

U N I F O R M S

of the
United States
Coast Guard

By Donald L. Canney
and Barbara Voulgaris



From the founding of the Revenue Cutter Service to the present, the military aspect of the Coast Guard has been unmistakable.

Alexander Hamilton emphasized the need for commissioned officers in this naval service. Until the Navy was reestablished in 1797, it was the nation's only naval service for the first few years of its existence.

The need for naval rank and status required visible symbols of authority, so some sort of standardized uniform was the result.

The history of these uniforms reflects both the traditions and roles of the Revenue Service and the Coast Guard, as well as the fashions of the period.

Uniforms of the United States Coast Guard, is a publication by the Coast Guard Historian's office, December 1990. Research and manuscript by Mr. Donald L. Canney. Editing and design by PAI Barbara Voulgaris. *Front cover photo*: A revenue cutter officer poses on board a cutter in the early 20th century. *Back photo*: Carl Anton Muller, later called Charles A. Miller, emigrated from Sweden sometime prior to 1863 and enlisted in the Revenue Cutter Service. This photograph was probably taken in 1863.

The early history of Revenue Cutter Service uniforms is vague. The scarcity of information is due in part by two fires. The British destroyed most of the records when they torched government buildings in 1814. Another fire in 1833 destroyed even more.

In any case, the early uniform must have been similar to that of the Continental Navy, which ceased to exist at the Revolution's end. In 1776, this original uniform consisted of a blue coat with red lapels and cuffs, yellow brass buttons, a red

waistcoat, blue breeches, white stockings and a tri-cornered hat. There was even disagreement with this uniform. John Paul Jones and others substituted white for the decorations and breeches.

The enlisted seaman's outfit was more of a matter of tradition than regulation, both in the Revenue Service and Navy. Loose-bottomed trousers were easily rolled to the knee for deck work. A black neckerchief could be worn as a sweat cloth. Tradition has it that the color black was in memory of the death of

British Admiral Horatio B. Nelson. In the days of sail, long hair was common for sailors, who wore it in a pigtail, probably to prevent it from tangling in the rigging, and tarred it (hence the nickname Jack Tar). The black neckerchief did not show the tar stains. The wide collar on the jumper also prevented tar stains. This wide collar was originally detachable.

Finally, the short jacket allowed freedom of movement in mounting the ratlines, manning the footropes and other sailing necessities. Any



Captain William Cooke seizes contraband gold near Brunswick, N.C., in 1793. Cooke commanded the revenue cutter *Diligence*, one of the first 10 cutters built for the service. The cutter service at this time had no ensign nor official uniform. Many officers wore their Revolutionary War uniforms, as pictured in the painting above.

uniformity in seamen's uniforms was strictly the result of similarities of garments sold in the "slop stores," early versions of the ship's store.

As sailors tended to be proficient with needle and thread, many made their own "uniforms" and followed their shipmates patterns. Many added individual decorations or embroidery. Regulations for enlisted men's uniforms in the Revenue Service did not appear until 1834.

The earliest surviving written description of a Revenue Service uniform dates from 1819 and describes, "the gentlemen stationed at Charleston" as outfitted in "a neat and becoming suit of blue, a body coat, trimmed with brass buttons, having for a design an eagle perched upon an anchor surrounded by stars. The pants and vests were blue, with tall, round hats, black cockades, leather stocks and cut and thrust swords."

This "body coat" was double-breasted and swallow-tailed, with six buttons per lapel and four on the skirts, plus one on each corner of the collar. The leather stock was a wide band worn around and over the shirt collar leaving only the flared edge of the collar protruding above. This item was replaced by the necktie. The pants had only recently been introduced. "Old fashioned" knee breeches were last seen in Navy regulations in 1813.

Ranks were distinguished by the epaulettes and probably conformed to Navy practice. Captains wore two epaulettes, senior lieutenants wore only a right epaulette and junior officers wore only a left epaulette. Rank may also have been indicated by the number

of buttons in various places, another common uniform practice of the day. The "tall, round hats," referred to as "stovepipe" hats, were black and sported a cockade, which was a ribbon rosette decoration on the side.

The first existing Revenue Cutter Service regulations regarding uniforms appeared in 1830, under Treasury Secretary Samuel D. Ingham. It is doubtful that earlier regulations existed and it appears that there was no real uniformity. One old veteran stated that, "the officers paid but little attention to dress . . . and adapted such patterns as the caprice of the commanding officer selected."

Before 1832, distinctive Revenue Service uniforms were further clouded by regulations which allowed U.S. Naval officers to hold Revenue Service commissions while on furlough from their own service. Many such officers refused to relinquish their uniforms, a practice no doubt confusing and frustrating to both enlisted men and officers.

The first officer's uniform for which there are existing regulations was that mentioned above in 1830. The full dress captain's outfit had nine buttons per lapel, two on the collar, four on the cuffs and six more on the skirts. Yellow braid closed each seam of the coat, the outer seam of the blue pants and the seams of the nine button buff vest. A "high crowned" black hat with black cockade and eagle button on the left side, topped this outfit.

The undress uniform apparently dispensed with the braid and had narrow lace on the shoulders rather than the prescribed epaulettes of the full dress. Lieutenants had fewer

buttons on the cuff, three for first lieutenant, two for second lieutenant, and each wore one epaulette. First lieutenants wore one epaulette on the right shoulder and second lieutenants wore one epaulette on the left shoulder.

This blue uniform met with immediate criticism and within a year the regulations were altered, doing away with the abundance of yellow braid trim. Shortly afterwards, the collar and cuff buttons were also eliminated.

In 1833 the high hat was replaced by a chapeau and rank was designated by gold lace sleeve stripes rather than buttons. Captains wore one stripe an inch wide; first lieutenants one stripe a half-inch wide; second lieutenants two half-inch stripes; and third lieutenants wore three one-quarter inch stripes.

Though this uniform was said to have met with general approval by the Revenue Service officers, it raised a storm from the naval side of the sea services. Now that naval officers could no longer hold simultaneous commissions in the Revenue Service, they were not pleased that revenue officers' uniforms were so similar to, and patterned upon, U. S. Navy uniforms.

The controversy was highlighted at a grand ball in Charleston, S.C., shortly after the the new uniform regulations were adopted. In attendance were officers of several revenue cutters, as well as Commodore Jesse D. Elliott of the U.S. sloop-of-war *Natchez* and his staff. In the glitter of the evening, Elliott and staff were literally outshone by the appearance of Captain William A. Howard of the



Samuel Chester Reid, privateer officer, War of 1812. Prior to the 1830s, little is known of Revenue Service uniforms. There was much latitude given to officers and they often wore Navy uniforms. It was also possible for officers to hold commissions in both the Navy and the Revenue Service and wear the same uniform for both. Some early descriptions of revenue officers mention a "high hat" or round hat, pictured here. Such an outfit and hat was often worn by merchant vessel officers.



Captain Alexander V. Fraser, captain commandant of the Revenue Cutter Service, from 1842 until 1847, in the uniform of the period.

revenue cutter *Jackson*, apparently fresh from Washington arrayed in the new uniform, complete with epaulettes and lace. The new uniform was well placed on Howard, a man of many accomplishments and

described as "one of the handsomest men of his day." Howard's impression was sufficient to compel Elliott to immediately complain to Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury demanding that the

Revenue Service uniform be modified to remove the resemblance to Navy uniforms. In particular, it seems that the wearing of epaulettes was objectionable. This was the first Revenue Service uniform which included epaulettes. Woodbury moved from the Navy to the Treasury Department in 1834 where he immediately moved to correct this situation.

Secretary Woodbury directed a board of revenue officers to design a "distinctive" uniform "without epaulettes." Failing to dissuade them from these shoulder decorations, the secretary retaliated by changing the color to gray. This uniform was apparently unanimously disliked in the Revenue Service. Their argument was the same as that used in the Civil War Confederate Navy; "Whoever heard of a sailor in a gray uniform?"

The description of the new uniform began with a "dark gray" cloth coat with the nine button lapels and four on the cuffs and pocket flaps, one on the hip and three on the skirts. A band of black braid was worn above the cuffs and the braid was also to be on the outer seam of either gray or white pants.

A black silk cravat and buff vest with nine buttons were worn, with a black belt for the sword. The undress uniform was single-breasted with a standing braided collar. The dress uniform had a more modern looking "rolling collar." Rank was distinguished by epaulettes and a descending number of buttons. Captains had two epaulettes. Third lieutenants also omitted the braid on the cuff. The regulations authorized a "plain" cocked hat.



Lieutenant Henry Harwood Key, Revenue Marine. One of the earliest photographs of a revenue officer. This picture is dated from the mid-1850s. Key wears two epaulettes, authorized in 1853 for all three lieutenant grades. Note the sword. This was called the "most handsome" sword ever authorized for the service. The three buttons on the sleeve also indicated rank. Photo courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

Under these regulations, petty officers and seamen wore jackets with five buttons. Under this was a white frock with blue facings on the collar and on the breast with a blue star in each corner of the collar as well as on the breast. The men wore white or blue trousers, depending on the season, along with a blue belt. Considering the officers' uniform controversy, it is curious that the enlisted men were given blue jackets. The button prescribed was no longer the national eagle or shield. It was "impressed with the shield of the Treasury Arms, surmounted on a fowl anchor."

Such was the unpopularity of this gray uniform that within two years it succumbed to its critics and blue returned. However, the black braid and other details remained.

The cocked hat however, went from plain to ornate with gold tassels, four rows of gold bullion diagonally from top to bottom and a rosette on the left side. The two-piece sword belt clasp was to have the Treasury arms and anchor design in the center, surrounded by a burnished gold rim. For undress, a "Navy regulation" cloth cap was designated with two gold bands a half-inch wide. Two years subsequent to these regulations shoulder straps were authorized.

The next major uniform change would come in the Civil War years, although minor changes were introduced in the 1840s and 1850s.

In 1843, the first regulation sidearms were authorized. This was a straight sword with Roman hilt and spring guard with elaborate engraving on the blade. Decorated with



Third Lieutenant, U.S. Revenue Marine, Civil War era. The coat was the frock identical to the Navy uniform of the era. Note the shield and anchor device on the hat and shoulder straps. Straps were for undress; epaulettes were for dress.



Another uniform from the Civil War period. Note the differences between this uniform and the one on the left. Rank is shown on the sleeve with stripes rather than buttons.

the spread eagle, the national shield, a blue and gold bullion and silk sword knot, this sword was called the most handsome the service ever authorized. Prior to this regulation, swords were apparently either Navy type or individual preference.

In 1844, further means were sought to distinguish the revenue uniform from the Navy's. To accomplish this, the epaulettes, which were described as "plain" in the earlier regulations, were to be decorated with the Treasury arms, surmounted on an anchor. The same device was to be mounted on the cap band. In typical cost consciousness, the same die was to be used for both cap and epaulette devices, with the latter in silver and the cap ornament in gold. Captain Fraser, senior officer of the service at the time, wrote that if all the officers cooperated and had these fabricated at the same place, the cost could be kept down to \$5 each.

New vessel technology resulted in additions to the uniform regulations in 1845. Three years earlier, the first steam vessels were authorized for the Revenue Service. In 1844, the first to go into commission were the *Spencer* and *Legare*.

At first, steam-engineering personnel were appointed on a temporary basis, then were commissioned as officers, chief engineers or assistant engineers. The higher rank wore the first lieutenant's uniform without the epaulette or strap, but wore the Treasury arms embroidered on the collar in gold. The third lieutenant's uniform was to be the assistant engineer's dress with the collar embroidering in silver.

Changes in shoulder decorations came in 1853. Secretary James Guthrie ordered that lieutenants of all grades wear both epaulettes in their full dress uniforms.

The shoulder strap was officially authorized at this time, although some unofficial straps may have appeared as early as 1838. Originally, the strap on the shoulder was simply a device to attach an epaulette. The number of epaulettes and their position showed rank, thus rank could still be determined by these straps, even when the epaulettes were not being worn.

In the Navy, narrow lace shoulder straps were authorized in 1830 and rank distinguishing devices were added to wider straps in 1840. In the Revenue Service regulations of 1853, captains were designated by a fowl anchor, shield and a star above and below, plus the time honored twin bars at each end. Lieutenants lost one of the twin bars and second lieutenants lost stars as well. Third lieutenants wore a plain strap.

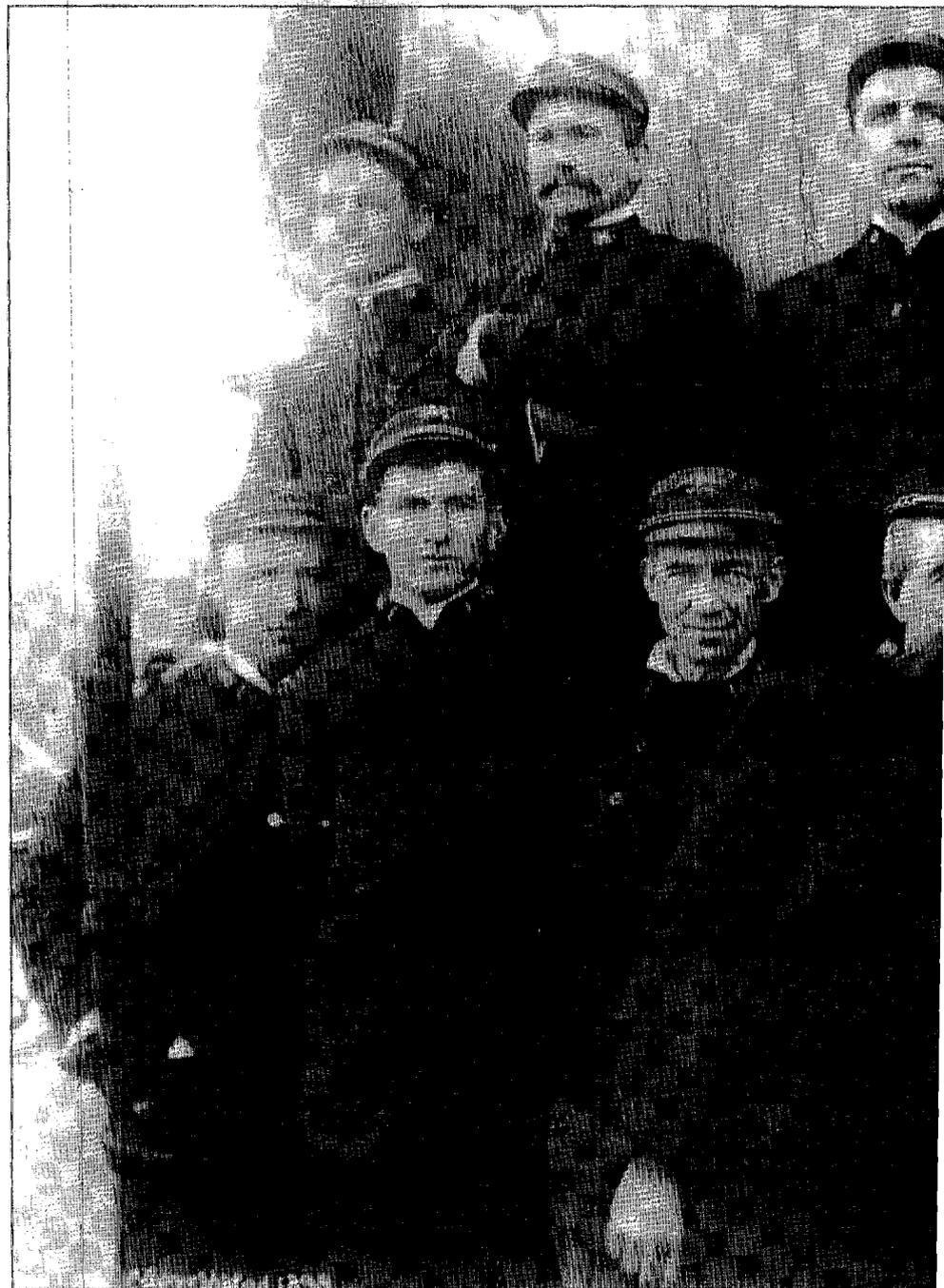
The straps themselves were of blue cloth with raised gold edgings. On the caps, the double gold bands were replaced by a single band of gold lace, one and one-half inches wide.

In 1862, the major change was the elimination of the "body coat," equivalent to the "cut-away" coat of today. Officers' full dress was now a frock coat similar to the single-breasted undress coat, but double-breasted with the standard nine buttons per row. This uniform was, as far as a cut was concerned, identical to the standard undress Navy uniform of the Civil War era.

The dress and undress uniform coat was the same but epaulettes were designated for full dress and shoulder straps for undress wear. Two one-half inch gold lace stripes above each cuff identified a captain

and lieutenants wore single stripes. The coats could be worn with buff, white, or blue vests, single-breasted, and either white or blue pants.

While epaulettes were to be



Ship's officers, circa 1900. Note that the sleeve braid indicating rank is dark, except for warrant officers. Engineering officers have an embroidered four-bladed

"plain," both shoulder straps and cap ornaments designated rank. Oddly enough, the cap and strap ornaments did not necessarily match. The captain's wreath on his cap enclosed a Treasury shield but his shoulder

straps had crossed anchors. The chief engineer's wreath enclosed a typical ship's paddle wheel and a star but the strap had a wheel with an anchor. All lieutenants had the shield and anchor on both cap and

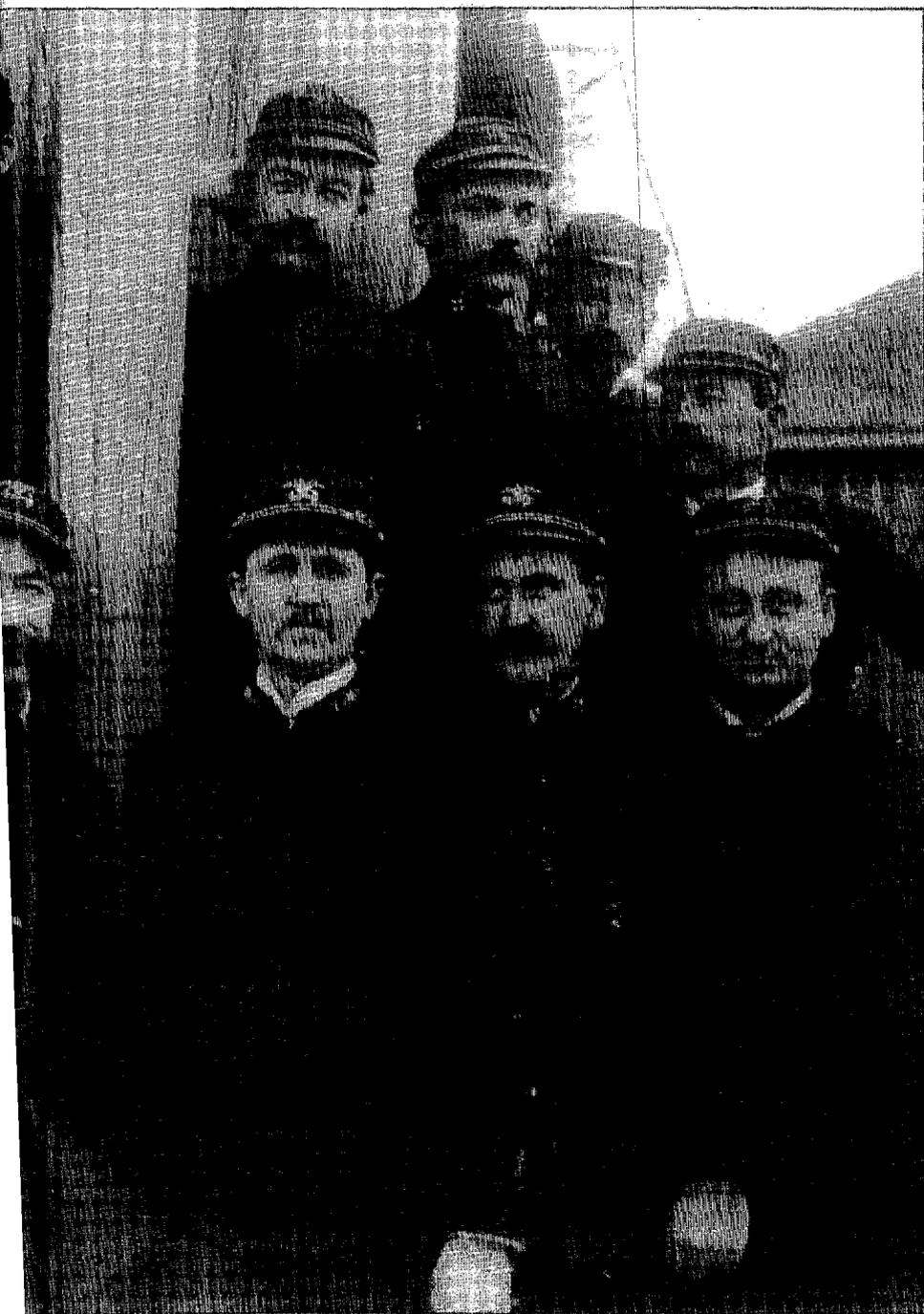
straps, but twin bars were authorized for first lieutenants, single bars for second lieutenants and no bars for third lieutenants. Assistant engineers had either a paddle wheel or omitted the wheel on both cap and straps. These regulations called for a "Navy Regulation" sword, doing away with the handsome eagle design and replacing it with a curved hilt weapon with typical oval hand guard.

Petty officers were authorized a double-breasted blue jacket with nine buttons on the lapels and blue pantaloons. All other enlisted men (seamen, firemen, coal passers, stewards, cooks and boys) wore white or blue frocks with opposite color facings.

Blue or white trousers could be worn with blue cloth cap or a low crowned, wide-brimmed straw hat. The latter was common 19th century naval attire and usually was worn for summer or tropical duty.

New uniform regulations issued in 1864 mainly changed the rank designations. Now a maximum of four one-half inch sleeve stripes marked the revenue captain. The upper stripe was sewn slightly above the lower three. A space of one-half inch separated the upper stripes from the other three which were separated by only the one-quarter inch.

Additionally, a small embroidered national shield was placed above the stripes on the sleeve. Cap and shoulder strap devices were again changed. Captains now had crossed anchors on both headgear and shoulders, as well as gold leaves at each end of the straps. Lieutenants now had a national shield, stripes and three stars, in place of the Treasury



matching the fly-front edging. In 1908 this dark color was changed to gold, propeller on the collar.



Captain Francis Tuttle of the revenue cutter Bear, in the fly-front uniform coat. This coat was authorized in 1891. Apparently facial hair was not regulated in this era. The fly-front coat remained standard until around the First World War.

shield. The paddle wheel cap ornament for engineers remained, but twin bars were added to the straps for chief engineers, single bars for first assistants, and no bars for second assistants. Chief engineers had three sleeve stripes, assistants two and one for first and second respectively.

At this time there were few distinguishing features of revenue officer uniforms, compared to the Navy. Shoulder strap devices were gold rather than silver, engineers had a paddle wheel as opposed to a four leaf stylized ship's prop and Naval officers had no device above the cuff stripes, except for "executive" stars

for line officers. Note also that both services abolished the cocked hat during the war.

After a couple of decades of general satisfaction with the uniform, 1871 brought another controversial set of regulations. These called for the reinstatement of the "swallowtail" coat, this time with seven buttons per lapel and four buttons on the cuffs. These buttons bore the shield with "U" and "S" on each side. The vest was also seven-buttoned and the blue or white pants had a black silk cord decorating the outside seam. The undress coat was a seven button double-breasted ver-

sion of the popular civilian sack coat which was very similar to the modern suit coat. Most of these coats were single-breasted and no illustration has been found of the double-breasted version.

However, the controversy over these new uniforms did not center on the cut or style of the attire, but on the ornaments and devices. Shoulder straps and lace were abandoned and the rolling collar was decorated with a horizontal fouled anchor, with an oak leaf perpendicular to the anchor's shank and the letters U. S. R. M. in Old English forming an arc around the upper part of the leaf.

Epaulettes displayed the fouled anchor with oak leaves which was patterned after the U. S. Naval lieutenant commanders. The U.S.R.M. in Old English was also arched over a vertical anchor on the cap.

The lieutenant's uniform substituted bars on the collar for the oak leaf. Engineers wore an embroidered four-bladed propeller. These devices, particularly the Old English letters, were described as the "poorest and ugliest" ever authorized and many officers simply refused to comply with the requirements.

In two years the "objectionable features" were discarded officially and shoulder straps were restored. At this time the cap ornament was standardized for all officers. This was the spread eagle with shield grasping a fouled anchor and surrounded by a circle of 13 stars. This emblem has remained essentially unchanged ever since, with only the elimination of the stars and changes in size.

New regulations were promulgat-



A typical enlisted crew aboard a revenue cutter, circa 1890. The traditional naval sailor suit went without major change for a century or more. Note the petty officers in the front row and the rating badge on the right sleeve of the third sailor from the right in the middle row. The rating on his badge is not identified.



The crew of a revenue cutter, circa 1910. The "P" on the bow of the ship indicates that this was probably the revenue cutter Pamlico, homeported on the Atlantic coast. Note the shoulder knots on the commanding officer, first row right. The white duck cap was first authorized in the 1891 regulations and this is one of the earliest photos showing it in use.

ed in 1878, reverting to the nine button double-breasted coat, though the "tails" were retained for full dress and the frock for undress.

The sack coat was authorized for off duty and watchstanding. It was single-breasted with five buttons and worn without lace or shoulder straps. The cap no longer had a gold braid around it but had a black band of silk between upper and lower welts. It was also now the same diameter on top as on the base. The sword was no longer the Navy type but was double-edged, with dagger hilt and white grip, 26 to 29 inches long.

Epaulettes continued in the 1871 pattern. The center device on the shoulder straps for line officers was a foul anchor with a perpendicular shield. Captains had oak leaves at each end and lieutenants the familiar bars. The obsolete paddle wheel

on engineers' straps was now a four-bladed propeller and the number of bars at the ends denoted the ranks. Rank devices on sack coats were similar to the shoulder straps. They were sewn on the collars and consisted of oak leaves and bars, accompanied by a shield for all except engineers.

No major changes were introduced in the Revenue Cutter Service uniform until 1891, when fashion again changed the look of military dress in general. New to the Revenue Service was the military tunic.

This item had been introduced into the Navy in the 1870s and its type can still be seen at military academies. It is a tight-fitting, single-breasted coat with low-standing collar. The most distinctive characteristic is the fly-front, concealing

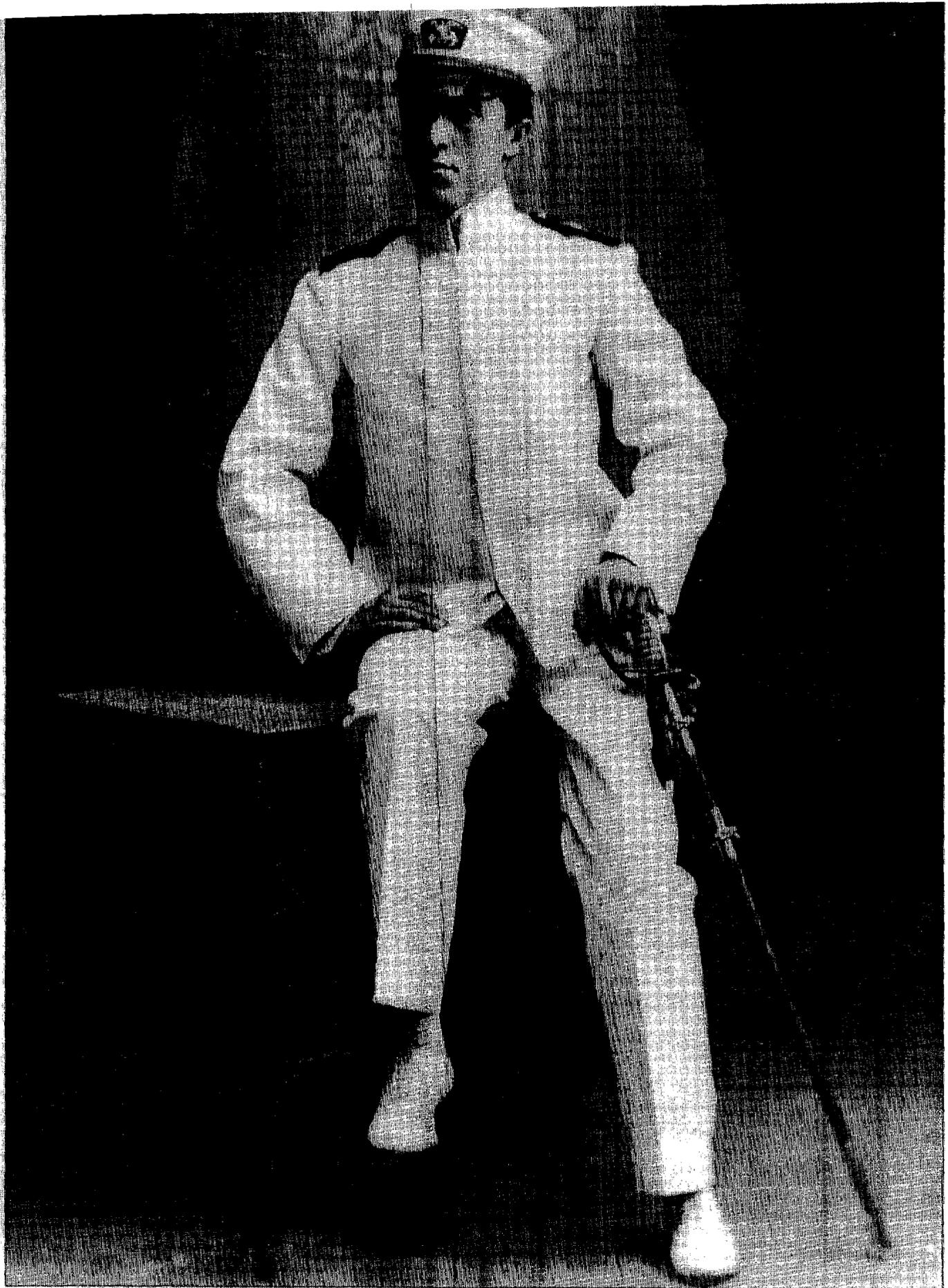
the buttons. The Revenue Service version of this was dark blue with a trim of black mohair braid, one and one-quarter inch wide. Inside this, was a narrow silk braid edging. Grade markings were the same in number and width as the dress uniforms but in black braid. For summer, a white duck version was authorized, trimmed with linen braid. This was designated the service coat and was standard until the 1920s.

Also in 1891 an optional full dress uniform for social occasions was authorized. This was cut away as was the full dress but with a rolling collar and five buttons worn with a low cut waistcoat, single-breasted with four revenue buttons. Worn without epaulettes or shoulder straps, this was similar to the formal tuxedo of civilian dress but with cuff braid and shield device on the sleeves.

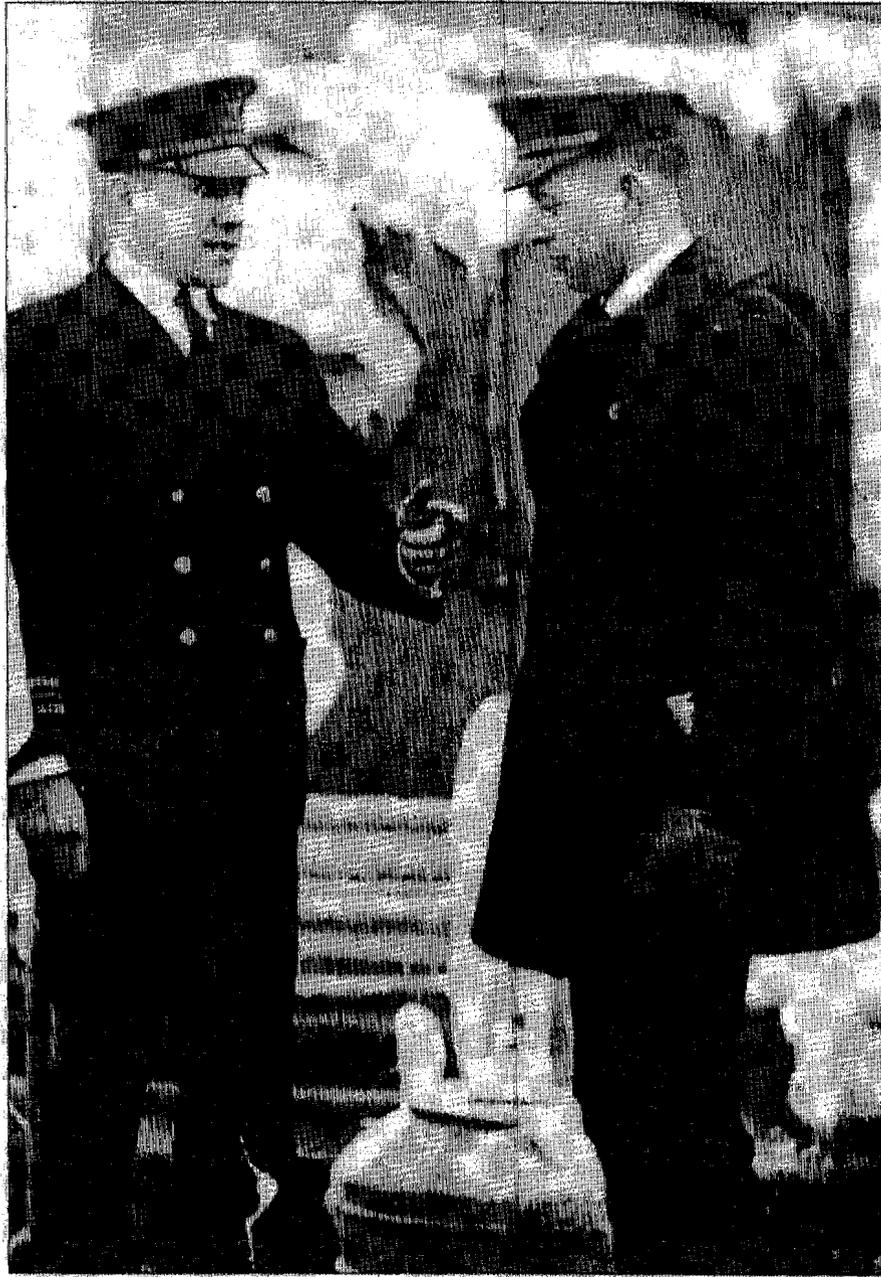
The headgear of the 1891 regula-



Coast Guardsmen at Fort Trumbell, Conn., 1917, in the Navy-style uniform.



Captain Francis Saltus Van Boskerck, composer of the lyrics and music of Semper Paratus, shown here in his white dress uniform after his appointment to first lieutenant, Aug. 4, 1902.



Coast Guard officers during the Prohibition era. The double-breasted coat, left, was similar to that of the Navy's in World War I. It was originally patterned after the Royal Navy's jacket. The peacoat on the right has long been a standard item of the sea services.

tions included a "chapeau," cocked hat, of black beaver, with a cockade on the right side. For service and undress, a helmet was authorized. This was made of cork "or other suitable material," with a high crown and narrow brim front and back covered with light-drab tan linen duck.

This tropical helmet was similar to British colonial uniform headgear.

Petty officers were allowed a double-breasted coat with rolling collar. Cooks and stewards wore a single-breasted coat, but with rubber-like buttons rather than the revenue but-

tons of the double-breasted coat.

Other enlisted personnel still retained the "sailor suit" of traditional design, complete with flat hat with its black ribbon hanging behind. The name of the wearer's vessel was in gilt around the front of the ribbon.

Rating badges were worn on the right coat sleeve. A boatswain wore crossed anchors; a gunner wore crossed gun barrels; a master-at-arms wore crossed keys over an anchor; a quartermaster wore crossed flags below a ship's wheel; a coxswain wore an arrow crossing an anchor; and an oiler wore a propeller.

In 1902, probably as the result of the Spanish American War, Revenue Service officers were given relative rank with naval officers. Three years later, new sleeve insignia were prescribed. Three stripes now indicated a captain: a narrow center stripe, with a half-inch wide stripe above and below. First lieutenants wore two-half inch stripes; second lieutenants, one stripe of half-inch braid below a quarter-inch stripe; and third lieutenants, one narrow stripe.

In 1908, the head of the Revenue Service was designated as "captain commandant" and given four sleeve stripes. This rank was equivalent to a naval captain. The rank of senior captain was also created, designated by three equal sleeve stripes, equating to the naval commander.

On the standing collar, rank devices were also changed to match the new grades. The captain commandant wore a spread eagle with shield; senior captains, a silver oak leaf; captains, a gold oak leaf; first lieutenant, two gold bars; second lieutenants,

one gold bar; third lieutenants wore no device other than the corps ornament. Engineer officers wore a fowl anchor with four oak leaves on the shank.

A heavy overcoat was part of the 1908 regulations. This was double-breasted with seven plain buttons on each side and a rolling collar wide enough to "protect the ears." Both shoulder marks and sleeve rank were authorized for this, but the sleeve braid was to be black.

A cloak was also authorized. This was "three quarters of a circle" to hang two inches below the ends of the fingers, fastening at the neck

with a hook and eye and a clasp underneath.

Both full dress and service caps had "scrambled eggs" on the visor. Engineers had a gold band one-half inch wide on their visor.

For a short time fashionable shoulder knots were authorized. These were dressier than the shoulder straps and consisted of "three strands of gold wire cord 3/16th of an inch in diameter." These were twisted and terminated in loops at the outer ends on an oval-shaped pad. Corps and rank devices were worn within the loops.

"Cut and thrust" swords etched

with "U.S.R.C.S." could be worn, along with a tasselled gold and blue bullion sword knot. The dress belt which completed this ensemble was edged in gold lace.

Warrant officers also wore the fly-front uniform coat, but with a single black mohair braid stripe one and a quarter inch wide on the lower sleeve.

Collar devices showed the specialty marks; fowl anchors for boatswains; flaming spherical shell for gunners; a chevron for carpenters; and a three-bladed propeller for machinists.

Petty officers were distinguished



Coast Guard uniforms of World War II. The male enlisted uniform was identical to the Navy's. The female uniform was like the Navy's except for the service emblems. The lapel devices were crossed anchors under the Coast Guard emblem.



The SPAR uniform of World War II was similar to the Navy's uniform. Notice the Coast Guard emblems on the jacket lapels.

from other enlisted grades by a double breasted coat with gilt buttons. Rating badges were worn on one sleeve. Officers of the port watch on the left sleeve and vice versa. The badge was on a three and one quarter inch field and consisted of a spread eagle over a specialty mark and chevrons. Half chevrons were to be worn as service stripes to indicate each three consecutive years of duty in the Revenue Service.

Enlisted personnel continued with the traditional jumper. A jersey could be worn as an outer garment "from sunset to 8 a.m." and during the day for drills, exercises

and working parties.

In 1915 the Revenue Service and the Life-Saving Service combined into the U.S. Coast Guard, subsequently, the Life-Saving Service adopted the uniform prescribed by the old Revenue Cutter Service.

By the 1920s two major changes were seen in Coast Guard uniforms. First was the adoption of the double-breasted service coat similar to that still worn by the U.S. Navy. This was worn without shoulder straps, and rank designations were on the lower sleeve, with the familiar shield device above the rank stripes. Enlisted men, below petty

officer, adopted the Navy-style white circular hat.

In 1930 Coast Guard aviation was little more than five-years-old. The working dress for aviators, all ranks above petty officer, was forest-green gabardine or serge for winter and khaki-colored cotton for summer.

The coat had three buttons, a roll collar with notch lapel, and four outside pockets (the lower to be of the "bellows" style). The pockets had flaps and the back had a bellows pleat from the shoulder to the sewn in waist belt. The khaki shirt had a soft collar worn with a black tie. The aviator badge was a winged, fouled anchor with shield, worn on the left breast. A folding-type flying cap was also authorized, edged in black and gold silk for commissioned and chief warrant officers.

In 1941, for the first time, Coast Guard uniforms became "officially" a modification of Navy regulations. The garments themselves were the same as Naval uniforms, only the distinguishing corps devices, buttons, shoulder marks, etc., were distinctively Coast Guard. The officer's cap device for the Coast Guard was the most obvious difference. It consisted of a large spread eagle with shield, with a single horizontal anchor held in the eagle's talons. The Naval device had, and still has, a smaller eagle over crossed anchors. Also, the Naval eagle was silver; the Coast Guard's, gold.

The Coast Guard uniform coat also continued to have the national shield placed above the sleeve rank stripes. Coast Guard gilt buttons



A class of SPARS graduate from the Reserve Training Center in Yorktown, Va., in 1972. The basic design of the uniform has generally remained the same.



Old and new Coast Guard uniforms from the 1970s. This uniform marked the first major change from the traditional sailor suit. The shade of blue was distinctive from other shades used by other services.

centered their design on a perpendicular anchor, with a rope like inner-rim. The Naval button consisted of an eagle, facing dexter over a horizontal anchor.

The interchangeability with Navy uniforms continued until after the transfer of the Coast Guard to the Department of Transportation and the subsequent adoption of today's lighter blue, single-breasted uniform. The only non-interchangeable uniform was that of the enlisted surfmen adopted in 1943. This was single-breasted and worn by mounted beach patrols and port security personnel.

The SPAR uniform of World War II was designed like the Navy's female uniform although Coast Guard emblems were worn on the lapels. There have been few major changes to the women's uniform over the years. Certain items have been phased in and out and there have been modifications to the style and fit but the uniform has remained fairly similar.

The present enlisted uniform marked the first major change in enlisted mens' uniforms in over a century. Dissatisfaction with the old traditional sailor suit jumper goes back decades but tradition held on.

Two explanations were given for the change to the blue uniforms under Commandant Chester R. Bender. The first was to create a distinctly different uniform from that of the Navy and to solidify the fact that the Coast Guard was a separate organization.

The second reason was to update the uniform to be consistent with contemporary society. The particu-

lar shade of blue was chosen because it was different from the shades used by the other services. Coast Guard uniforms have seen two basic trends in their history. One marked a similarity to the uniforms of the U.S.

Navy, the other was to have totally different uniforms from that sister service.

Through most of this history, the similarities have been the most

prevalent and for many years the sole differences were in the insignia and ornaments.

Today, the blue uniform is probably the most distinctive since the day



Lightship officers and crew. Engineers have the three-bladed propeller on their sleeve above the rank stripe. The other house in the place of the propeller.

of the unloved gray uniform of the 1840s, but today's blues have the distinct advantage of retaining the blue color, as appropriate for a service steeped in serving on the seas.

Lighthouse Service uniforms

The United States Lighthouse Establishment was formed in 1789 by Congress and placed under the Treasury Department. It was transferred to the Commerce and Labor Department in 1910 and finally was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1939. Uniforms were prescribed for lighthouse keepers, their assistants, lightship personnel, lighthouse tender crewmen, and the supply depot personnel.

Regulations of 1912 prescribed similar uniforms for lighthouse keepers and officers of lighthouse tender vessels. This was a single breasted, fly-front coat, fitted closely to the body and similar to the Revenue Service uniform coat authorized in 1891. Collar ornaments for lighthouse tender officers and engineers were embroidered anchors and three-bladed propellers, respectively.

Light station personnel wore embroidered loops enclosing either the letter "K" for the keeper, or the numbers one to four, depending on their ranks as assistants. Lighthouse personnel did not wear sleeve ornaments.

Tender officers wore black mohair braid stripes, similar to naval officer stripes. Captains had two wide outer stripes and two narrow inner stripes. Second officers wore two stripes and third officers, one stripe. Chief engineers wore three stripes, assistant engineers wore two stripes and second assistants, one stripe.

A standard Navy-type cap was worn, with a silver lighthouse orna-

ment and a surrounding wreath. Regulation buttons also portrayed a lighthouse.

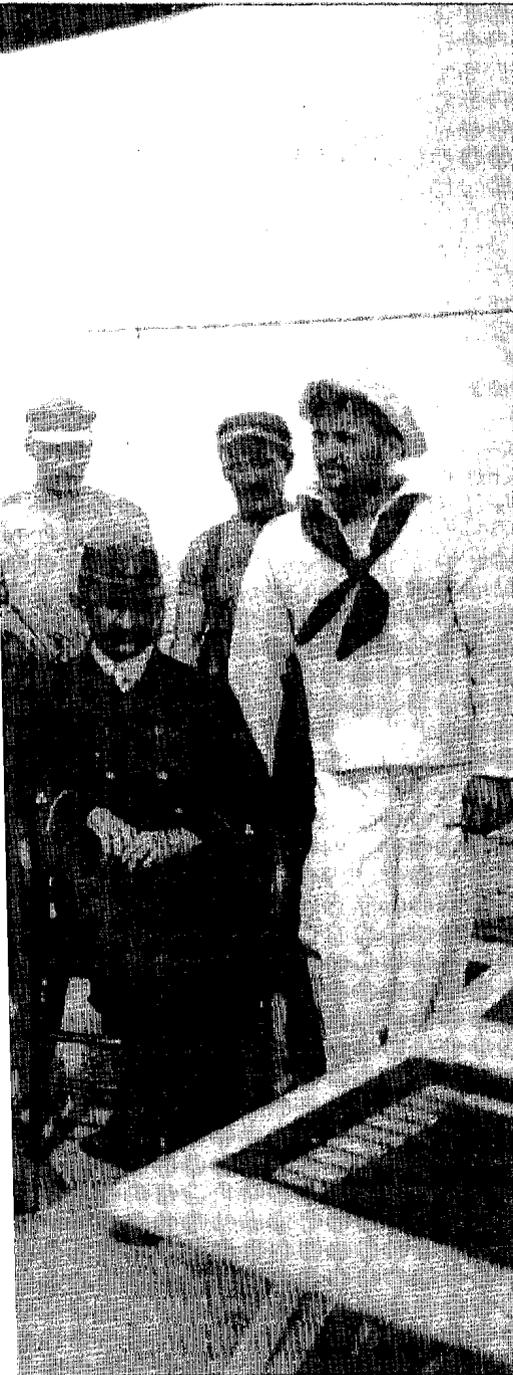
A double-breasted coat was prescribed for quartermasters and machinists. This had five gilt buttons on each breast. Their caps carried the silver lighthouse, with "U.S.L.S." beneath its base. Officers of light vessels also wore this uniform coat.

In the enlisted ranks, stokers wore a Navy-type white duck uniform. Oiled canvas rain suits were authorized, as well as dark blue watch caps and sweaters for winter wear.

At the supply depots, the keepers wore the same uniform as the lighthouse keepers. Watchmen wore a uniform typical of policemen of the period, reminiscent of the "Keystone Cops," which was a single-breasted Army-style coat with five gilt buttons and high collar. Within the standard embroidered loop on the collar was a "W." The high police-style helmet was black for winter and tan for summer and had the lighthouse ornament on front. Captains of the watch added a wreath around the lighthouse. Watchmen wore "Police" badges on their breast, lettered with "L.H.S.," "Police," and "U.S."

Regulations for the lighthouse establishment as part of the Coast Guard were promulgated in 1941, including uniforms for civilian employees.

By this date, the cap device for officers was changed to a lighthouse and crossed anchors for lighthouse tender officers. Lightship officers retained the old lighthouse surrounded by the wreath device. Their uniforms were of standard navy blue



officers have an embroidered light-

This was a life buoy crossed by an oar and a boat hook, over which was "U.S." and below was "L.S.S." also in gold. All buttons had the same ornament.

The surfmen wore a similar coat, but single-breasted and with four medium-size plain black buttons. A pleat two inches wide ran from each shoulder downward on front and back and a belt passed through the four pleats. On the right sleeve was the service emblem and on the left was the individual's seniority num-

ber, embroidered in white silk. The cap was the same as the keeper's, but with "U.S. Life-Saving Service" on the band instead of the buoy device. A sailor-style jumper and overalls were also authorized.

All personnel were authorized a "storm suit." This was made of brown rubber cloth or cotton duck, with the name of the station on the breast. The southwester hat was black, with the name of the station in white letters with "L.S.S." in an arc over the station name.

Diversity characterizes the uniforms of the Coast Guard and its predecessor agencies. In fact, no federal agency can boast of a tradition as diverse. The uniforms almost always reflected its conservatism and sometimes its thriftiness.

A common thread however, does connect them all. Each uniform was worn by men and women who served their country and provided safety and security on America's navigable waters.



A showcase of Coast Guard uniforms, beginning with the Revenue Cutter Service up through present day dress. During the 14th Coast Guard District's Bicentennial Ball, each uniform was highlighted and a short historical narrative was presented.

