

[Role in armed conflicts 3-5.01-K](#)

OUTLINE the Coast Guards role during the following armed conflicts, as presented in the E-PME Study Guide.

- Quasi War
- War of 1812
- Mexican American War
- Spanish American War
- Civil War
- World War I
- World War II
- Korean War
- Vietnam
- Desert Shield/Storm
- War on Terrorism

***Coast Guard's
Military Role***

The Coast Guard has served proudly in almost every one of our nation's conflicts since the birth of our Constitution. Until the Department of the Navy was established in 1798, the Coast Guard was the only armed force afloat. Traditionally, our role in wartime has been to:

- Augment the Navy with cutters and manpower
 - Embark on special missions utilizing the Coast Guard's unique skills
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Quasi-War

France, distressed over the U.S. trading with its British enemies, seized American ships on the high seas. On May 28, 1798, Congress authorized the capture of armed French vessels hovering off the U.S. coast, initiating an undeclared quasi-war with France (1798-99). Then, on July 9th of the same year, Congress empowered U.S. naval vessels to capture armed French vessels anywhere on the high seas.

The strategy employed by the U.S. to defeat the French campaign against American shipping was to conduct offensive operations in the Caribbean, since most of the French cruisers were based in this area.

During this tacit war, the Revenue Cutter Service, forerunner of the Coast Guard, operated eight cutters along our southern coast in the Caribbean Sea and along the West Indies Islands.

Cutters captured 18 prizes unaided and assisted in the capture of two others. A prize is the wartime capture of a ship and its cargo.

On its two cruises to the West Indies:

- The cutter *Pickering* captured 10 prizes, one of which carried 44 guns and 200 men, three times her own force.
- Another noteworthy cutter, the *Eagle*, recaptured the American vessels *Nancy* and *Mehitable* in a memorable fight in 1799 with the French privateer, *Revenge*.

The U.S. was successful in stopping the depredations of the French privateers against American commerce.

War of 1812

The Coast Guard's role of augmenting the Navy with shallow-draft craft evolved out of the War of 1812 with England. The cutter *Jefferson* captured the first prize of this war. Several memorable battles of the war are noted here.

- One of the most hotly contested battles was between the cutter *Surveyor* and the British frigate *Narcissis*. The *Surveyor* was eventually captured, but the British captain praised the gallantry of the American crew.
 - ▶ The captain of the *Narcissis* wrote the following to Captain Samuel Travis the next day after the battle:

“Your gallant and desperate attempt to defend your vessel against more than double your number excited such admiration on the part of your opponents as I have seldom witnessed, and induced me to return you the sword you so ably used in testimony of mine.... I am at loss which to admire most, the previous arrangement on board the Surveyor or the determined manner in which her deck was disputed inch by inch.”
- One of the most dramatic engagements was the defense of the cutter *Eagle* against the attack of the British brig *Dispatch* and an accompanying sloop.
 - ▶ When the *Eagle* was run ashore on Long Island, the cutter's crew dragged her guns to a high bluff and fought the British ships from there. The battle raged on from 9:00 a.m. until late afternoon. When their ammunition was depleted, the crew tore the ship's logbook into wads and fired it back at the enemy. During the battle, the *Eagle*'s flag was shot away three times. Each time, volunteers from the crew replaced the flag. The British, with overwhelming numbers, finally captured the *Eagle*.

Mexican-American War

After combat skirmishes with American and Mexican troops over the Texas southwestern boundary, Congress declared war with Mexico on May 13, 1846. Mexico's declaration of war with the U.S. occurred on May 23rd.

The U.S. Navy was critically short of small steamers and schooners. The President ordered the use of Revenue Cutter Service cutters since the cutters were steam-propelled.

Once again, Coast Guard cutters filled the void. This was the first time ever that steamboats were used in a war.

The cutters served in various capacities. Their amphibious operations included:

- Performing scouting, convoy, and towing duties
 - Blockading harbors
 - Transporting troops and supplies
 - ▶ Shallow-draft revenue steamers towed ashore naval craft overloaded with Marines and seamen
 - ▶ Cutters *Ewing* and *Legare* delivered rifles to troops before the battles of Monterey and Buena Vista
 - Executing forays up the Alvarado and Tabasco Rivers
 - Conducting river expeditions
 - Carrying mail and dispatches
 - Quelling a mutiny of troops on the *Middlesex*
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Civil War

During the Civil War (1861–1865), the men of the Revenue Marine faced the same dilemma as their compatriots in other military services. They had to decide on which side to fight. These decisions cost the Revenue Marine both men and cutters. The remaining men and cutters were ordered to combat service with the Navy by President Lincoln.

As in other wars, the cutters performed various functions. The cutter *Harriet Lane* took part in the expedition to Fort Sumter in 1861 to patrol the coast for commerce raiders and provide fire support for troops ashore. The *Harriet Lane* is credited with firing the first naval shots of the Civil War.

During the Civil War, our cutters in the Navy's service performed blockade duty along the Atlantic coast, Chesapeake Bay, and Potomac River. Cutters were involved in the transport of troops and supplies.

Cutters not assigned to the Navy:

- Patrolled the shipping lanes to safeguard trade against Southern privateers
 - Assisted distressed vessels at sea
 - Continued the normal duty of protecting the nation's customs revenue as this income was critical to the Union war effort
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Spanish-American War

Spain declared war on the U.S. on April 24, 1898, a consequence of our intervention in the Spain/Cuba crisis. Prior to the outbreak of the war, cutters had conducted neutrality patrols for three years, patrolling the waters off of North Carolina to the Gulf of Mexico.

Since both the Navy and Revenue Cutter Service had evolved into more modern, professional organizations, putting Revenue cutters into the service of the Navy went smoothly.

- Eight cutters, carrying 43 guns, joined Rear Admiral William Sampson's North Atlantic Squadron on blockade duty off of Cuba's coast.
- The cutter *McCulloch*, carrying six guns and manned by 10 officers and 95 crewmen, was engaged in the battle of Manila Bay. The *McCulloch* subsequently served as the escort and dispatch boat with Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron.
- Eleven cutters served under the Army's tactical control, guarding our important east and west coast ports against possible attacks.

On May 11, 1898 in Cardenas Bay, Cuba, the cutter *Hudson* and torpedo boat *USS Winslow* were engaged in battle with Spanish gunboats and shore batteries. With the massacre of Ensign Bagley, U.S. Navy, and the commanding officer and half the crew wounded, *Hudson* rescued the craft from destruction while under intense enemy fire.

In recognition of this valiant effort, Congress authorized that the following medals be presented:

- A gold medal to Lieutenant Frank Newcomb, U.S. Revenue Cutter Service
- A silver medal to each of Newcomb's officers
- A bronze medal to each crewmember

A peace treaty was signed in Paris, France on December 10, 1898. Once again, the Revenue Cutter Service provided important inshore support to the Navy.

World War I

After German submarines deliberately sank three American vessels, the U.S. entered World War I on April 2, 1917. The Coast Guard was again put into military service. This time, however, the entire Coast Guard—manpower, vessels, and units—was transferred to the Navy in April 1917 to fight overseas. In previous wars, while the Revenue Cutter Service (RCS) cutters operated with the Navy, the RCS remained under Treasury Department control.

In August and September 1917, six Coast Guard cutters, *Ossipee*, *Seneca*, *Yamacraw*, *Algonquin*, *Manning*, and *Tampa* were deployed to Gibraltar, constituting Squadron 2 of Division 6 of the Atlantic Fleet's patrol forces. The cutters escorted hundreds of convoys between Gibraltar and the British Isles, as well as performing escort and patrol duties in the Mediterranean.

One notable event involving the *Tampa* is described here.

On September 26, 1918, *Tampa*, after escorting a convoy from Gibraltar to the United Kingdom, proceeded toward the port of Milford Haven, Wales. A loud explosion was heard at 8:45 p.m. When the *Tampa* failed to arrive at her destination, U.S. destroyers and British patrol craft conducted a search. They found a small amount of wreckage belonging to the cutter and two unidentified bodies in naval uniforms. Presumably, the *Tampa* was torpedoed by a German submarine and all of the crew killed. Of the 115 crewmembers on board, 111 were Coast Guard personnel.

The *Tampa* had served as an ocean escort to 18 convoys from Gibraltar, comprising 350 vessels. Only two ships were lost through enemy action.

In the U.S., one of the major tasks of the Coast Guard was to provide port security. Since our ports handled wartime shipping, concern over the possibility of sabotage and accidents was profound. Working closely with the Navy, the Treasury Department established Coast Guard Captains of the Port offices in New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Norfolk, VA; and Sault Ste. Marie, MI, with the New York office becoming the largest command. Fifteen cruising cutters patrolled off the coast.

Scrutiny of the remaining coastline was given to lifesaving station personnel, who doubled as coast-watchers. Many lifesaving stations were tied into the Navy's communication system to expedite reports of suspicious activity. These actions greatly expanded the Coast Guard's role of ensuring maritime mobility in U.S. ports and waterways.

World War I ended in November 1918 and saw a higher percentage of Coast Guard personnel killed than any other U.S. military service.

World War II

Following the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the Coast Guard began carrying out neutrality patrols on September 5, 1939. On June 22, 1940, port security began.

Shortly thereafter, the Dangerous Cargo Act was passed, giving the Coast Guard jurisdiction over ships carrying explosives and dangerous cargoes. In March 1941, the Coast Guard seized 28 Italian, 2 German, and 35 Danish merchant ships. A few days later, 10 modern Coast Guard cutters were transferred on Lend-Lease to Great Britain.

On April 9, 1941, the Coast Guard was given responsibility for cold-weather operations in Greenland. This function continued throughout the war. The Coast Guard made the first U.S. naval capture of the war on September 12th. The cutter *Northland* took the Norwegian trawler *Boskoe* into “protective custody” and captured three German radiomen ashore. The Germans were attempting to set up weather stations in Greenland.

On November 1, 1941, about a month prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the Coast Guard was ordered once again to operate as part of the Navy. The Coast Guard’s multi-faceted skills were employed in theater operations around the globe as well as support areas.

Coast Guard operations during World War II are briefly discussed here.

World War II Submarine Patrol

Coast Guard-manned ships sank 11 enemy submarines; Coast Guard aircraft are credited with sinking one enemy submarine. A few notable attacks are mentioned here.

- One of our first successful attacks involved the 165-foot cutter *Icarus*. Using depth charges, the *Icarus* forced the surfacing of a German submarine. With just a 3-inch deck gun, the submarine was forced to surrender.
 - In early 1943, after a sharp gun battle, the cutter *Campbell* sank an enemy submarine by ramming it, causing severe damage to the *Campbell*. A small crew kept the ship afloat during the 600-mile tow to port.
 - In the latter part of 1943, the cutter *Spencer* tracked a submarine through a convoy. This was accomplished with such skill that the action report became part of antisubmarine force policy.
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World War II Escort Service

Coast Guard cutters and aircraft performed extensive convoy protection duties in the Atlantic arena. These craft are credited with sinking 12 German U-boats.

*World War II
Transport Duty*

Coast Guard personnel manned over 350 ships and hundreds more amphibious type assault craft...from the largest troop transports to the smallest attack craft. These vessels landed Army and Marine forces in every major amphibious invasion in North Africa, Italy, France, and the Pacific. Amphibious operations in the Pacific theater alone engaged thousands of Coast Guardsmen in situations where small-boat experience was essential.

The Coast Guard's only Medal of Honor recipient was posthumously awarded to Douglas Munro, for his extraordinary heroism, outstanding leadership, and gallantry actions. On September 27, 1942, Munro was instrumental in rescuing a group of marines near the Matanikau River. The initial landings were made on Guadalcanal in August 1942.

*World War II
Search and Rescue*

Coast Guard craft rescued more than 1,500 survivors of torpedo attacks off the U.S. coast. Cutters on escort duty saved another 1,000 survivors.

Over 1,500 more survivors were rescued during the Normandy operation.

*World War II
Water and Shore
Patrol*

Coast Guard coastal picket vessels patrolled along the 50-fathom curve, where enemy submarines concentrated early in the war. As a major participant in the U.S. anti-sabotage effort, on-shore duty had armed Coast Guardsmen patrolling beaches and docks:

- On foot
 - On horseback
 - In vehicles
 - With and without dogs
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*World War II
"Rear" Support
Services*

The Coast Guard also contributed to the war effort in other less publicized areas. These activities included:

- Providing port security
 - Supervising the movement of dangerous cargoes
 - Controlling merchant vessel traffic
 - Maintaining aids to navigation
 - Breaking ice to allow ship passage
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Some World War II Statistics

Some statistics pertaining to the Coast Guard's involvement in World War II follow:

- The Coast Guard manned 802 cutters, 351 naval ships and craft, and 288 Army vessels.
- Almost 2,000 Coast Guardsmen died in the war, a third of these fatalities in action.
- Almost 2,000 Coast Guardsmen were decorated:
 - ▶ One received the Medal of Honor
 - ▶ Six received the Navy Cross
 - ▶ One received the Distinguished Service Cross

The Coast Guard returned under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department on January 1, 1946.

Korean War

The Coast Guard's involvement in Korea began years before the United Nations took police action (commonly called the Korean War) in June 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea. In 1946, a Coast Guard team was sent to Seoul, Korea to organize, supervise, and train a South Korean Coast Guard. They succeeded in establishing a shipyard, supply and communications systems, and training facilities. The team also arranged for the transfer of 19 ships from the Japanese and American navies.

When "war" broke out, the Coast Guard's role was marginal, primarily one of support. Its principal contributions consisted of improving communications and meteorological services, as well as assuring port security and proper ammunition handling. Coast Guardsmen manned a number of Navy destroyer escorts, performing a variety of missions in the Western Pacific.

Vietnam

The Coast Guard was also an effective force in the Vietnam Conflict (1965–1970), performing duties uniquely suited to its specialized skills.

Shallow-draft warships and operating expertise in coastal waters were needed for the interdiction of trawlers being used by North Vietnam for infiltration and resupply activities. This operation was named “Market Time,” with the Coast Guard having a major role.

- In 1965, twenty-six 82-foot Coast Guard cutters were deployed to Vietnam for Operation Market Time. To avoid being easy targets in the moonlight or flare light, the white cutters were repainted gray.
- In 1966, the first ocean-going cutters augmented the Navy and Coast Guard surveillance forces already in Vietnam.

Other duties performed by Coast Guardsmen included:

- Improving port security, especially in Saigon
- Overseeing the Merchant Marine
- Teaching Vietnamese workmen how to safely handle ammunition and other dangerous cargoes
- Assisting in the safe navigation of ships
- Setting up a Loran network for Southeast Asia
- Conducting numerous Medical Civil Action Programs (MEDCAPs), Civic Action Programs, to help relieve the sufferings of the Vietnamese civilians

Some Coast Guard Statistics

Coast Guard statistics relative to Vietnam:

- Some 8,000 Coast Guardsmen and 56 Coast Guard cutters served in Vietnam.
 - To block infiltration, Coast Guard units boarded almost 250,000 junks and sampans.
 - Coast Guard cutters participated in nearly 6,000 Naval Gunfire Support (NGFS) missions, causing extensive enemy damage.
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*Desert Shield/
Desert Storm*

As with other military actions, the Coast Guard again saw service in the Gulf War (1990–1991). From the beginning of Desert Shield to the end of Desert Storm, the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard served proudly in several key areas.

- Coast Guard law enforcement boarding teams (LEDET) were deployed on board Naval vessels to assist in enforcing United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq.
- Reserve Port Security Units (PSUs) provided coastal patrols, anti-terrorist operations, and overall port security.

On August 22, 1990, select reserve members were called to active duty in support of Operation Desert Shield. A total of 950 Coast Guard reservists were called. This was the first time in the Coast Guard Reserve’s 50-year history that involuntary overseas mobilization occurred.

- The Coast Guard led a U.S. interagency team responsible for advising Saudi Arabia on a massive oil spill cleanup in the Persian Gulf created by Iraq.
- Both regular and reserve Coast Guard units provided port security and supervised the safe loading of weapons, ammunitions, and other war supplies bound for the Gulf.

*Operation Desert
Shield*

The mission of Operation Desert Shield was to defend Saudi Arabia. After invading Kuwait, Iraqi troops had begun to mass along the Saudi border, breaching it at some points. This suggested that Hussein’s forces may continue south into Saudi Arabia’s oil fields.

When it was obvious that Saddam would not withdraw, Desert Shield became Desert Storm on January 17, 1991.

*Operation Desert
Storm*

The air offensive against Iraqi forces began on January 17, 1991. The next day, Coast Guard LEDET personnel on board the USS Nicholas assisted in clearing 11 Iraqi oil platforms and taking 23 prisoners.

The ground offensive by coalition forces to liberate Kuwait began on February 24, 1991. On February 28, 1991, the United Nations Security Council officially ended the Gulf War by calling a formal cease-fire.

Operation Desert Storm (continued)

The mission of Operation Desert Storm was to, among other things, destroy:

- Republican Guard forces
 - Iraqi known chemical, biological and nuclear production, storage, and delivery capabilities
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War on Terrorism

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 taking over 3,000 lives, President George W. Bush declared a War on Terrorism.

As usual, the Coast Guard was right there in time of need.

Units from Activities New York were among the first military units to provide security and render needed assistance. To protect our nation's coastline, ports, and waterways, six U.S. Navy cyclone-class patrol coastal warships were assigned to Operation Noble Eagle on November 5, 2001...the first time U.S. Navy ships were employed jointly under Coast Guard command.

To protect the U.S. in the heightened alert state, a comprehensive national plan was launched, including:

- **Operation Liberty Shield In March 2002.** As part of this operation, the Coast Guard increased its patrols by 50 percent and placed armed boarding officers on every high-interest vessel arriving or departing from American ports. By the end of 2003, the USCG had conducted over 3,000 air and sea patrols. Over 3,900 Reservists served on active duty.
 - **Operation Enduring Freedom.** In support of this operation, eight 110-foot Island Class patrol boats and four PSUs composed of approximately 1,300 Coast Guard men and women had been deployed by the end of 2003.
 - **Operation Iraqi Freedom.** The Coast Guard's vital role in supporting this operation represents its largest overseas deployment in support of military operations since the Vietnam Conflict. Due to the Coast Guard's multimission character and capabilities, we served in numerous roles.
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Operation Iraqi Freedom

The Coast Guard participated in Maritime Interception Operations and coastal security patrols, along with the U.S. Navy and coalition naval forces. In addition, the Coast Guard provided security to Iraqi oil terminals located in the North Arabian Gulf and Maritime Environmental Response expertise for acts of maritime environmental terrorism.

At the height of operations, 1250 Coast Guard personnel were deployed, including about 500 reservists. This included:

- Two 378-foot high endurance cutters
- A 225-foot seagoing buoy tender
- Eight 110-foot patrol boats
- Five port security units
- Three tactical law enforcement teams
- Support staff to the Central and European Command theaters of operation

Persian Gulf Region Duties

Coast Guard cutters and active duty and reserve personnel in the Persian Gulf region performed a myriad of duties. They:

- Provided force protection to the coalition fleet
- Guarded key ports and oil platforms in the Gulf
- Conducted maritime interception boardings to enforce UN economic sanctions against Iraq
- Responded to marine environmental issues
- Took custody of prisoners of war

In addition, the Coast Guard improved the safety of the navigational approach to the Persian Gulf's only international seaport for humanitarian aid, commercial, and military vessels. This was a critical step toward economic recovery for the Iraqi people.
