the Service its first military tasks. In the same act that established the United States Navy, Congress authorized the President to augment the Navy with revenue cutters when needed.<sup>9</sup> Eight revenue cutters were subsequently deployed under Navy control along the U.S. southern coast and in the Caribbean from 1798 to 1799, where they performed national defense duties and preyed upon French shipping. At the conflict's conclusion the Navy retained three cutters and returned five to the Revenue Marine.

For the most part, the Navy considered the cutters to be too small and slow for strictly naval duties.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the need for sufficient numbers and types of warships led to the Revenue Marine's participation in naval operations on many other occasions. With only six frigates in service, the Navy needed the services of more armed vessels as the nation entered the War of 1812 against Great Britain. Revenue cutters again were absorbed into Navy service, and one promptly captured the first British prize of the war.

Shallow-draft revenue cutters proved useful in the small conflicts that erupted along the North American coastline as the nation expanded. From 1836 to 1839, cutters engaged in littoral and riverine operations during the Seminole War in Florida. Revenue Marine vessels also participated in

amphibious operations during the Mexican War in 1846-1848.

As the nation and the U.S. Navy grew, the relatively small numbers of armed vessels the Revenue Marine could contribute to national defense duties became relatively less important. However, the Service remained a repository for militarily useful, shallow-draft warships that were always in demand for littoral operations, and revenue cutter officers and crews performed many gallant actions in support of the Navy.

#### Battle Streamers\* Earned 1790-1865

- ◆ 1790-1797: Maritime Protection of the New Republic\*\*
- ◆ 1798-1801: French Quasi-War
- ◆ 1812: War of 1812
- ◆ 1820-1861: African Slave Trade Patrol
- ◆ 1822-1830s: Operations against West Indian Pirates
- ◆ 1835-1842: The Indian Wars
- ◆ 1846-1848: Mexican War
- ◆ 1861-1865: The Civil War

\* For more information, look up "Battle Streamers" in the Glossary.

\*\* Awarded solely to the Coast Guard.



The revenue cutter *Eagle* engages the French privateer *Bon Pere* in 1799 during the Quasi-War with France.

### Supporting Maritime Trade

From its earliest days, Revenue Marine efforts were not single-mindedly focused on customs collections. Instead, the Service adopted a wider role of protecting and fostering—as well as regulating—marine transportation and trade. During the presidencies of George Washington and John Adams, the Revenue Marine began maintaining aids to navigation, assisting lighthouse personnel, and charting coastal waters. It also carried out various health and quarantine measures at major ports. On the law enforcement side, beginning in 1819 the Revenue Marine worked with the Navy to drive pirates out of the coastal waters of the southern Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, clearing those areas of threats to traders.

The Service also took on the major task of finding and rescuing distressed mariners, something it had hitherto done on an *ad hoc* basis. In 1832, Treasury Secretary Louis McLane ordered Revenue Marine cutters to begin limited cruising during the winter months in order to provide assistance to mariners in distress. This experiment was so successful that in 1837 Congress authorized the President “to cause any suitable number of public vessels ... to cruise upon the coast, in the severe portion of the season ... to afford such aid to distressed navigators as their circumstances and necessities may require.”<sup>11</sup> Thus began a tradition of assistance to life and property that today is one of the Coast Guard’s most widely acclaimed missions.

During this same period steamboats were plying the nation’s rivers and beginning to

venture out to sea, but their boilers were notoriously unreliable and dangerous. In 1832, explosions destroyed fully 14 percent of all steamers in operation, with the loss of a thousand or more lives. The situation cried out for action, and in 1838 Congress enacted the first navigation law “better securing the lives ... on board vessels propelled in whole or in part by steam.”<sup>12</sup> This Act, which gave U.S. district judges authority to appoint steamboat inspectors, is considered the beginning of an organization that would evolve over the next several decades into the Steamboat Inspection Service within the Treasury Department. It also launched what has become “an enduring national policy of regulating private enterprise in the interest of safety afloat.”<sup>13</sup>

Almost ten years later, Congressman William Newell of New Jersey, who had personally witnessed the grounding of the bark *Terasto* and the death of her crewmen years earlier, set in motion a series of legislative moves that led to the formation of the U.S. Life-Saving Service (LSS). The LSS and the Revenue Marine worked together closely—revenue service personnel often were temporarily reassigned to the LSS, and cutters provided material support to lifeboat stations along the U.S. coast.

### Law Enforcement in a Restive Nation

The Revenue Marine aided the federal government in enforcing its sovereignty over U.S. affairs. Its actions were not always popular in a country that was still searching for a balance between central and state power. Congress passed the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts in 1807 and 1809,

respectively, in an attempt to keep the United States neutral during the Napoleonic Wars. Both the Revenue Marine and the Navy were called upon to prevent proscribed trade—an uncomfortable policy that hurt large numbers of traders, shipping companies, fishermen, and coastal communities.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning in 1820, the Revenue Marine also began enforcing the laws against the importation of slaves, another duty that was not universally acclaimed. Revenue cutters captured a number of slave ships, but it was an exercise in frustration, because captured slavers rarely were successfully prosecuted in the courts. Despite the efforts of the Revenue Marine, the U.S. Navy and, later, the Royal Navy, the slave trade continued until the early 1860s.<sup>15</sup>

In 1832, the Revenue Marine was thrust into the national limelight when South Carolina refused to recognize U.S. tariff laws, challenging federal authority. President Andrew Jackson sent five cutters to Charleston “to take possession of any vessel arriving from a foreign port, and defend her against any attempts to dispossess the Customs Officers of her custody.”<sup>16</sup> Due to its link to ocean trade and the revenue that it brought the U.S. Treasury, the Revenue Marine again became part of the federal government’s “long arm”—a role it would reprise 29 years later as the country headed into civil war.

The revenue cutter *Harriet Lane* fires across the bow of the merchant ship *Nashville* as she enters the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Revenue Cutters in the War Between the States

As war loomed after South Carolina passed its Ordinance of Secession in December 1860, the men and cutters of the Revenue Marine faced the same dilemma as their compatriots in the Army and Navy. “Each man in federal uniform was forced to decide, and to decide quickly, whether his supreme allegiance lay with a state or with the nation-state.”<sup>17</sup> Men chose both ways, and the Revenue Marine lost men and cutters as a result.

Many, but not all, of those who remained were ordered by President Abraham Lincoln to combat service with the Navy.<sup>18</sup> The cutter *Harriet Lane*, which took part in the abortive relief expedition to Fort Sumter in 1861, is credited with firing the first naval shots of the Civil War.<sup>19</sup> Other cutters in service with the Navy performed blockade duty along the Atlantic coast, Chesapeake Bay, and Potomac River. Cutters not assigned to the Navy patrolled the shipping lanes to safeguard trade against Southern privateers and to assist distressed vessels at sea, and their usual duty of protecting the nation’s customs revenue took on an added urgency since that income was critical to the Union war effort.



## 1865 TO 1915: THE ROAD TO THE COAST GUARD

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the nation's continued territorial growth and the ongoing expansion of its overseas trade highlighted the need for a more effective and efficient Revenue Marine and Life-Saving Service. Reforms that began in the late 1860s ultimately improved the Services' ability to serve the nation and laid the groundwork for the formation of the modern Coast Guard.

### Sumner Kimball and Service Reform



In 1869, George Boutwell, Secretary of the Treasury under President Ulysses S. Grant, formed an interim Revenue Marine Bureau under the leadership of N. Broughton Devereux. He in turn established boards designed to overhaul and reorganize the Revenue Cutter Service (RCS), as it was now known.<sup>20</sup> The Revenue Marine Bureau became a permanent agency in 1871 under Treasury official Sumner I. Kimball.



Sumner I. Kimball

Kimball immediately set out to increase the professionalism of the RCS. Six months after taking office he issued revised RCS regulations that provided for economy of operations,

centralized control of the Service in headquarters, and officer accessions and promotions based on merit rather than political influence or seniority. Meanwhile, Bureau Chief Devereux's personnel board, headed by Captain John Faunce, USRCS, reviewed the qualifications of every RCS officer and removed those found to be incompetent or otherwise unfit for duty. Officers retained were given rank equal to their capabilities, and were thereafter promoted based on the results they achieved on the professional examinations mandated in Kimball's regulations. As a result, by 1872 Kimball could proclaim his junior officer corps the best the RCS had ever possessed.<sup>21</sup> To ensure a continuous supply of competent junior officers, Kimball persuaded Congress in 1876 to authorize establishment of a training school, thus laying the foundation for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.<sup>22</sup>

Kimball and his staff also implemented the recommendations of Devereux's other board, which had analyzed the cutter fleet. Kimball reduced fleet tonnage by replacing large, aging cutters with smaller, speedier, and more efficient ones sized according to the needs of the ports where they were to be stationed. He also steadily replaced sail vessels with steamers. As a result, while from 1872 to 1881 the fleet size increased by just one cutter, 60 percent of the vessels had been built since 1869 and the ratio of steamers to sailing cutters had risen from 2.5:1 to nearly 8:1.<sup>23</sup> Thanks to the reforms of Kimball, Devereux, and Faunce, the RCS now boasted a highly professional corps manning modern cutters well suited to their mission.

Upon appointment as chief of the Revenue Cutter Service, Kimball also instituted a program of inspecting the life-saving stations in New Jersey and Long Island, New York, where he discovered appalling conditions. As a result of his findings, Congress appropriated funds to establish the Life-Saving Service as a branch under the supervision of the RCS, to build lifesaving stations in states that did not already have them, and to staff the stations with paid surfmen. Kimball reorganized the RCS to accommodate the LSS and applied his considerable talents to systematically improving readiness, training, personnel, and equipment standards. During this period the LSS also increased its reach, expanding to cover the Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, and Pacific coast of the United States.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Lifesaving Medals

When Congress passed the Life-Saving Act of June 20, 1874, it established First and Second Class Medals to recognize daring and heroic rescues on the waters of the United States. The medals were renamed the Gold (First) and Silver (Second) Lifesaving Medals in 1882. The Gold Lifesaving Medal is awarded for demonstrating extreme or heroic daring while rescuing or attempting to rescue persons in peril on the water at the risk of one's own life. The Silver Lifesaving Medal is awarded for extraordinary effort that does not reach the criteria for the Gold Lifesaving Medal.

Despite Kimball's effort to inculcate discipline and professionalism, the Life-Saving Service was plagued by claims that unqualified lifesavers were given their jobs solely for reasons of politics and patronage. Compounding the situation

were several high profile tragedies, chief among them the loss of the warship *Huron* in November 1877 and the steamer *Metropolis* in January 1878, which produced a tremendous outcry against the LSS. Recognizing the need to improve rescue operations, on 18 June 1878, Congress passed legislation authorizing the construction of a number of additional lifesaving stations, removing the Life-Saving Service from the Revenue Cutter Service, and appointing Sumner Kimball general superintendent of the new Service.<sup>25</sup> Kimball steadily eliminated the system of political patronage that had grown with the LSS, replacing it with one based upon technical competence and non-partisanship. Coordination with the Revenue Cutter Service remained, however, since RCS officers continued to serve as inspectors and auditors for the lifesavers.

#### Growing Civil Duties

Meanwhile, the United States had purchased the territory of Alaska in 1867, giving the Revenue Cutter Service a new set of sovereignty and resource protection responsibilities. In addition to increased law enforcement obligations, the RCS performed many civil and humanitarian duties, mounted scientific expeditions, protected fish and game, and was entrusted by the Bureau of Education to deliver teachers to the native peoples. Overall, the RCS was instrumental in establishing the power of the federal government in Alaska. In fact, one could say that for many years the RCS was the government along western Alaska's coast.

With the growth of the American merchant marine, the marine safety and waterways management work of the revenue cutters—supporting marine transportation and trade—also expanded. Although they acted without a clear statutory mandate, cutter crews had long performed many tasks related to the safety of harbors and cruising grounds. In 1889, however, Congress passed laws to regulate anchorages, giving the Revenue Cutter Service the duty of enforcing these new laws. In 1906, lawmakers authorized the Service to clear derelict hulks from harbors and their approaches. And, in 1910, the Service was given authority over some aspects of pleasure boating.

The mission of safety at sea became important internationally with the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 with the loss of more than 1,500 lives. This tragic event led the Revenue Cutter Service to assume ice patrol duties the following year when the Navy, which originally had assigned two cruisers to perform the mission, announced that it needed the warships elsewhere. Private shipping and port organizations petitioned the Treasury

Department to assign revenue cutters to what they considered an extremely valuable effort. The department granted its permission, and two cutters undertook the mission. The assumption of this seemingly natural function, which the Coast Guard has now conducted without incident for more than 85 years, reflected long-standing RCS practice in the Bering Sea.

The last half of the nineteenth century also saw the RCS expand its mission of protecting marine resources. RCS personnel patrolled the Pribilof Islands off Alaska to prevent the ongoing slaughter of seals. The Service also worked with the Bureau of Fisheries to encourage proliferation of “food fishes” and regulated the harvesting and sale of sponges in the Gulf of Mexico.

#### Spanish-American War

By 1898, both the Navy and the Revenue Cutter Service were more modern, professional organizations than they had been on the eve of the U.S. Civil War. Reflecting this state of affairs, the transfer of revenue cutters to Navy control during the Spanish-American War went relatively smoothly.



Crewmen from the revenue cutter *Bear* haul supplies to whaling vessels trapped in the ice near Point Barrow, Alaska, in 1888.



The revenue cutter *Hudson* during a joint Navy-Revenue Cutter Service raid on Spanish gunboats in Cardenas Bay, Cuba, during the Spanish-American War in 1898.



For three years prior to the outbreak of war, RCS cutters had conducted neutrality patrols that stretched from the waters off North Carolina to the Gulf of Mexico. They seized ships suspected of violating U.S. neutrality and smuggling ammunition and other supplies to Cuban rebels.

All of this changed with the executive order directing the RCS to provide cutters to the Navy. Eight cutters joined Rear Admiral William Sampson's North Atlantic Squadron on blockade duty off Cuba. Another cutter served as an escort and dispatch boat with Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron, which defeated a Spanish naval force at Manila Bay, Philippines. Elsewhere, eleven cutters served under the Army's tactical control, guarding important U.S. ports on the east and west coasts against possible attacks by Spanish raiders or warships.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, the Revenue Cutter Service provided important inshore support to the Navy. For instance, at the specific request of President William McKinley, Congress awarded medals to the officers and the crew of the cutter *Hudson* recognizing their bravery under fire during a combined Navy/Revenue Cutter Service raid on Spanish gunboats in Cardenas Bay, Cuba.<sup>27</sup>

#### 1915 TO 1916: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD

The process that resulted in the formation of the U.S. Coast Guard actually began with an attempt to abolish the Revenue

Cutter Service. In 1911, President William Taft appointed his economic adviser, Frederick A. Cleveland, to lead a commission to recommend ways to increase the economy and efficiency of government. The Cleveland Commission concluded that uni-functional agencies were more efficient and economical than multifunctional ones. The commission thus recommended combining the Lighthouse Service and Life-Saving Service, with their similar "protection" function, and recommended apportioning the duties and assets of the multifunctional RCS among other government agencies and departments. In particular, larger cutters and their crews would be transferred to the Navy.

The Treasury, Navy, Commerce and Labor departments were asked to comment on the report. Secretary of Commerce and Labor Charles Nagel agreed that other departments could perform many RCS duties, but none could perform its lifesaving mission. This mission probably could be accomplished best, he wrote presciently, by combining the RCS, the Life-Saving Service, and the Lighthouse Service. While not sure where this new combined service should reside within the government, Nagel was adamant that it should not be in the Navy Department.

For its part, the Navy Department stated that it could use the RCS cutters, since it was short of smaller, shallow-draft ships. But Secretary of the Navy George Meyer did not relish absorbing RCS personnel into the Navy. Moreover, he wrote:

It is true that the chief functions of the Revenue Cutter Service can be performed by the Navy, but this cannot be done as stated in the Cleveland report in the regular performance of their military duties. All duties which interfere with the training of personnel for war are irregular and in a degree detrimental to the efficiency of the fleet.<sup>28</sup>

The final responses came from Secretary of the Treasury Franklin MacVeagh and Revenue Cutter Service Captain-Commandant Ellsworth Price Bertholf. MacVeagh in particular was defiant in defense of the Service. He pointed to the close and successful working relationship that the RCS and the Life-Saving Service had developed, a relationship that would be severed by the abolition of the Revenue Cutter Service. He also took the Cleveland Commission to task over the alleged “efficiencies” that spreading RCS duties across the government would generate. Finally, he echoed the Navy’s argument concerning the nature of RCS and Navy duties, stating:

[The Navy] could never give the kind and degree of attention that is required of the Revenue Cutter Service and its officers and men trained in their particular duties for 120 years. The [RCS’s] work is alien to the work of the Navy, alien to the spirit of the Navy, and alien, I think, to its professional capacities and instincts—alien certainly to its training and tastes.<sup>29</sup>



Ellsworth Price Bertholf

Nevertheless, in April 1912, President Taft sent to Congress the Cleveland Commission’s final draft, and the other comments, with his recommendation that the legislators adopt the commis-

sion’s findings. RCS supporters within the federal government, the press, and the general public fought the move, citing the Service’s heroic rescue work in particular as a reason not to disband the agency.

*There will not be two services. There will not be a Life-Saving or a Revenue Cutter Service. It will be the coast guard.*

— Captain-Commandant Ellsworth Price Bertholf, testifying on the RCS/LSS amalgamation, 1915

Meanwhile, Secretary MacVeagh ordered Bertholf and Sumner Kimball, head of the Life-Saving Service, to draft legislation that would join the RCS and LSS in a new service. When Taft and MacVeagh left office after the 1912 election, President Woodrow Wilson and his Treasury Secretary, William Gibbs McAdoo, strongly supported the bill combining the two services. The Senate passed the bill in 1914 and the House passed it on 20 January 1915, after a debate that centered more upon cutter officer and surfmen pay and retirement benefits than conceptual issues.

Combining the civilian Life-Saving Service and the military Revenue Cutter Service—organizations with vastly different cultures—into a single military service presented Captain Bertholf, who was named the first Coast Guard Commandant, a delicate challenge. Bertholf was absolutely convinced that the military character of the RCS had to prevail, but large numbers of the life-savers had no desire to change status. Consequently, while the Life-Saving Service and Revenue Cutter Service were joined at the top in 1915, they operated as separate entities within the Coast Guard for more than 15 years. However, events soon would accelerate the development of a twentieth-century maritime security force formed by the union of these two nineteenth-century institutions.

#### 1917 TO 1945: A SERVICE FORGED BY WAR, CRISIS, AND CONSOLIDATION

Approximately two years after its founding, the Coast Guard was plunged into war. World War I was the first in a series of events that would shape the Service during the next several decades and expand its maritime duties. Some of these events, such as Prohibition and World War II, permanently increased the size of the Coast Guard.

#### Battle Streamers Earned 1917-1938

- ◆ 1917-1918: World War I
- ◆ 1926-1927, 1930-1932: Yangtze Service

The Coast Guard in the Great War

World War I saw the Coast Guard transferred to the Navy to fight overseas. In previous wars, RCS cutters had operated with the Navy but the Revenue Cutter Service itself had remained under Treasury Department control. During the Great War, however, the entire Service was transferred to Navy control as prescribed in the act that created the Coast Guard.

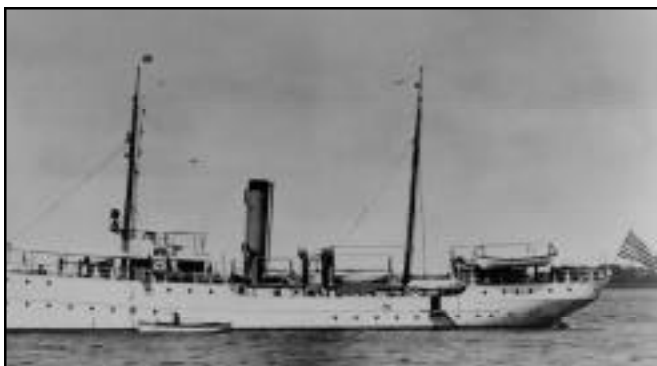
In the period leading up to America's entry into the war, the Coast Guard and Navy began rudimentary planning for integrating the Coast Guard into naval operations—a first in the history of both services. For the most part, the Navy believed that Coast Guard forces would be best suited for coastal patrol although a few of the larger cutters were designated for convoy escort operations. The services did not develop any detailed plans, but Coast Guard units did participate in some naval preparedness drills.

The Coast Guard was actually mobilized and transferred to the Navy in April 1917. The Service sent six cutters to European waters that summer. For the remainder of the war, the cutters escorted convoys between Gibraltar and the British Isles. They also performed escort and patrol duties in the Mediterranean.

At home, one of the Coast Guard's major tasks was port security. Concern over the possibility of sabotage and accidents was acute in the aftermath of an October 1917 shipboard explosion in the port of Halifax,

Nova Scotia. In that incident, a French steamer loaded with ammunition collided with another vessel and caught fire. The resulting explosion leveled a large portion of the town and caused more than 1,000 civilian deaths and numerous other casualties. U.S. ports handled more war time shipping than Halifax, making the issue of port security even more pressing. As a result, the Treasury Department, working closely with the Navy, established Coast Guard Captain of the Port offices in New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Norfolk, Virginia; and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. The New York office soon became the Coast Guard's largest command.

Thus, the Coast Guard's role of ensuring maritime mobility in U.S. ports and waterways expanded considerably. Along the remainder of the U.S. coast, lifesaving station personnel doubled as coast-watchers, maintaining a lookout for potential infiltrators. To facilitate the reporting of suspicious activity, many lifesaving stations were tied into the Navy's communication system, which had the effect of improving the Coast Guard's peacetime communications as well.



The Coast Guard cutter *Tampa*, which was sunk by a German torpedo in September 1918, with 131 crewmen aboard.

### Interdiction and Build-Up

When the war ended in November 1918, cutters gradually began to return from overseas service, but the Coast Guard did not pass immediately back to Treasury Department control. A new political storm brewed as proponents from the Navy (including Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels), Congress, and even Coast Guard officers from the old Revenue Cutter Service, struggled to keep the Service permanently under the Navy Department. The Navy was determined to retain control of all government vessels, and most Coast Guard officers did not wish to relinquish the more generous pay, promotion, and social benefits that accrued to Navy officers. But in 1919—after strong protests and canny lobbying by Captain-Commandant Bertholf and Treasury Secretary Carter Glass—the Service was returned to the Treasury Department.

Still, the period immediately following World War I was the most difficult the Coast Guard ever faced. Within just a few years, however, the Service would experience its greatest peacetime growth. The catalyst for this expansion was the 1920 National Prohibition (Volstead) Act, which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages. With no other federal agency prepared to enforce the new law at sea, much of the burden of enforcing the Volstead Act fell to the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard began its enforcement effort with just over 100 vessels to cover the vast expanses along the shores of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts. This situation created several years of relative inef-

fectiveness. Beginning in 1924, however, Congress appropriated funds sufficient to allow the Service to begin a major expansion to meet its responsibilities under the law. Over the next ten years, the Coast Guard budget increased dramatically and the Service grew accordingly. The enlisted force tripled in size, as did the fleet. The Service acquired and refurbished 20 obsolete Navy destroyers for use in picketing the foreign supply ships that lay offshore, outside U.S. territorial waters. A large force of specially designed Coast Guard patrol boats and harbor craft, plus a number of seized smuggling vessels, patrolled inshore waters and pursued the rumrunners' contact boats. When even this proved insufficient, the Coast Guard began using aircraft to report suspicious vessels. This action marked the rebirth of Coast Guard aviation.<sup>30</sup>

While this buildup and decade-long effort did have a deterrent effect on the rumrunners, the interdiction effort ultimately failed because the law was unpopular and the demand for alcohol never ceased. In 1933, Congress finally repealed the Volstead Act. Still, the Coast Guard benefited from its Prohibition experience. Patrol boats built during this period conducted numerous missions for many decades and served as prototypes for later vessel classes. Coast Guard communications equipment and procedures and intelligence methods were significantly improved. Tactics and techniques developed to combat the rumrunners would be used decades later to combat drug smugglers. And the Service developed international law expertise through its efforts to increase the limit of the territorial sea from three to 12 nautical miles.



One of 20 former Navy destroyers transferred to the Coast Guard for deepwater interdiction duties during Prohibition.

#### The Waesche Consolidation

After Prohibition, Rear Admiral Russell R. Waesche, Sr., Coast Guard Commandant from 1936 to 1945, guided one of the greatest transitions in the Service's history. In many ways, his vision was responsible for today's Coast Guard. Waesche oversaw the addition of many responsibilities, the most sweeping of which was Congress' authorizing the Coast Guard to enforce all U.S. laws at sea and within territorial waters. Prior to this, most observers had presumed that the Coast Guard had sweeping law enforcement authority at sea. However, a 1927 Supreme Court case had called this authority into question. At the Treasury Department's request, in 1936 Congress clarified the situation, granting Coast Guard personnel the authority to make "inquiries, examinations, inspections, searches, seizures, and arrests upon the high seas and the navigable waters of the United States."<sup>31</sup> The Service was also tasked to break ice in the nation's harbors and channels, and it took on a small role in the certification of merchant seamen. That role expanded in 1938 to include administration of the U.S. Maritime Service, formed that

year to improve the efficiency of merchant mariners.

Waesche also saw the need to regulate boating activity in the nation's waters. Lacking the manpower to perform this function, in 1939 he created the volunteer force now called the Coast Guard Auxiliary to meet this specific need. By 1940, the Auxiliary had 2,600 personnel and 2,300 boats that augmented the Coast Guard at a fraction of the cost of a full-time force. Waesche's greatest force multiplier, however, was the Coast Guard Reserve, created in 1941, which gave the Coast Guard the potential to perform many roles and missions that would otherwise be impossible for a small service.<sup>32</sup>

Also in 1939, as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's reorganization plans, the U.S. Light-house Service was placed under the Coast Guard. Waesche welcomed this addition, recognizing that it gave the Coast Guard an all-encompassing role in ensuring the safety of the nation's waterways. Absorbing the Lighthouse Service also added nearly 50 percent more civilians to the Service, caused a district reorganization, and brought many of the lighthouse personnel into the Service's military organization.

Additional responsibilities continued to accrue throughout Waesche's tenure. In 1940, for example, the Coast Guard was tasked with open-ocean weather patrol duties in the northern Pacific Ocean and the North Atlantic, a service it would continue to perform for nearly 40 years.



Russell R. Waesche, Sr.

National Defense to the Fore

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the Coast Guard—having had its civil responsibilities vastly increased since World War I—once again shifted focus to emphasize military preparedness, with its forces playing a major role in asserting national sovereignty over U.S. waters and shipping. The Coast Guard began carrying out neutrality patrols in the North Atlantic in September 1939 and put port security forces on a wartime footing the following June.

U.S. strategists also were concerned that Germany would establish a military presence on Greenland, which had been incorporated in the U.S. hemispheric defense system, and sought to station U.S. armed forces on the frozen island. The State Department believed that the dispatch of military forces to Greenland would be unnecessarily provocative.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, however, the Coast Guard was deemed an acceptable U.S. military presence, and so in April 1941 the Coast Guard took responsibility for cold-weather operations in Greenland.

### Battle Streamers Earned 1939-1945

- ◆ 1939-1941: American Defense Service
- ◆ 1941-1942: Philippine Defense
- ◆ 1941-1946: World War II – American Theater
- ◆ 1941-1946: World War II – Pacific Theater
- ◆ 1941-1945: World War II – European-African-Middle Eastern Theater
- ◆ 1944-1945: Philippine Liberation
- ◆ 1941-1942, 1944-1945: Philippine Independence and Philippine Presidential Unit Citation
- ◆ 1945: World War II Victory

#### Other WW II:

Croix de Guerre (France), Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Occupation Service

By Executive Order 8929 of 1 November 1941, roughly a month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, President Roosevelt transferred the Coast Guard to the Navy for the second time in its history. Thereafter, Coast Guard cutters and aircraft performed extensive convoy protection duties in the Atlantic (sinking 12 German U-boats), while other Service craft performed area anti-submarine patrols. Coast Guard craft rescued the survivors of torpedo attacks off the U.S. coast, while Coast Guard coast-watchers maintained beach patrols and guarded U.S. ports. This wartime mission once again foreshadowed a future peacetime mission—in this case the Service's Maritime Defense Zone duties. Coast Guard personnel manned Navy destroyer escorts as well as Navy and Army amphibious ships and craft, and took part in every major amphibious invasion of the war.



Allied troops waded to shore from a Coast Guard-crewed landing craft during the Normandy invasion, 6 June 1944.

Coast Guard personnel served in-theater around the globe during the war years, but the Service also made a significant contribution to the war effort in rear areas, protecting and facilitating the movement of men and materiel by sea. Coast Guard activities in the maritime mobility area—providing port security, supervising the movement of dangerous cargoes, controlling merchant vessel traffic, maintaining aids to navigation, and breaking ice—often

received less public attention than its direct combat duties, but they were indispensable to prosecution of the war.<sup>34</sup>

World War II also gave the Coast Guard the opportunity to experiment and innovate. A Coast Guard officer, Lieutenant Commander Lawrence M. Harding, shepherded development of a new electronic long-range aid to navigation—LORAN—and the subsequent development of a LORAN network.<sup>35</sup>

During the war a few far-sighted officers doggedly pursued the development of helicopters for use in search and rescue, law enforcement, and anti-submarine patrol. Initially cool to the idea until after a demonstration, Admiral Waesche urged Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King to develop the helicopter for naval use. King in turn ordered the Coast Guard to obtain helicopters for use in anti-submarine surveillance. The Service acquired a handful of aircraft and trained Coast Guard, Navy, and British aircrews to fly them. While they never demonstrated much success against submarines, these helicopters demonstrated an immediate usefulness in search and rescue, foreshadowing the role for which they eventually would become famous.



An HNS-1 helicopter, piloted by Coast Guard Lieutenant, j.g., Stewart Graham, lifts off from the converted merchant ship *Daghestan* in January 1944, while in convoy from New York to Liverpool, England.

In addition to driving mission and technological innovation, the war had a major effect on the size and shape of the Service. During the war years the Coast Guard experienced a nearly ten-fold increase in personnel strength. The Roosevelt Administration also thought it would be convenient and cost-effective to consolidate the functions of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation into the Coast Guard. The roots of this agency stretched back to 1838, when the Steamboat Inspection Service was created. In 1932, this agency had merged with the Bureau of Navigation, which had been created in 1884. Now called the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, this civilian agency joined the Coast Guard permanently in 1946. As a result, Coast Guard missions now touched every facet of domestic maritime activity. The Service's duties expanded overseas as well, as the United States took the lead in shaping the postwar world.

## 1946 TO 1972: SORTING OUT ROLES AND MISSIONS

### Battle Streamers Earned 1946-1965

- ◆ 1945-1957: China Service
- ◆ 1950-1954: Korean Service
- ◆ 1958-1965: Armed Forces Expeditionary Service

The post-World War II period brought further changes as the Coast Guard inherited new missions and once again had its roles redefined and broadened. Perhaps foreseeing this expansion, and mindful of the growing pains the Service had suffered during the war, the far-sighted Waesche created a



committee in 1944 to develop a comprehensive plan to retain after the war the functions the Service had absorbed in the 1930s and 1940s.

The 1948 Ebasco Study pointed to an agency that was under-manned and under-equipped to perform its myriad and wide-ranging missions. This led to legislation formally delineating the Coast Guard's duties. These included port management, control, and security functions; vessel traffic services; coastal security; and some military roles.

An International Role in Peacetime and in War

The Coast Guard obtained a global peacetime presence as part of its efforts to safeguard transoceanic navigation. The Service retained operational control over a regional wide-area system of LORAN transmitter sites. Support for a burgeoning civilian aviation system also led to Coast Guard cutters continuing to man a system of open-ocean weather stations until 1977, by which time improvements in weather forecasting and aircraft navigation and safety had made the service unnecessary. On-scene to provide weather and communications support to transatlantic and transpacific flights, cutters on ocean station duty conducted several high profile at-sea rescues of the passengers and crews of civil and military aircraft. Perhaps the most significant of these was the rescue of 62 passengers and 7 crewmembers from the flying boat *Bermuda Sky Queen* by the cutter *Bibb* operating on a mid-Atlantic ocean station. Cutters continued to conduct international ice patrols as well, although this

duty eventually became the province of Coast Guard aircraft detachments.

The Coast Guard's flexibility and diverse capabilities allowed the Service to support broader American political and military policy overseas in the post-war period. For instance, the Service helped establish the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency and the navies of Korea, the Philippines, and other countries. It also participated (and still participates) in numerous military exercises, including UNITAS exercises with South American navies, and has conducted training with small navies and coast guards around the world.

The Coast Guard participated only marginally in the Korean War. During the Vietnam War, however, the Coast Guard played a major role in "Operation Market Time," which involved the interdiction of trawlers being used by North Vietnam for infiltration and resupply activities.

Working together, the U.S. Navy and the South Vietnamese Navy (VNN) had attempted to halt the flow of men and materiel, but the VNN's lack of training and the U.S. Navy's lack of shallow-draft warships and expertise operating in coastal waters frustrated the effort. Navy Secretary Paul Nitze, therefore, wrote Treasury Secretary Henry Fowler for assistance. After noting the Seventh Fleet's deficiencies, Nitze wrote: "We are therefore attempting to locate a source of more suitable patrol craft. Such characteristics as high speed, shallow draft, sea-keeping ability, radar, and communications equipment are important considerations."<sup>36</sup>

Battle Streamers Earned  
1962-1975

◆ 1962-1975: Vietnam Service

Other Vietnam:

- Navy Unit Commendation
- National Defense Service
- Army Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation
- RVN Armed Forces
  - Meritorious Unit Commendation,
  - Gallantry Cross w/Palm
- RVN Meritorious Unit Citation,
  - Civil Actions Medal First Class
  - Color w/Palm

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Edwin Roland believed that Coast Guard forces were tailor-made for the mission. He also feared that if the Coast Guard did not play a greater role than it had during the Korean War, the Service might lose its status as an armed service. Consequently, after deliberations in Washington and in the field, 26 Coast Guard 82-foot patrol boats (WPBs) and their crews were assigned to Market Time.

In March 1967, when the Navy needed additional destroyers for naval gunfire

support duties, it looked to U.S. Navy ships conducting Operation Market Time. Secretary Nitze turned again to the Coast Guard to fill the gaps in surveillance and interdiction opened by this move, requesting “that the Treasury Department assist the Department of the Navy by assigning five high-endurance cutters to augment Market Time forces.”<sup>37</sup> The Coast Guard responded by deploying a squadron of high-endurance cutters (WHEC).

Together, Coast Guard, Navy, and VNN assets formed a gauntlet through which Viet Cong vessels had to run. Navy patrol aircraft monitored vessels more than 100 nautical miles from the coast. Navy radar picket ships and WHECs formed a second barrier 40 nautical miles out. Coast Guard patrol boats, Navy Swift boats, and VNN junks formed the final barrier just off the coast and up South Vietnam’s rivers. By the end of Operation Market Time, the Coast Guard had boarded nearly a quarter of a million sampans and junks and destroyed more than 2,000. The maritime border of South Vietnam was sealed and taken away as a resupply route for communist forces.

Five Coast Guard 311-foot, high-endurance cutters assigned to Operation Market Time in Vietnam tied up alongside the Navy repair ship *Jason* (AR 8).



### Expanding Civil Responsibilities

The Coast Guard's civil duties continued to expand in the period following World War II. In 1958, the Service developed AMVER, the Automated Mutual-assistance Vessel Rescue system, a ship reporting system able to identify other ships in the area of a ship in distress that then could be sent to assist.<sup>38</sup> In 1965, the Service took responsibility for coordinating all search and rescue operations in U.S. waters, and that same year accepted responsibility for all of the nation's icebreaking duties. Until then, both the Navy and the Coast Guard had performed icebreaking duties. When the Navy decided its personnel and resources should be devoted more to traditional naval combat operations, however, it offered the mission and its five-ship icebreaking fleet to the Coast Guard. The two services signed a memorandum of understanding and the ships were gradually phased into the Coast Guard, which now became the primary U.S. surface presence in the polar regions.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard's traditional maritime law and sovereignty enforcement role remained important. Circumstances in Cuba, for example, handed the Service a greater role in enforcing U.S. immigration policy and controlling the flow of sea-borne migrants. The Coast Guard began patrols to enforce U.S. neutrality and to aid Cuban refugees in the Florida Straits in 1961. Then, in 1964, the Camarioca boatlift first tested the Service's ability to respond to a mass exodus. Repeated mass migrations from Cuba and Haiti over the next three decades would hone Coast Guard capabilities in this area.



The crew of a Coast Guard patrol boat, on duty with U.S. naval forces in Vietnam, searches a Vietnamese craft for weapons and supplies.

### Finding a New Home

As the years progressed, the Coast Guard found itself in a familiar situation. The Service performed so many types of maritime missions, in so many locales, and for so many purposes, that the Service did not fit perfectly in any one federal department. While the Service and most of its predecessors had been part of the Treasury Department since their founding, the traditional, direct link between revenue collection and the Service had faded.

The result was President Lyndon Johnson's decision to include the Coast Guard in the newly formed Transportation Department in April 1967. In the beginning, Treasury Secretary Fowler and Coast Guard Commandant Roland protested, but the President had already decided that many Coast Guard functions belonged in the new department. Rather than see those functions stripped from the Service, Roland

cooperated in the transfer. Nevertheless, he successfully communicated his concern that the Coast Guard remain a military service.<sup>39</sup>

### 1973 TO TODAY AND BEYOND: A UNIQUE INSTRUMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

In the post-Vietnam era, the United States has continued to face complex and varied threats. Increasingly, the Coast Guard's unique status as military service and law enforcement agency has brought it to the forefront of U.S. maritime security efforts. For instance, social upheaval in the Western Hemisphere highlighted the critical importance of the Coast Guard's alien migrant interdiction mission. The Service faced the challenge of mass migrations from Cuba in 1980 and 1994 and from Haiti in 1992 and 1994.

The influx of illegal drugs also came to the fore as a national security problem in the 1970s. The Coast Guard took on the primary maritime interdiction role, and eventually expanded its Caribbean presence to disrupt the illegal drug supply chain along its entire length. The Service's efforts effectively neutralized the seaborne importation of marijuana, which slowed to a trickle after a prolonged and concerted Coast Guard effort. Unfortunately, as the marijuana trade dried up, the shipment of cocaine began to increase.

Battle Streamers Earned  
1973-Present

◆ 1991-1995: Southwest Asia Service

The Coast Guard's environmental protection responsibilities grew as well. While the Revenue Marine had been tasked with duties protecting valuable natural resources as early as 1822,<sup>40</sup> and the marine environment as a whole beginning with the Refuse Act of 1899,<sup>41</sup> growing environmental awareness in the United States pushed the Coast Guard deeper into the anti-pollution realm.

The *Torrey Canyon* and *Amoco Cadiz* disasters led to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, in which Congress set a no-discharge standard for oil in U.S. navigable waters. The practice of discharging shipboard oily residues at sea led to an October 1973 convention adopted by the International Conference on Marine Pollution prohibiting oil discharges within 50 miles of shore.

Given responsibility for coordinating and administering oil spill clean up in the maritime realm, the Coast Guard deployed a multi-faceted strategy for responding to spills and identifying responsible parties. The Service developed techniques to detect spills from the air and to match samples of spilled oil to the oil remaining in the tanks of suspected polluters. Three Strike Teams composed of Coast Guard personnel trained to operate special oil spill clean-up equipment were stood up, one each on the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts. And each Captain of the Port identified a local network of contractors who could respond to spill reports.

Yet the spills continued. On 15 December 1976, the Liberian tanker *Argo Merchant*, carrying 7.5 million gallons of oil, grounded

off Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. While favorable winds drove the oil out to sea instead of onto the beaches of New England, this ecological near-miss, together with the fourteen more tanker accidents that occurred in or near American waters during the next ten weeks, led to the Port and Tanker Safety Act of 1978. This legislation created a 200-mile pollution control zone and authorized the Coast Guard to force substandard foreign tankers out of the U.S. trade.

The 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, however, had the greatest impact on the Coast Guard's role as protector of the marine environment. The Service would not only oversee the cleanup, but the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) passed by Congress in the wake of the spill gave the Coast Guard one of its single largest legislative mandates in its history. OPA 90 assigned the Service a significantly increased role in spill response, vessel inspection, and the oversight of liability actions.

Another rising environmental concern in the 1970s pertained to the perceived depredation of America's abundant fisheries resources by large foreign fishing fleets. In the 1950s, the United States had implemented several international conventions intended to protect certain fish stocks. The Coast Guard documented violations by foreign fishing vessels but had little direct enforcement authority. Congress addressed the situation in 1964 with the Bartlett Act, which prohibited foreign fishing in U.S. territorial waters and authorized the seizure of foreign vessels in violation of the act. Later amendments expanded the protected area to include the 12-mile

contiguous zone and increased the maximum penalty for violations.

In 1976, when even these protections were deemed inadequate, Congress passed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Act established a 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone; created eight Regional Fishery Management Councils, tasked to develop fishery management plans to protect America's fish stocks; and placed the primary responsibility for at-sea enforcement of the nation's fisheries laws with the Coast Guard. In the ensuing decades, the Service acquired authority to enforce a series of legislative enactments and international agreements intended to protect the nation's living marine resources.

The Service has played a role in post-Cold War military operations as well. Coast Guard port security units deployed to the Persian Gulf during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990-1991. In recent years, the unified Commanders-in-



The *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, in 1989.

Chief have requested and been provided cutters to conduct maritime interception operations, peacetime military engagement, and other supporting warfare tasks for all three forward-deployed Navy Fleets.<sup>42</sup>

During Operations Support Democracy (November 1993-August 1995) and Uphold Democracy (October 1994-March 1995), Coast Guard cutters, buoy tenders, patrol boats, and port security units supported United Nations-led operations to restore democratic institutions in Haiti. Two port security units, a harbor defense command unit, five law enforcement detachments, and 13 cutters carried out operations that included maritime surveillance and interdiction, search and rescue coverage for in-transit U.S. aircraft, and establishing and restoring aids to navigation.

The Service also has commanded the Maritime Defense Zones since they were created in 1984 to provide for the coastal defense of the United States. In 1994, the MDZ concept was expanded to include defense of foreign harbors, expeditionary port security, and coastal sea control. Working closely with Navy coastal warfare units, Coast Guard reserve and active duty forces maintain the ability to protect strategic

U.S. ports, as well as critical foreign ports of embarkation and debarkation.

## ECHOES FROM THE PAST

Over the course of its history, the Coast Guard has evolved into a multi-mission service that is focused on the full spectrum of maritime affairs. Reflections of this generalist outlook can be seen in the organization, training, and force structure of the modern Coast Guard. Unlike other services, the Coast Guard has no specialized staff corps. Likewise, as a relatively small service with a limited budget, the Coast Guard has needed durable platforms that are flexible enough to be used for many different types of missions.

As the country's maritime "jack of all trades," the Coast Guard has always needed to maintain a high degree of flexibility and operational readiness. In the process, the Service has been able to generate synergies between what might otherwise have been seen as pronounced contradictions. The Coast Guard calls upon its military character to ably perform dangerous and difficult civil operations. Moreover, as the Revenue Cutter Service merged with civilian agencies to form the modern, military Coast Guard, our Service charter has broadened to address virtually every aspect of U.S. maritime affairs, in peacetime and in war. This continued the process of building a national service that oversees America's civil use of the seas and protects its waterborne commerce, coasts, and interests from a wide variety of threats.



Coast Guard port security raider boats engage in force protection for the U.S. Navy guided-missile cruiser *Normandy* (CG-60).