

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Station Montauk, New York



Location:	Star Island, Lake Montauk
Date of Conveyance	1954
Station Built:	1955
Fate:	Still in operation

Remarks:

Many of the old Lifesaving Service Stations converted to Coast Guard use along the south coast of Long Island had been closed down by 1950. Some had been destroyed by the great hurricane of 1938. Others had been shut down after World War II. During the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, two stations provided rescue coverage for the east end. These were stations at Ditch Plains and Napeaque. By 1955, Coast Guard operations on the south fork had become centralized with the establishment of a new station at Star Island, Montauk. This time period also witnessed sweeping changes in equipment and rescue boat design.

The Ditch Plain Station, located south of Lake Montauk operated three types of rescue boats during the 1940s. A twenty six foot motor surf boat was kept in a boat house on the ocean side. A thirty eight foot picket boat and 36 foot motor lifeboat were moored out on buoys at Lake Montauk. For long range SAR work during this decade, Ditch Plains depended on the dispatch of 80 foot and 75 foot wooden patrol cutters from Base 4, New London, Connecticut. Patrol craft were not assigned to the Montauk area on a permanent basis until the 82 foot WPB Point Wells was stationed there in 1962. The SAR boats of the 1940's, were generally much slower than their present day counterparts, but were sturdy sea boats, nevertheless.

The 26 foot surfboat was a motorized version of the old Monomoy pulling boat used for decades by the service. It was used for quick launches into moderate surf conditions or for short range SAR work. The 21 foot Revenge, Boston Whaler would be the 1880s counterpart of the Monomoy. The wooden hulled 38 foot Picket boat was built in large numbers during the 1920s to counter the rum running trade. Depending on the type of power plant installed, Picket boats could attain speeds of between 20 and 35 knots. The Picket boat was a forerunner of our 40 and 41 foot utility boats.

The 36 foot motor lifeboat (MLB) was originally built in the 1920's. This was the Coast Guard's heavy weather rescue lifeboat up until 1964. In that year the steel hulled 44 foot (MLB) replaced the smaller 36 footers. The 36 footer at Montauk during the 1940's was a diesel powered boat. She had a capacity for a three man crew and twenty seven survivors. This lifeboat could cruise at 9 knots for distance of 202 miles. The large cutters based at New London were also of wood construction. They proved to be the prototypes for our modern 82 foot patrol boats. The 75 footers were part of a class of two hundred cutters built during the prohibition decade of the 1920s. Nicknamed "Six Bitters" after twin 6 cylinder, 200 horsepower plants, these craft provided the backbone of the Coast Guard's inshore anti-smuggling operations. These boats had a beam of 13' 7 1/4", drew 4 feet, displaced 37 tons and could reach 16 knots a full speed. Designed for work up to twenty miles offshore, her sturdy construction allowed these boats to work up to fifty miles out. Nearly fifty of these vessels were still in commission during World War II. Three 75 footers were based out of New London in this period. They were the CGC 135, CGC 147 and CGC 148.

Another type of patrol cutter that saw service in the Montauk area was the 80 foot class. Three of these boats were based out of New London in the 1940s. Only ten of these craft were built. They were 47-ton twin screw cutters, that could attain 26 knots at full power. Their powerplant was a unique arrangement. Four, four hundred horsepower Liberty gasoline engines were coupled to the two shafts. At the end of the Second World War, the aging fleet of 75 and 80-footers were replaced by yet another wooden patrol craft, the Wheeler 83-footer. This cutter, developed at the beginning of the war, was one of the finest small cutters ever designed. During the war they served on coastal anti submarine patrol.

During the Normandy invasion, these craft saved over 1,000 troops from swamped landing craft. These boats were built by Wheeler Shipyards of Brooklyn, New York. Each was powered by two Viking 600 horsepower gasoline engines which could attain speeds of 20.5 knots. Her low silhouette and high-flaring bow made for good sea keeping qualities. A Wheeler 83-footer was based at New London and provided long range BAR coverage for Montauk during the 1940s and 1950s. Often this cutter would tie up at the Montauk Yacht Club or anchor out in Lake Montauk awaiting a SAR call. The 83346 was in service at New London as late as 1962.

Another craft which provided SAR Patrols off Montauk was the CGC *Yeaton*, a 125 foot cutter based at New London. The *Yeaton* frequently made 7 day patrols in Gardiner Bay and Block Island Sound. Much of the patrol time, however, was spent tied up at the Fish Shangreala Pier next to the Montauk R.R. Station or the Railroad pier at Greenport, in order to conserve fuel. In 1962 Montauk became homeport for its first long range BAR boat, the brand new CCC *Point Wells*. The 1950s was a decade of change for the Coast Guard at Montauk. In 1954 the commander, Third District decided to close down Ditch Plains. Coast Guard operations at Long Island's East End would be consolidated with a new station at Star Island on Lake Montauk.

Instead of building a new structure the station at Napeague would be closed and moved by barge to Lake Montauk. The entire operation took six months. While enroute by barge from Napeague Bay, the station was blown onto a sand bar by a winter storm. There the barge remained for two months while tugs tried to free her and in July 1954 the voyage of Montauk Station ended. The building arrived in Lake Montauk after a half year odyssey. Another year of work lay ahead to mount the building on a foundation and construct work-shops and a large pier. On October 1, 1955 Montauk Station was commissioned as an active unit of Moriches Group, which included Shinnecock and Moriches stations.

During the years 1955 to 1965 the Star Island facility operated a 36 foot MLB and a steel hulled 40 foot utility boat. In 1962 the CGC *Point Wells* made Star Island her home base. The 40 foot utility boat took the place of the wooden picket boat. The 40 foot utility boat was a graceful, rugged and fast search and rescue boat. She could operate in calm to moderate sea conditions. The 40-footer was a direct ancestor to the 41 foot utility boat of today and to many sailors thinking a superior boat. The Mark IV Steel 40-footer could carry twenty men or 5,000 lbs. of cargo. On a SAR mission this boat could attain 23 knots powered by twin six cylinder, 190 horsepower Detroit diesels. At maximum speed the 40-footer could range up to 383 miles. Unfortunately, the Star Island facility had not yet been built when one of the worst boating tragedies in recent local history struck the Montauk area. This incident was the disastrous floundering of the fishing vessel *Pelican* on September 1, 1951. The 42 foot *Pelican* should have been rated for a maximum of 20 passengers but took on 62 fares that fateful day. Badly overloaded, the *Pelican* set out at mid-morning for a day of Blue fishing off Block

Island in the face of northeast winds and heavy swells. By late morning, sea conditions had become much worse. Captain Carroll decided to head in. But his decision had come too late. The *Pelican* took a fearful pounding all the way back from Block Island. Ten miles east of Montauk Point huge seas flooded and stalled his port engine. The Captain was so busy fighting the waves he never ordered the passengers to don life jackets.

The *Pelican* doggedly rolled her way westward. The passengers were sick, battered and panicky. When the *Pelican* entered the Endeavor Shoals, rip current waves began washing over the starboard side. The passengers in terror stampeded to the portside. The boat lost all stability and quickly capsized. Forty-five people including the Captain were drowned. Nineteen people somehow survived and were picked up by nearby fishing boats. The tragedy happened so fast Ditch Plains Station was unable to respond. Coast Guard helicopters searched for weeks afterward for victims. Much stricter regulations on commercial party boat fishing vessels were passed as a result of this disaster.

In recent years Montauk Station has kept busy. 1979 is a good example. In that year almost 300 SAR cases were handled and 729 people were assisted. Not all cases are SAR related. During the summer of 1979, a trawler brought back to Star Island a particular hot cargo, in its net a live, but undetonated depth charge. The entire Island was evacuated when Suffolk County Police bomb squad and Naval Demolitions experts from New Jersey defused this hot potato.

Montauk Station has again undergone rapid change the past fifteen years. The steel 44 foot motor lifeboat replaced the 36 MLB in 1965. In 1975 the aluminum 41 footer replaced the aging 40 footer. The late 1970s have also seen a shift in emphasis at Montauk from SAR work to law enforcement. Regular law enforcement patrols have been part of the station's mission since 1978. All regular and reserve boat crews have received small arms training with the New York City and Nassau County Police forces. In October, 1978 Montauk's Cutter *Point Wells* made a large drug bust when she seized seven tons of marijuana aboard the seventy foot sailing vessel, *Scott Bader* off Gardiner's Island. Montauk Station goes into the decade of the 1980's with the two important roles of SAR station and anti-drug smuggling unit.

On 30 September 2005, the unaccompanied personnel housing at Coast Guard Station Montauk was dedicated to the memory of Petty Officer 3rd Class Nathan B. Bruckenthal, the only Coast Guardsman killed in action since the Vietnam War, who was killed off the coast of Iraq.

Photographs:



BRUCKENTHAL HALL DEDICATION (FOR RELEASE): MONTAUK, New York (Oct. 3, 2005)--
A member of the Coast Guard Honor Guard waits to post colors during the Bruckenthal Hall Dedication ceremony at Coast Guard Station Montauk, NY, Oct. 03, 2005. The building is named after Bruckenthal who was killed in action April 24, 2004 while defending the Iraqi Kwahr Al Amaya Oil Terminal against a series of waterborne attacks. He is the first Coast Guardsman killed in action since the Vietnam War. USCG photo by PAC Tom Sperduto



BRUCKENTHAL HALL DEDICATION (FOR RELEASE): MONTAUK, New York (Oct. 3, 2005)--Bruckenthal Hall at Coast Guard Station Montauk, NY, Oct. 03, 2005. The building is named after Bruckenthal who was killed in action April 24, 2004 while defending the Iraqi Kwahr Al Amaya Oil Terminal against a series of waterborne attacks. He is the first Coast Guardsman killed in action since the Vietnam War. USCG photo by PAC Tom Sperduto .

Sources:

Station History File, CG Historian's Office

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