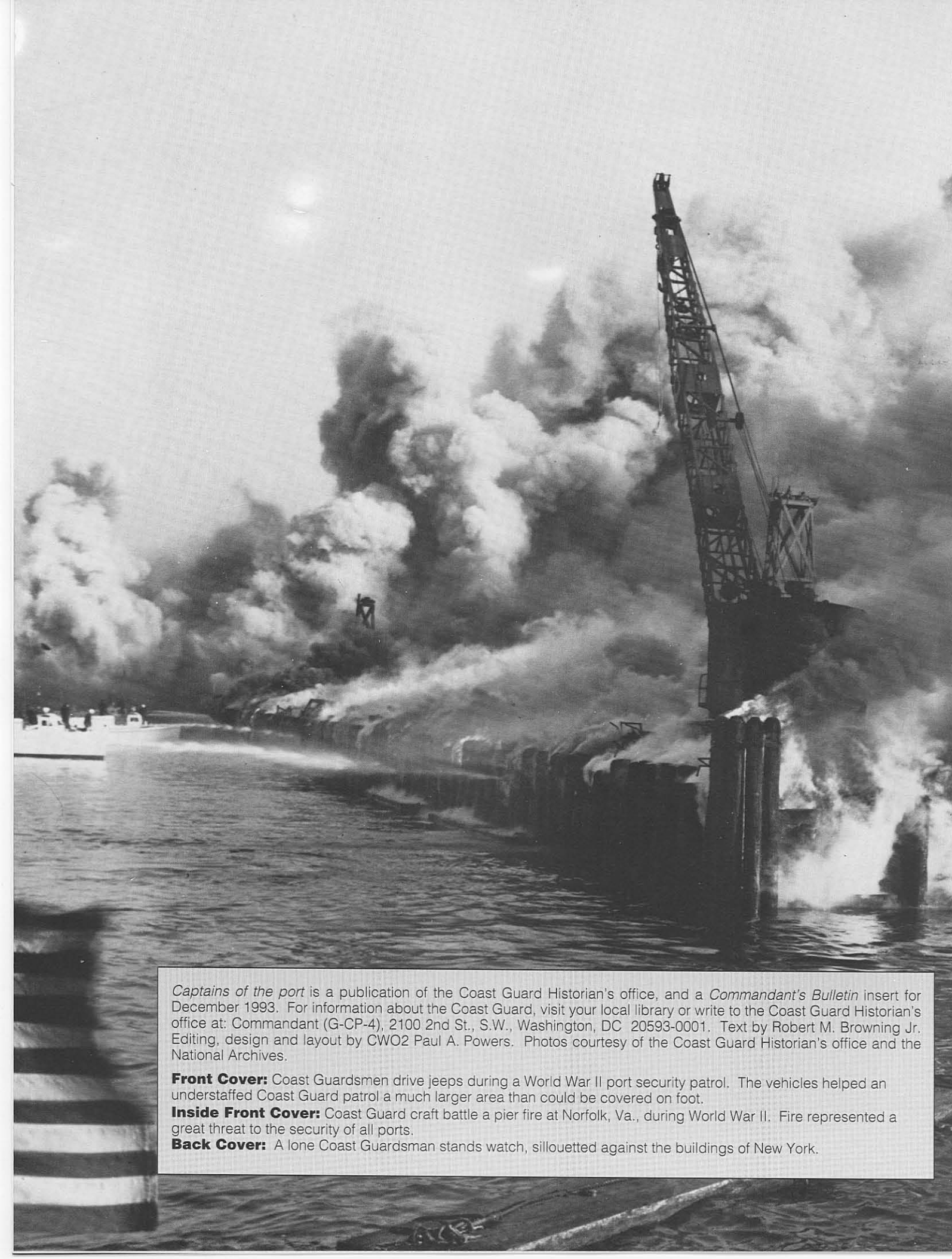




CAPTAINS OF THE PORT

BY Robert M. Browning Jr.



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Front Cover: Coast Guardsmen drive jeeps during a World War II port security patrol. The vehicles helped an understaffed Coast Guard patrol a much larger area than could be covered on foot.

Inside Front Cover: Coast Guard craft battle a pier fire at Norfolk, Va., during World War II. Fire represented a great threat to the security of all ports.

Back Cover: A lone Coast Guardsman stands watch, silhouetted against the buildings of New York.



Right: A Coast Guardsman examines pallets of explosives destined for the war in Europe. The constant threat of fire and sabotage required Coast Guardsmen to remain constantly vigilant.



On the morning of Dec. 6, 1917, a tremendous blast ripped through the sleepy town of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The explosion destroyed 3,000 dwellings, killed more than 1,600 people and injured 9,000. Most of the dead were children.

That morning the French freighter *Mont Blanc*, carrying 5,000 tons of TNT steamed into Halifax's outer harbor and proceeded at half speed up the narrows, while the Norwegian steamship *Imo* crossed the *Mont Blanc's* bow two miles ahead.

As the two ships approached, there was great confusion regarding which ship had the right of way. The *Imo* reversed engines, but being in ballast, swung so that the bow pointed directly at the *Mont Blanc*. A collision was now inevitable. The *Mont Blanc's* captain attempted to minimize the potential of his cargo exploding by maneuvering his ship so that the forward hold, containing no TNT, would be struck.

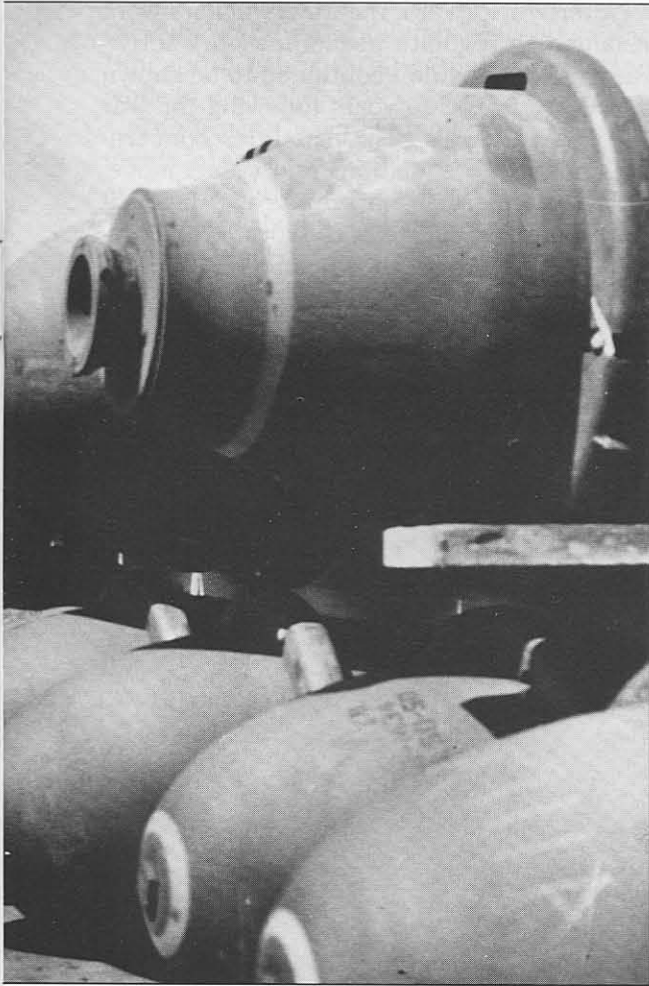
Unfortunately, after the collision, a fire started, and the crewmen tried to put it out rather than scuttle the ship. When the fire reached the TNT, an explosion — equal to a small nuclear blast occurred. The *Mont*

Blanc virtually disappeared, and the shock waves threw the *Imo* ashore.

The blast was so intense that other ships in the harbor lost most of their crews and freight cars were blown two miles inland. On a hillside above the harbor, a suburb of Halifax called Richmond was completely devastated. Most of the buildings were virtually knocked to the ground. This accounted for most of the casualties.

The *Mont Blanc* disaster ranks as one of the worst maritime tragedies of all times. This particular ship sailed from New York on its way to Europe, one of hundreds that loaded explosive cargoes in New York for the war in Europe. It was this disaster that stirred American leaders to empower the Coast Guard to ensure that this never happened in the United States.

The timely and safe movement of supplies is one of the most important aspects of warfare, yet it is frequently overlooked. The smooth movement of cargoes — in and out of ports in wartime — is an important task and often affects tactics and strategy. The Coast Guard, through its captain-of-the-port offices, was tasked with providing logistical



supervision, security, law enforcement and safety measures in all major American ports during World War II. The management of these important logistical functions allowed the United States and its allies to move supplies without delays or disorder.

The Coast Guard and its predecessor agency, the Revenue Cutter Service, have long been tied to the movement and anchorage of vessels in U.S. territorial waters. The RCS was first tasked with this job during 1888 in New York. By 1915, when the Coast Guard was created, the service was directed by the Rivers and Harbors Act "to establish anchorage grounds for vessels in all harbors, rivers, bays and other navigable waters of the United States"

World War I

During World War I, the Coast Guard served under the Navy and continued to enforce rules and regulations that governed the anchorage and movements of vessels in American harbors. The Espionage Act, passed in June 1917, gave the Coast Guard further power to protect merchant shipping from sabotage. This act included the safe-

guarding of waterfront property, supervision of vessel movements, establishment of anchorages and restricted areas, and the right to control and remove people aboard ships.

The tremendous increase in munitions shipments, particularly in New York, required an increase in personnel to oversee this activity. The term "captain of the port" was first used in New York and this officer was charged with supervising the safe loading of explosives. During the war a similar post was established in other U.S. ports.

During World War I, CAPT Godfrey L. Carden, commander of the Coast Guard's New York Division, was named COTP in that harbor. The majority of the nation's munitions shipments abroad left through New York. For a period of 1 1/2 years, more than 1,600 vessels, carrying more than 345-million tons of explosives, sailed from this port. In 1918, Carden's division was the largest single command in the Coast Guard. It was made up of over 1,400 officers and men, four Corps of Engineers tugs and five harbor cutters.

During Carden's tenure, COTP duties were performed without serious mishap. The most dangerous moment occurred when munitions at a rail yard in Morgan, N.J., began exploding and spreading fire into other buildings storing ammunition. Although Carden had no responsibility for accidents ashore, a Coast Guard detachment from Perth Amboy, N.J., reached the scene first with other New York units arriving later.



Left: CAPT Godfrey L. Carden was the captain of the port in New York during World War I. His command made up the single largest unit during the war.

When the Coast Guard arrived the fire was intense. Exploding shells filled the air with shrapnel. They attempted to control the fire and remove the dead and wounded. A party of Coast Guardsmen learned that nine cars of TNT lay in the middle of the facility and were in imminent danger of catching fire. Volunteers stepped forward to bring the train to safety. Moving the train

After World War I, the COTP officers were retained to regulate peacetime port activities, and the position continued to be known as COTP. In the 20 years following the war the Coast Guard's responsibilities concerning anchorage regulations and vessel movements in American harbors grew. In April 1939, with the outbreak of World War II imminent, the Coast Guard once again was

Right: A Coast Guard sentry asks for identification from a civilian entering a restricted area.

Below: Pier guards keep unauthorized people from entering restricted areas. The guard is armed with a Springfield rifle.



was complicated by tracks twisted from earlier explosions. In the inferno the Coast Guardsmen repaired the tracks and removed the train. During the disaster two Coast Guardsmen died in rescue activities.

The explosions of a total 1,000 tons of TNT at the yard rattled buildings in Manhattan. This served as a reminder to the public of the Halifax calamity and the importance of explosives handling.

called to enforce new anchorage regulations. These regulations charged the COPT's to enforce stricter laws that reflected the growth in the major ports and the increased maritime activity.

In September 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt's neutrality proclamation laid the groundwork for Coast Guard activity for the next two years. The Captains of the Ports were charged with sealing ship radios to

prevent warring nations from broadcasting the whereabouts of enemy vessels, sailing times and other intelligence information while in port.

The Coast Guard also checked the armaments of vessels to determine if they were armed with offensive or defensive weapons. This established if a vessel was a merchantman or vessel of war.

These new jobs were a huge task, and these offices were usually considerably understaffed. For example, in Philadelphia, an eight-man detail sealed more than 10,000 radios in a three-year period.



In June 1940, the president proclaimed that the Coast Guard assume the functions that other government agencies previously oversaw. This occurred because the increased traffic in American ports had blurred the authority of the various federal, state and local agencies responsible for port security and safety.

An August 1940 conference, represented by all the major government, state and local port authorities, considered topics that related to anchorages, dangerous cargoes and vessel movements. In order to clearly define relationships and authorities, several regulations and acts were clarified giving

the Coast Guard greater authority for the safety and security of navigable waters in the United States.

The Dangerous Cargo Act of October 1940 and the restructuring of anchorage regulations the same month, clearly laid out and expanded previous regulations and provisions. The responsibilities of each COTP increased and in November, 29 ports were designated to have offices. This set up the machinery for enforcing the laws and regulations which governed the movement of vessels, the loading of dangerous cargoes and the protection and regulation of anchorages.

Many of the responsibilities, later relegated to port security, were largely undefined or met only peacetime needs of marine commerce. The Coast Guard, with input from other agencies, and its earlier experience from World War I, adopted rules and regulations to protect anchorages, to safely load and unload explosives, and generally to make the ports secure from a number of threats not normal in times of peace.

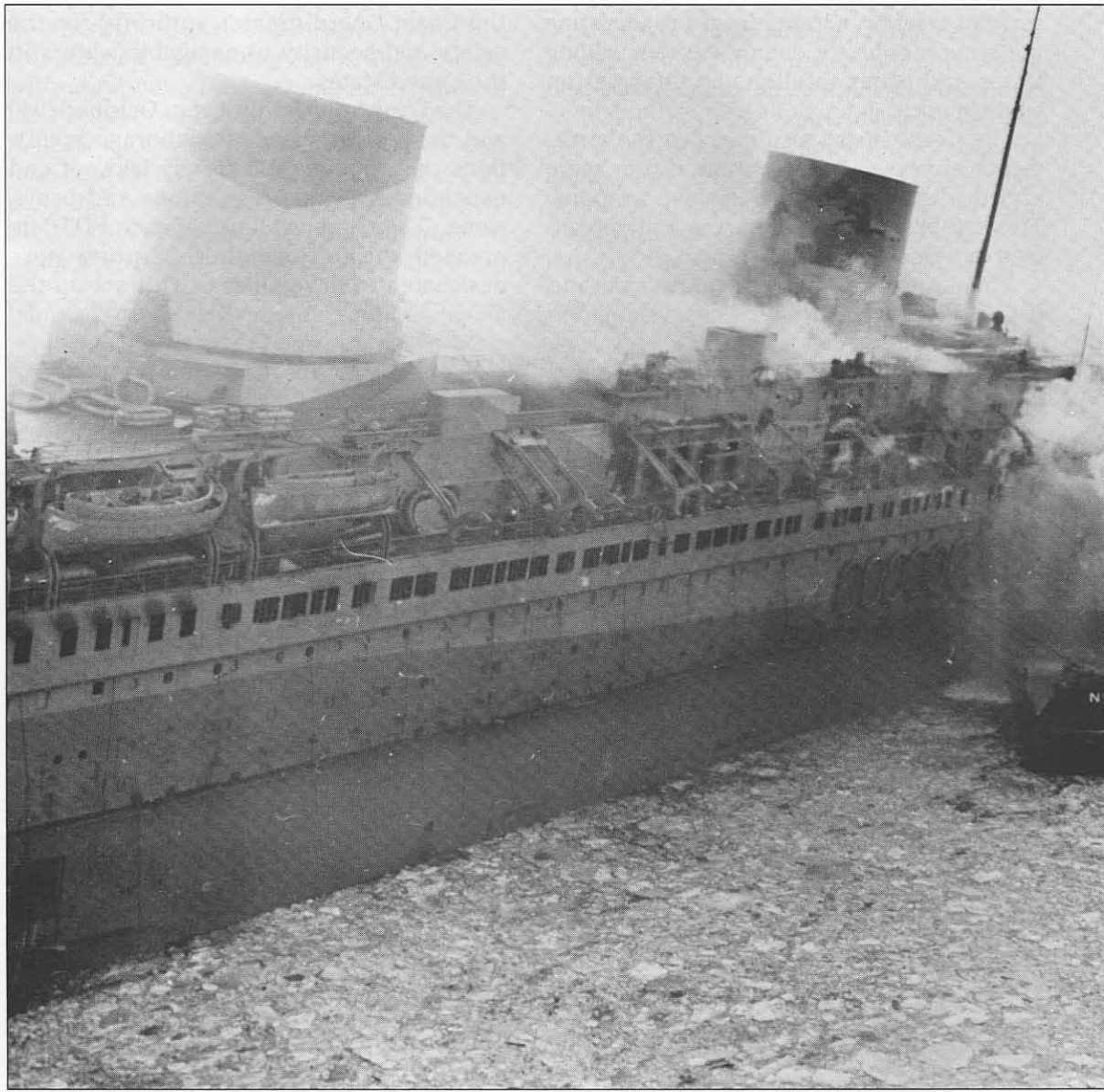
In March 1941, while the responsibilities of the service were being shaped, the COTP in Norfolk, Va., learned that crews of certain Italian vessels were sabotaging their ships in Wilmington, N.C., and Baltimore. The crews did this to avoid the internment of these valuable vessels. After confirming this fact, the Coast Guard determined it would take possession of the vessels under the 1917 Espionage Act. Dispatching two officers to the Italian vessels in Hampton Roads, they found that a great deal of

damage had been done to the ship's machinery and boilers. The Coast Guard Merchant Ship Control Office issued orders to investigate. Between March 29 and April 5, 1941, the service took into "protective custody" 27 Italian, 35 Danish and later 15 French vessels. These vessels, totaling more than 479,000 gross tons, were later repaired and converted for use by the Maritime Commission.

World War II

As the nation crept further towards war, the Coast Guard gradually received more responsibility. Regulations for explosives

Left: A sentry stands at ease while guarding a wharf. Checking for smokers on piers was a duty of the Coast Guard. This function was especially critical during the hot, dry, summer months.



Right: The luxury liner Normandie burns while firefighters try to put out the flames. The ship eventually capsized from the water used to quench the flames.

were put into effect in April 1941. COTP duties dramatically increased, and began to consolidate after the country went to war. In November 1941, the Coast Guard administratively transferred to the Navy Department. Port-security duties also transferred at this time to the secretary of the Navy. The commander in chief later delegated port-security responsibility to the commandant of the Coast Guard by letter in June 1942.

Marine-inspection and navigation duties under the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation were transferred to the Coast Guard by executive order Feb. 28, 1942. This duty fit well with the service's port safety and security measures. The Coast Guard was now responsible for almost all aspects of merchant-marine personnel and ship safety. The service thus had oversight of merchant vessels from the drawing board

until they were scrapped.

During the war, the port-security mission grew through various laws and agreements to give the service the following broad wartime responsibilities:

- Control of anchorage and movement of all vessels in port.
- Issuance of identification cards and the supervision of access to vessels and waterfront facilities.
- Fire-prevention measures including inspections, recommendations and enforcement.
- Firefighting activities, including use of fireboats, trailer pumps and other extinguishing agents.
- Supervision of the loading and stowage of explosives and military ammunition.
- Boarding and examination of vessels in port.
- Sealing of vessels' radios.



- Licensing of vessels for movement in local waters and for departure.
- Guarding of important facilities.
- Enforcement of all regulations governing vessels and waterfront security.
- Maintenance of water patrols.
- General enforcement of federal laws on navigable waters and other miscellaneous duties.

The Coast Guard was tasked to do many jobs with few resources. The service had to rely upon and coordinate many different groups to ensure that these tasks could be fulfilled. This relationship did not solidify overnight. It took a great deal of trial and error to implement a comprehensive port security program.

The Normandie

An early inadequacy in the division of authority became evident when the French

luxury liner *Normandie* burned. In January 1942, the vessel was being converted into a military transport in New York. The 83,000 ton ship caught fire due to a laxity of fire watches aboard. The lines of authority for fighting the fire proved to be indistinct. A small fire, that could have been contained, rapidly engulfed the whole ship. Because of delays, confusion and a few bad decisions, it later capsized to the embarrassment and dismay of all the agencies responsible for the vessel.

This accident, however, helped bring about a consolidation of the Coast Guard's duties. In February 1942, a presidential executive order directed the secretary of the Navy to ensure the safeguarding of American and territorial waterfronts. The president advised that this function be carried out by the Coast Guard. Thus, the responsibility was delegated by letter from the secretary of the Navy to the commandant of the Coast Guard, who operated under the chief of naval operations.

With the loss of the *Normandie*, the fire-prevention program received attention. Because of large concentrations of vital war materials, explosives and flammable and hazardous cargoes being loaded and unloaded, this role became extremely important. Normally the local municipalities oversaw these functions, but the local authorities, with their limited equipment, could not cope with the increased port traffic brought on by the war. In 1942, the Coast Guard likewise did not have the staff nor the firefighting equipment to lend much aid.

The Coast Guard remedied this situation and began a program to supplement harbor fireboats. The service immediately increased the firefighting force by converting 150 small vessels — tugs, luggers, fishing, and party vessels — to fireboats. They also built 103 30-foot Hanley boats with four gasoline driven 500-gallon-a-minute fire pumps.

The service likewise built several other fireboats including 29 40-foot fireboats equipped with seven fire monitors that served on the East Coast. Twenty-two fire barges of 50- to 60-foot lengths were built for the West Coast. These fire barges had eight gasoline driven fire pumps, each with a 500-gallon-a-minute capacity. By 1944, the nation's ports had been augmented with 253 Coast Guard fireboats. The boats were generally stationed in strategic areas of the harbors because of their lack of speed. They normally laid at ammunition-handling piers,

gasoline-loading operations, or near other dangerous cargoes.

All activities were carried out with the close cooperation of municipal fire departments. To supplement the boats afloat, the Coast Guard placed a large number of small fire pumps aboard picket and patrol boats. These pumps were capable of extinguishing small fires discovered while on patrol. In conjunction with the water craft, the Coast Guard also maintained trailer units with 500-gallon-a-minute pumps which could be pulled to fires ashore.

As an added precaution, the service placed a great emphasis on fire prevention. Men specifically trained for this work inspected all waterfront facilities, checked fire extinguishers and fire alarms, and ensured that safety rules were being followed by private industry and municipal authorities. The Coast Guard liberally distributed fire-prevention literature to educate various groups at the waterfronts. The service exhibited a high level of alertness and training during the war regarding fire safety. In all the waterfront fires reported from 1942 to 1943, the Coast Guard discovered more than 25 percent of them and responded to more than 91 percent.

In the private sector, the service performed similar safety functions. The potential for disastrous fires on privately-owned property was recognized early. Fires of any size affected port safety and security.

The COTPs found they had to "sell" the program to the private-facility owners because the Coast Guard had no legal authority to force compliance. As a result of this program, many private facilities installed firefighting equipment and took preventive

measures to avoid fires. Many also revised their housekeeping by rearranging cargo stowage and by cleaning areas that presented a hazard.

Welding and smoking accidents were known to cause most of the fires on the waterfront. Ship-inspection departments received instructions to give special attention to this problem. The Coast Guard began non-smoking campaigns and instituted other fire-safety programs. To further prevent fires, in the summer of 1943, all COTP offices asked pier owners to wet down piers during the hot, dry months.

One of the more visible duties of the Coast Guard was the protection of piers and docks. The service began this job with the understanding that it could not be solely a Coast Guard operation. To perform this tremendous task, the COTPs had to be the coordinators, and their men only a supplement to municipal and private personnel. The protection of waterfront property and facilities was coordinated with military, naval, Department of Justice intelligence, private organizations and companies, municipal and state police forces, and commercial organizations such as underwriters associations.

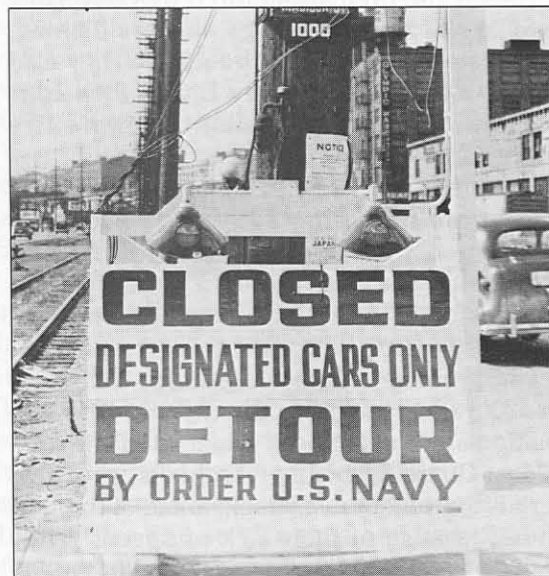
For two years, the COTPs administered protective and security measures for waterfront facilities without any regulations to support this action. The Espionage Act of 1917 did not include land facilities, so the Coast Guard had the responsibility without the legal authority to enforce regulations.

An executive order issued on Dec. 12, 1941, authorized the Coast Guard to place guards along all waterfront installations to protect national-defense facilities, materials and utilities. Because of limited personnel, however, the Coast Guard only maintained guards in cases of emergency or in exceptional situations when other guards could not be secured.

Even though the COTP had the responsibility for the security of all waterfront facilities in the port, the specific burden of security still rested on the owners and operators of the facilities. The COTPs therefore mainly supervised this duty for the first 15 months. An act of Congress in July 1943, that did not go in effect until May 1, 1944, gave the service the proper authority.

To protect vessels and important installations within each port facility, the Coast Guard created security zones around the dock areas. Within these areas the COTPs assigned roving guards and enforced the in-

Right: Signs such as this mark the limits of the areas restricted to authorized people. The Coast Guard was responsible for restricting the movement of people into these areas.





Top: Hundreds of reserve craft were used during the war. This vessel is the 35-foot boat Shirley Louise. It was given a coat of grey paint and taken into service for harbor patrol duty.

Center: Forty-foot fireboat had three fire monitors. These vessels helped to keep fires in the major ports from becoming out of control.

Bottom: The 83459 running trials in 1943. These vessels patrolled harbors and performed coastal-convoy escort and antisubmarine patrols. They replaced many of the reserve craft in the service.



tegrity of the zones with Coast Guard personnel and barricaded streets. The men watching the waterfront generally performed their service on foot but used vehicles in isolated spots.

Their official duties included:

- Locating and reporting fires.
- Detecting saboteurs or unauthorized personnel.
- Checking vehicles.
- Checking ID cards and watching for cameras.
- Contacting watchmen in facilities.

- Manning barricades.

In order to maintain a tight control over access to sensitive dock areas and to prevent sabotage and subversive acts, the service issued identification cards. Wartime regulations required that everyone working or visiting the waterfront have a card. Likewise, the Coast Guard had the authority to inspect and search vessels and remove persons not authorized to remain aboard.

There were four categories of ID cards issued by the COTP. They were:

- to U.S. citizens who worked on the docks

- to those with occasional business
- to temporary guards
- to aliens

The divided responsibilities between the Coast Guard and the owners of key terminals, docks and piers sometimes led to confusion. Some of these owners cooperated fully with the Coast Guard with regard to security, private guards, fencing and lighting. For most of the war, however, the service had no real statutory authority over the private facilities. One method used to bring the more obstinate owners in line, and one used in a limited way, was to refuse to permit any vessel into the facility until adequate protection was furnished.

Coast Guard Intelligence

Once the magnitude of the duties of the COTP were fully recognized, it became evident that there was a need for investigators to augment the existing intelligence operations. In March 1942, the chief of naval operations outlined a special-agent program for COTP work. The main thrust of the program was to uncover sabotage before it occurred. Coast Guard Intelligence acted mainly as a clearing house and repository for information.

Investigators spent much of their time with security checks and the screening of civilian and Coast Guard personnel. They also interviewed a large number of enemy

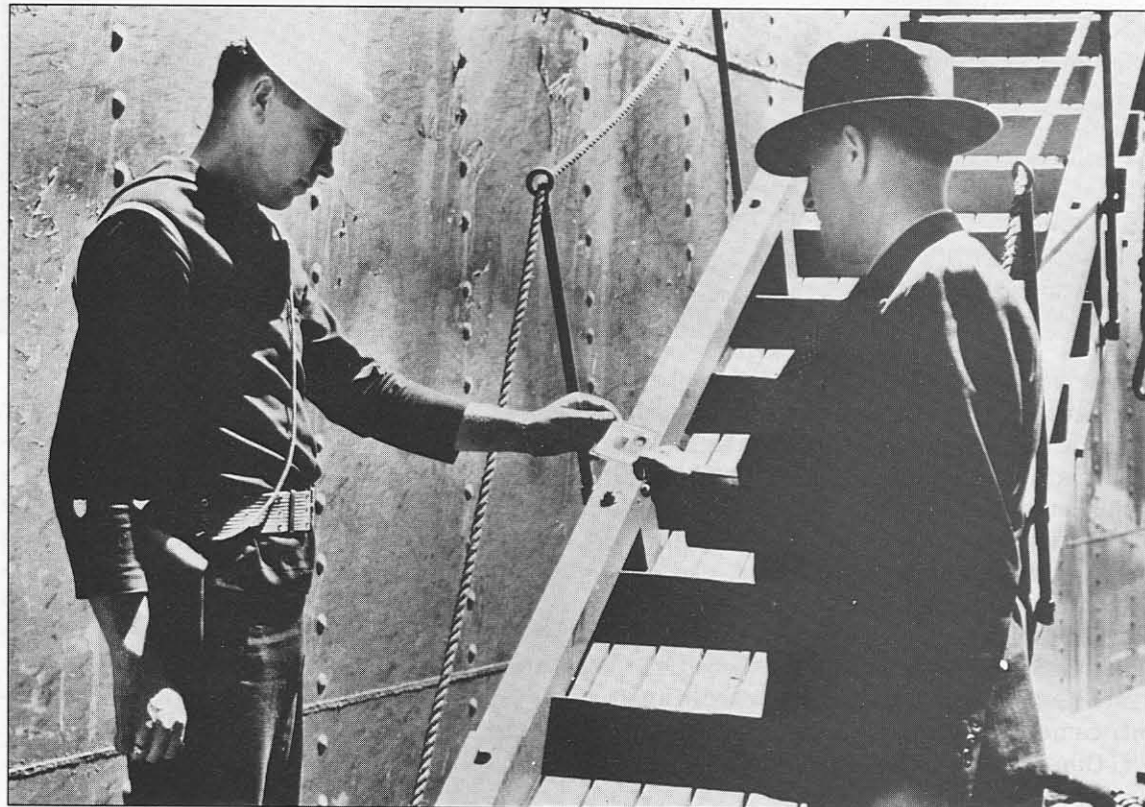
aliens who held temporary ID cards. Coast Guard-intelligence activities usually remained a small program within the COTP organizations. It served Naval Intelligence, but was sometimes discontinued and handled by Coast Guard district intelligence officers.

While pier and facility guards were important, harbor patrols were just as significant as those from shore and consumed much of



Above: The port security rating badge is still in use today. The port security field is the largest rating in the Coast Guard Reserve.

Right: A Coast Guard sentry checks the identification of a civilian boarding a ship.



the manpower of the COTP offices. This particular task used various patrol craft to watch the multitude of vessels and harbors full of vessels. These small harbor craft worked in tandem with offshore patrols and the Coast Guard Beach Patrol to watch the vast shore lines.

Harbor-patrol craft watched for fires, unauthorized persons, pleasure craft with improper papers, reported accidents, removed menaces to navigation, rendered assistance, patrolled anchorages and restricted areas, and escorted ammunition and dangerous cargo ships out of the harbor. Most of this duty consisted of identifying and checking personnel aboard vessels. Coast Guard harbor patrols often questioned the occupants of small craft and checked car-

goes for proper documentation. Parties of men also inspected ships' equipment for safety and made recommendations for replacing firefighting equipment or called fire hazards to the attention of owners.

Early in the war, Coast Guard Auxiliary craft handled some of these duties but, gradually, reserve craft took over the function. Most of the reserve craft were small, converted pleasure craft given a coat of gray paint. They usually carried only small arms — revolvers, rifles and submachine guns. Their equipment sometimes included fire pumps and hoses. The boats operated on a full-time basis an average of 21 hours a day. They were an important adjunct to the regular service, at a time when the government had no other resources to carry out these



Left: The 30-foot Hanley fireboats, built in 1942-1943, had four 500-gallon-a-minute fire pumps.

important functions. These vessels were gradually returned to their owners as the Coast Guard replaced them with 83-foot and 38-foot picket boats specifically designed for this duty.

Vessel security was also an important part of the responsibilities of COTPs. By discretion, the COTP regulated the number of guards required according to the size and cargo of the vessel. But the responsibility for providing guards to protect and maintain the security of vessels while in port rested with the vessel's owners.

The vessel's size determined the type and number of guards that were required to ensure security. Vessels between 2,000- and 5,000-gross tons were required to have guards at each gangway when moored to a dock or other facility. Vessels over 5,000 tons additionally had to have a roving guard to patrol all parts of the vessel accessible to passengers and crew members.

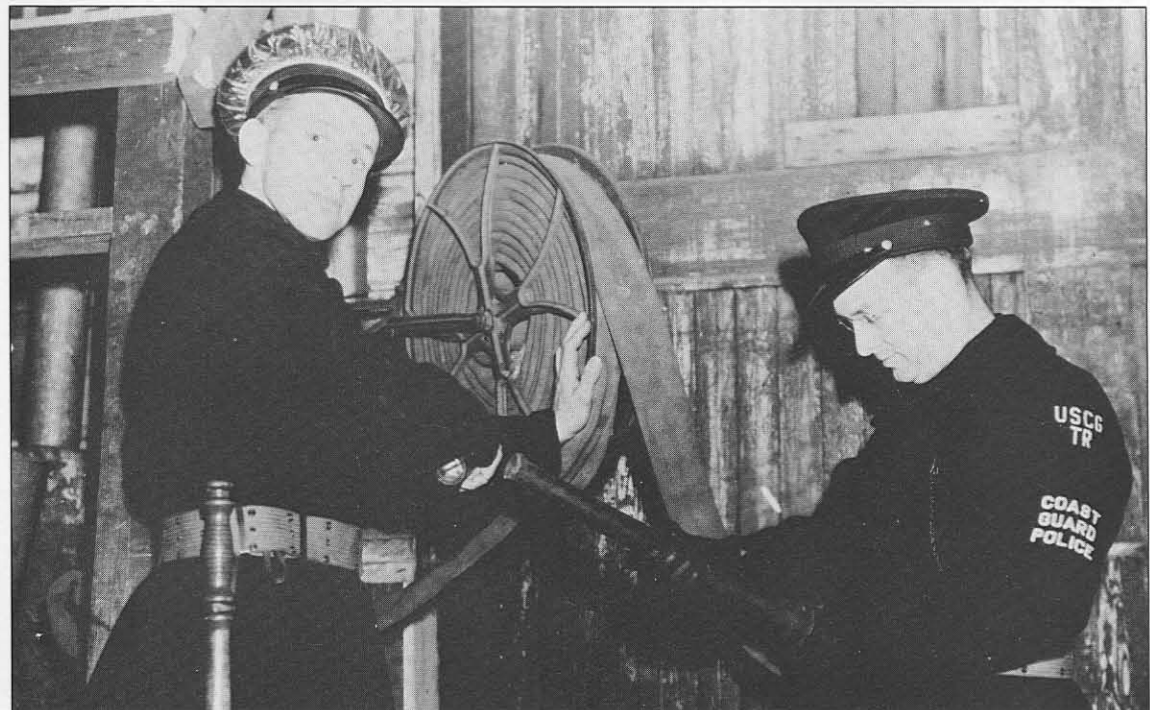
Fire guards stood watch with fire extinguishers and hoses with running water when repairs created special hazards in all vessels over 1,000-gross tons. Special regulations also covered inspections, maintenance of boilers, shipboard electrical power, tending of mooring lines, ventilators, lighting, ships' keys and much more.

Dangerous cargoes, if not handled properly, could not only endanger a particular ship or warehouse but the whole port and the movement of all cargoes. This was the greatest single threat to all major ports during the war. A catastrophic accident could

cripple logistical activities for months. The safe loading and handling of dangerous cargoes was an integral part of the logistical successes of World War II and an important mission of the Coast Guard.

Early in 1942, those responsible for port safety realized that the peacetime regulations that governed the movement of explosives would have to be amended to sufficiently handle wartime conditions. The transfer to the Coast Guard of many of the duties of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, then under the Department of Commerce, helped to consolidate the Coast Guard's authority. A number of these duties included the authority to control the shipment of explosives on ships. There were, however, some gaps in the oversight of movement of this type of cargo. For example, in New York, the Interstate Commerce Commission regulations stopped when the shipment left the railroad cars and Coast Guard responsibility did not begin until it was loaded on the vessels.

After meetings with a joint Army, Navy and Coast Guard committee, the Coast Guard promulgated a code for the transportation of military explosives and ammunition. This sped up the movement of important shipments. Each munitions vessel would be assigned a 24-hour-a-day detail to supervise the safe transfer of the cargo. A security-detail man watched each cargo hold, one roved the weather decks fore and aft, one guarded the gangway for illegal entry and several stayed on the pier. When



Right: Two temporary reservists examine a fire hose as a fire-safety measure.

loading was complete, the Coast Guard personnel closed and sealed the hatches and a detail remained until the vessel sailed.

During the war, the COTPs made the appropriate recommendations for the anchorage of vessels carrying explosives and dangerous cargoes and designated loading terminals and conditions in which they could be used. For better control, the COTPs issued permits for unloading explosives and also regulated the loading and unloading of flammable materials. Considerations were given to dangers to shipping, the degree of isolation from populated areas, accessibility to shipping, and obstacles that might delay the swift movement of these vessels to and from the terminal. At times, the responsibil-

ity of providing the safest possible loading had to be relaxed to avoid holding up the flow of supplies which might be harmful to the national war effort.

The COTP, by law, had nearly absolute authority to govern this activity but his authority could be checked. When explosives were handled by Army and Navy facilities, the COTP could merely withhold approval if unsafe conditions existed. In these instances, he could not take steps to stop any dangerous activity as long as it lay wholly under the control of military officials.

There were several major ammunition explosions during World War II. The British steamship *Fort Stikine*, carrying 1,400 tons of munitions and cotton, caught fire while



Left: A pier guard watches the loading of bombs into the hold of a merchant ship.

docked in Bombay, India. The ship exploded, showering the city with blazing cotton, sinking or badly damaging 21 ships, and killing and wounding nearly 1,400 people. A German air raid on Bari, Italy, in December 1944, also caused an ammunition ship to explode, sinking and damaging almost two dozen other vessels in the harbor. Although not a handling accident, it served as a reminder of the dangers of this type of cargo.

The service kept accidents in ammunition handling to a minimum during the war. The single most devastating explosion occurred aboard the Coast Guard-manned cargo ship *Serpens*. The *Serpens* exploded and sank while loading depth charges at Lunga Roads, Guadalcanal, in January 1945. Only two men of the 198 Coast Guardsmen aboard survived. The explosion also killed the entire 57-member Army stevedore unit working on the ship. This is the largest single loss of life in the history of the Coast Guard.

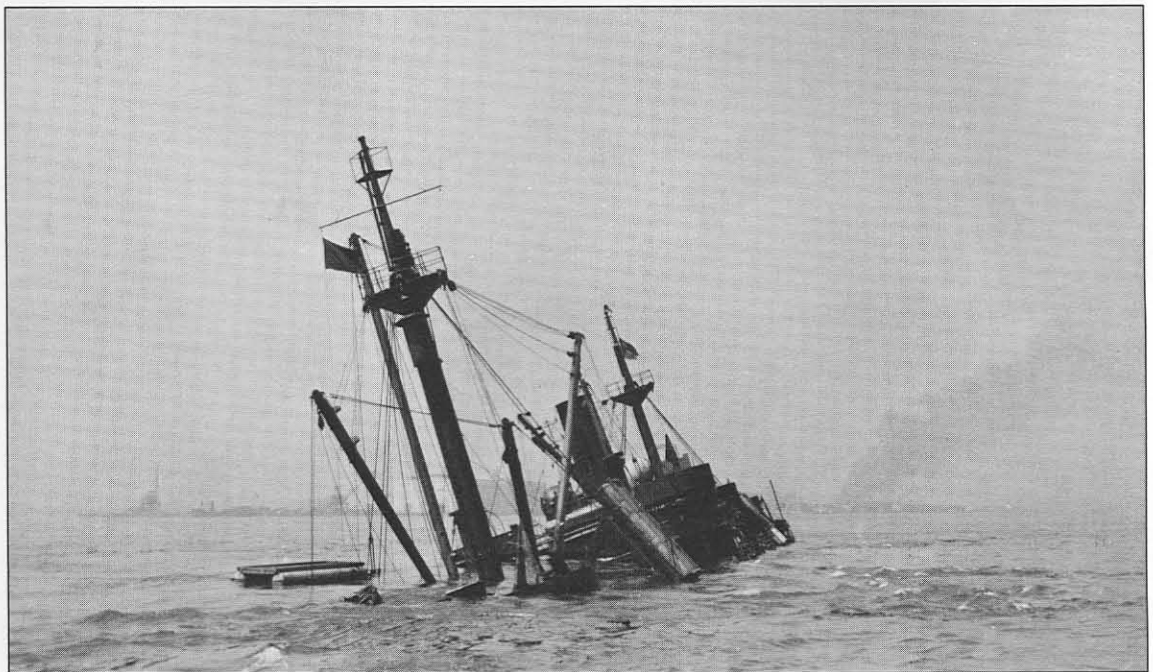
The most devastating explosion in the United States occurred at Port Chicago in Suisun Bay, about 25 miles from San Francisco. Coast Guard explosives-loading details had been assigned to that port but were removed by the COTP when safety recommendations were not followed. Eight-and-a-half months later, harking back to Halifax and the *Mont Blanc*, the steamship *E. A. Bryan*, with 5,000 tons of ammunition exploded. The explosion was so severe that it caused extensive damage for miles and killed more than 300 people. The only thing that prevented a larger loss of life was that the accident site was isolated from the large popula-

tion centers of San Francisco and Oakland.

There were many successes, too. A good example, which may have had consequences of untold proportions, is the fire aboard the Panamanian steamer *El Estero* in New York Harbor. At 5:20 on the afternoon of April 24, 1943, an oil-feed pipe burst on the *El Estero*. A boiler-room fire spread rapidly and could not be controlled by the ship's crew. A Coast Guard munitions supervisor who happened to be aboard, immediately assumed command of the vessel. The ship contained 1,500 tons of high explosives, nearly equal in explosive power to the explosives that destroyed Halifax. The munitions officer, LCDR John T. Stanley, directed his men to fight the fire as best they could. Fire apparatus arrived soon thereafter. The additional equipment did not contain the blaze and the fire began consuming the ship's superstructure.

A real danger now existed. An explosion would be deadly in a metropolitan area where 10 percent of the nation's population was concentrated. The COTP of New York directed the ship be scuttled but Stanley's men could not reach the sea cocks due to the fire. Stanley cut the *El Estero* adrift and tugs towed it into the bay while fireboats worked to flood the vessel. The metropolitan area was warned of the possible disaster and local officials took air-raid precautions. Two hours of towing and flooding caused the ship to suddenly list and settle within sight of Staten Island, N.Y. Stanley received the Legion of Merit for his conduct. What is truly amazing about this incident is the fact

Right: The *El Estero* resting on the bottom after being flooded and sunk by firefighting tugs. The city of New York is within eye sight.



that this was his first day of duty as a munitions officer.

This last incident underscored the need for the Coast Guard to control shipping in the harbors and just how valuable this service would prove to be. The COTPs had the tremendous administrative and supervisory responsibility for the safe and timely movement of vessels within the harbor.

The Coast Guard issued licenses for vessels more than 100-feet long to depart local waters. Seasonally-employed vessels such as fishing and pleasure vessels were also supervised by the Coast Guard. The COTP defined anchorages and monitored them near bridges, railroad crossings, and cable and pipeline areas to ensure that these valuable logistical and communication conduits would not be affected by a shipping accident.

The work of the COTP increased as the

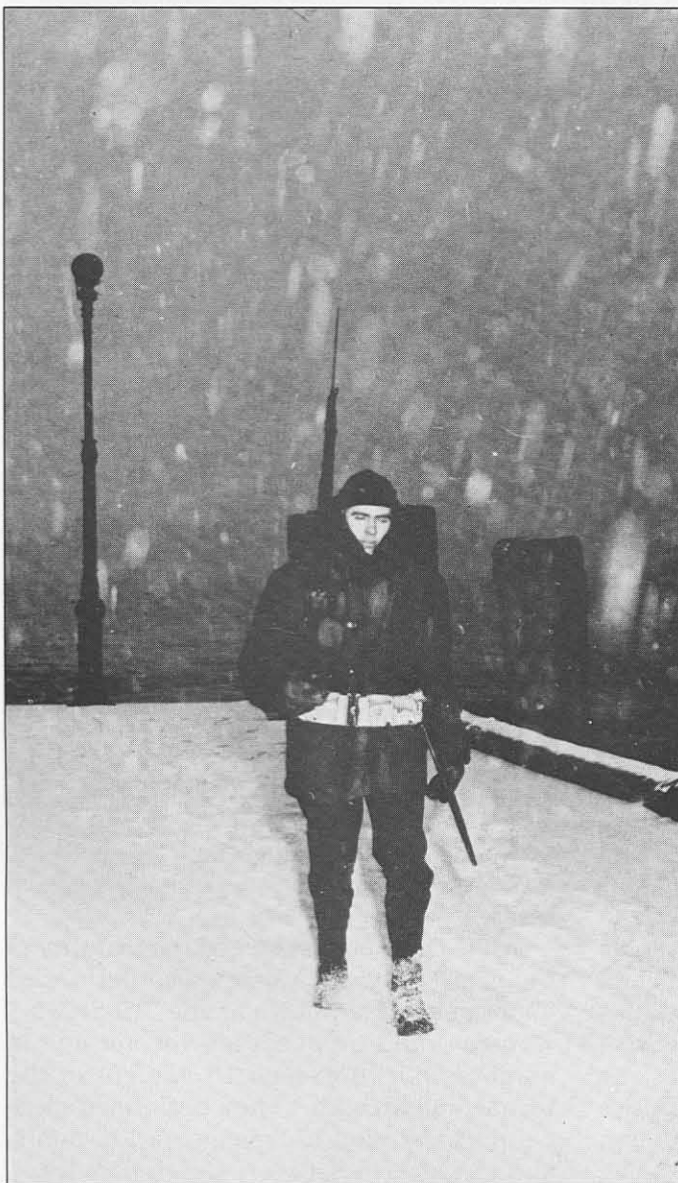
war progressed. This occurred because of the extra tasking given the service, but also because America increasingly became the major contributor to the war effort, causing a great buildup in the activity in all the major American ports. The service, however, never grew as fast as its responsibilities. This created situations in which the Coast Guard had to make daily decisions to balance port-security needs with its capabilities.

The expansion of port-security duties completely overwhelmed the small manpower pool allotted by the Coast Guard. At the beginning of the war, the Coast Guard guarded only 250 of the 400 essential piers in New York, out of a total of 1,900. In early 1942, only 1,200 men guarded these piers. When divided into four watches, this left only 300 for each watch. There were times when this small number was stretched even further.

By June 1942, the Coast Guard in the New York area had been augmented to 3,000. They guarded only 439 of the active piers. With the increased activity and the port's growth as a logistical center for the war, it was estimated that the Coast Guard would have needed nearly 16,900 officers and men to properly secure the port. At one point in the war, 50,000,000 gallons of gasoline sat in drums in the port of New York for several weeks. During this period, guarding the gasoline became a key concern, not checking ID cards or guarding the piers. Shortages of manpower, however, were felt in all the ports.

The heavy responsibility of port-security duties eventually comprised 22 percent of the Coast Guard's manpower, not including the reserves.

A lack of manpower proved to be the most serious deficiency that plagued port-security operations throughout the war. In June 1942, the Coast Guard temporary reserve was established to augment the Coast Guard regulars. The temporary reserve was made up of a special group of men and women who were excluded from full-time military service for one reason or another but still wished to serve their country.



Left: In the winter, port-security duty could be extremely harsh and yet always necessary.

These reservists could be between the ages of 20 and 65 but generally were near middle age. In their regular jobs, they were businessmen, attorneys, teachers, bankers, librarians and secretaries, just to mention a few.

The demand for port-security personnel became increasingly critical to meet the demands of the war. In May 1942, a volunteer port-security force was created in Philadelphia to use the new reserve component. These men and women would eventually augment the regular forces and relieve the COTPs of their single greatest worry — a lack of personnel.

By November,

the fire-safety program. These volunteers were unpaid, agreed to perform at least 12 hours of work a week and joined for a variety of reasons. By 1944, 50,000 served in the temporary reserve and fulfilled the major portion of pier-guard duty and harbor patrols. These men and women had full mili-



Above: Port-Security details receive instructions before going on patrol.

Right: Thirty-eight foot cabin picket boats await delivery to the Coast Guard.

These vessels replaced many of the reserve craft. They policed and patrolled harbors and navigable waters along the coast.



the Philadelphia unit had 700 people trained for port-security duty. A month later they began their first mission. The experiment in Philadelphia proved so successful that the Coast Guard created a port security unit and expanded the volunteer forces. Eventually, 22 major ports had these units, employing 20,000 men and women.

The VPSF performed many of the duties of the regulars and immediately began guarding the waterfront and spearheading

tary status while on duty and had all rights, privileges and powers of the Coast Guard reserve.

While the men discharged the majority of the guard duty, the women also performed important roles. Known as the "TR SPARS," women could be accepted for service in numbers not to exceed 10 percent of the regimental strength. They performed clerical duty, worked in transportation pools, and served as messengers and mechanics.

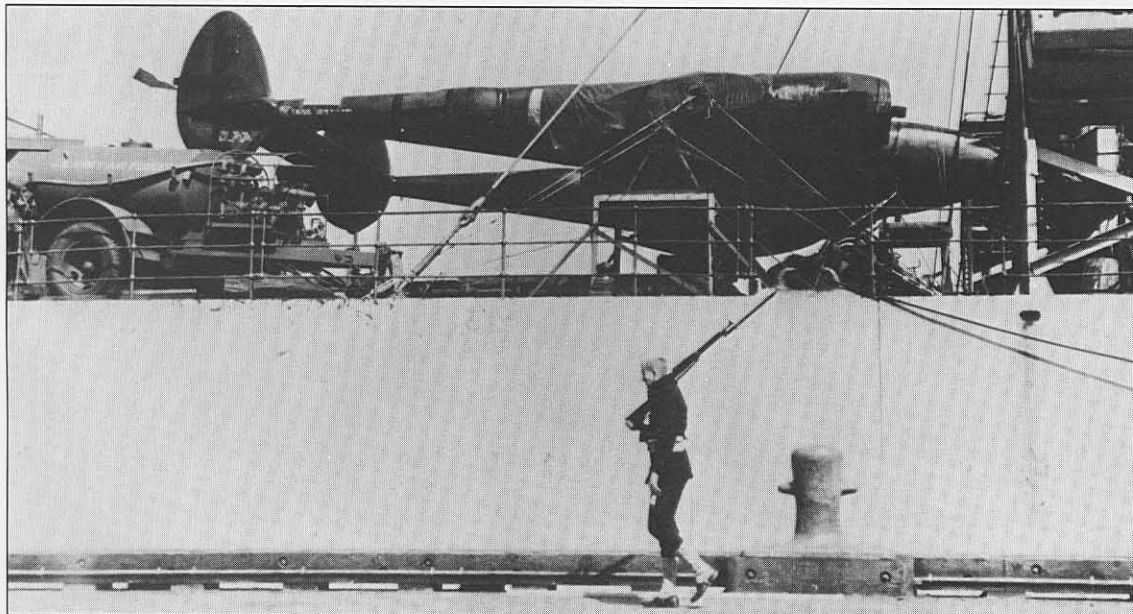
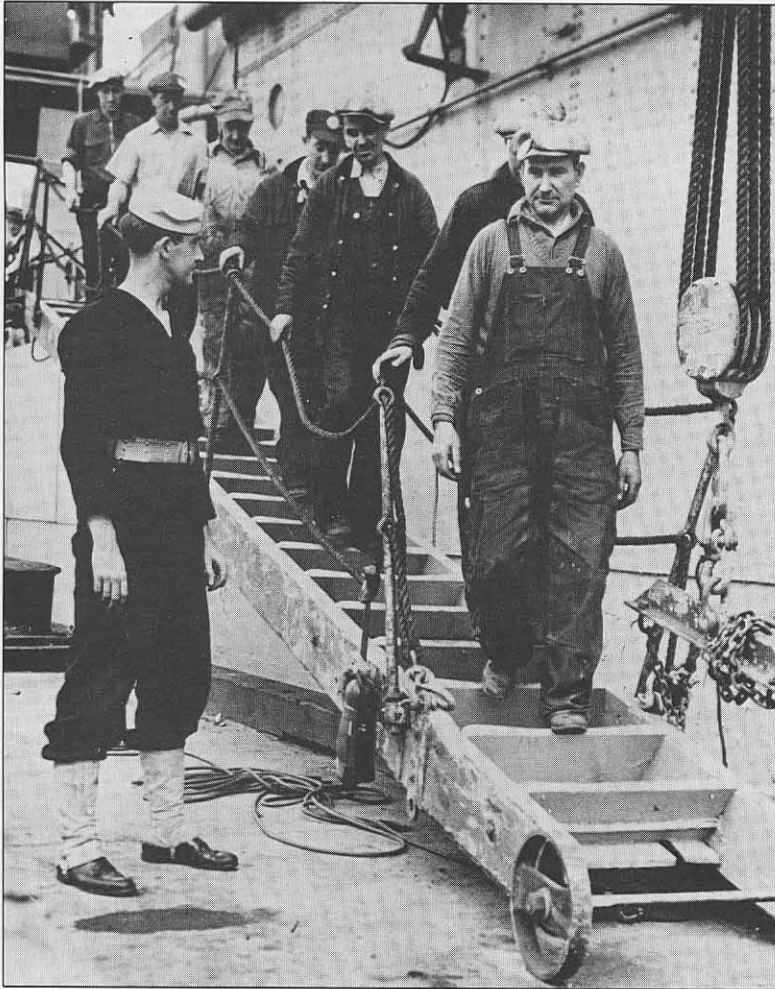
The temporary reservists demonstrated supreme competence and reliability and are a largely forgotten group that served an important role during the war. This organization freed up more than 8,000 regular Coast Guard officers and men to man military vessels. This equaled nearly 20 percent of the

regulars in service. More importantly, it allowed the Coast Guard to carry out the necessary port-security tasks without having to make sacrifices to fulfill its various worldwide commitments.

Allied victory during World War II depended upon the timely movement of supplies and the ability to plan for logistical buildups of supplies and men.

By the end of the war, nearly 200 COTP and assistant COTP offices had been established in the United States and overseas. The COTPs' valuable service to ensure the steady movement of supplies was of inestimable value.

The entire port-security program showed remarkable organization and effectiveness despite the incredible and wide-ranging responsibilities that faced the service during the war. The logistical centers of the United States remained secure from sabotage, confusion and mishaps. This function of the Coast Guard is often overlooked but it was certainly an important duty and a key factor in the Allied victory during World War II.



Above: A Coast Guard-pier guard watches workmen as they leave a merchant vessel. These men had to secure ID cards from the Coast Guard to have access to the ship.
Left: A Coast Guard sentry walks his post beside a merchant vessel carrying aircraft.

