Erroll Brown

5,000 African Americans served in the Coast Guard during World War II and about 1 out of every 5 reached petty officer and warrant officer level. By 1943, the Coast Guard commissioned its first African American officer and desegregated its first cutter, the *Sea Cloud*. Both events came a year before similar efforts in the U.S. Navy. In 1945, the Coast Guard appointed its second African American ship commander. Moreover, Olivia Hooker and four other SPARs became the first African American women to join the service.

These pioneering efforts of World War II paid off as African Americans reached higher levels in the enlisted rates and officer ranks. By the mid-1970s, African Americans made up seven percent of the service, including personnel at the master chief and captain levels. By the end of the twentieth century, African American Vince Patton had reached the highest enlisted rank in the service and Erroll Brown achieved flag rank. In 2010, Manson Brown became vice admiral and commander of the Coast Guard's Pacific Area and, in 2012, he became Deputy Commandant for Mission Support.

In addition, African American women have made great strides since World War II. They first graduated from the Academy in 1983 while several women climbed to senior enlisted and officer levels during the 1990s. Also, the first African American female aviator, Jeanine McIntosh, earned her wings in 2005.

Jeanine McIntosh

African Americans in the service have come a long way, pioneering the way ahead for all minorities in the Coast Guard, U.S. military services, and the nation and they are the longest serving minority in the U.S. Coast Guard and the federal government.

For information:

Historian's Office
Commandant (CG-09224)
U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20593

Vince Patton, Eighth Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard

Front Cover: Vice Admiral Manson Brown (Ret.)

Pioneers of Diversity: African Americans in the U.S. Coast Guard

United States Coast Guard

African American Service since 1790

African Americans have served in the Coast Guard for over 220 years. In that time, African American personnel have come a long way, challenging discrimination and cultural barriers, and persevering with a dedication to their service that has benefited all who serve in it.

During the early years of the Revenue Cutter Service African Americans served side-by-side with their white shipmates. In the War of 1812, African American cuttermen were among the first to fight against the Royal Navy. At fifteen years of age, an African American crewman from the cutter *James Madison* became the youngest POW in Coast Guard history.

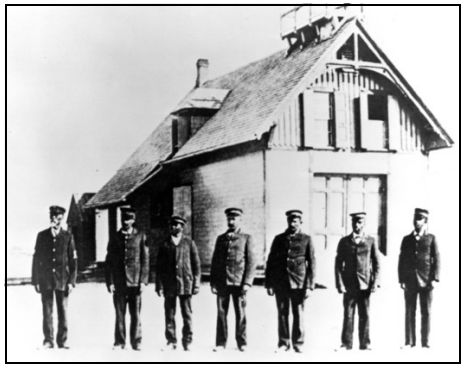
War has served as a catalyst for change in the Coast Guard as it has for all the military services. During the Civil War, African Americans comprised five to ten percent of the crewmembers on board revenue cutters. Considering the small size of cutter crews, this proved to be a *de facto* form of integration. During the war, the U.S. Lighthouse Service hired escaped slaves, or "contrabands," to operate lights in Union-held territory. For example, Fishing Rip Lightship, off Port Royal, S.C., had a contraband crew during the war. It was the first federal vessel of any kind with an all African American crew.

Crew of Cutter *Yocona*, 1925

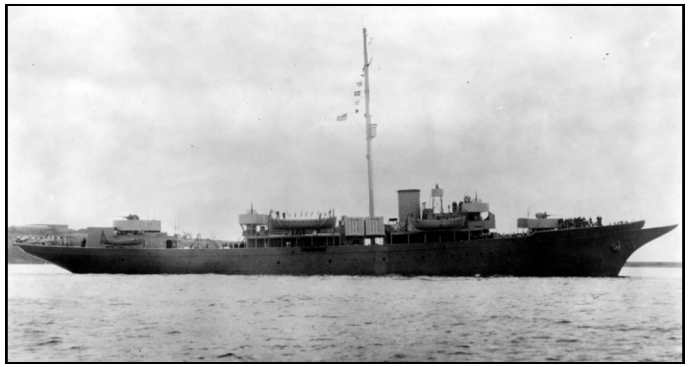
In the 1870s, African Americans were appointed by the Lighthouse Service to keep various lighthouses. In 1879, the first African American was promoted to full keeper and all-African American staffs manned some lights in the 1880s. African American watermen were considered some of the finest in the South. In the 1870s, the U.S. Life-Saving Service assembled crews with these men, including African American Jeremiah Munden, one of the service's first surfmen to die in the line of duty during a rescue. And, in 1880, Richard Etheridge assumed command of the Pea Island Life-Saving Service Station, supervising an all-African American crew and becoming the first African American station keeper in the service. Pea Island's 1896 rescue of the schooner *E.S. Newman* earned the crew the Gold Lifesaving Medal.

The 1890s saw greater improvements in the service for African Americans. Beginning in 1897, over twenty members of the Berry family served with approximately 400 years of total military service and nearly 115 consecutive years served by at least one family member. African Americans served in several rates during this period and fought at battle stations during combat. The 1898 Spanish American War served as a highlight of this decade. For example, the cutter *Hudson*'s steward Moses Jones and cook Henry Savage received special Congressional Medals along with rest of crew for heroic service in the hard fought Battle of Cardenas Bay, Cuba. It was the first such recognition of African American personnel in the service.

In the first half of the 20th century, the African-American Pea Island Station continued to stand as a symbol of minority success in the Coast Guard. In 1919, the Vicksburg-based cutter *Yocona*, became the first integrated federal ship in the history of the United States. By 1928, an African American became the first recognized minority to command a Coast Guard cutter.



Pea Island Station Crew



Coast Guard-manned USS *Sea Cloud*

Olivia Hooker