IT'S YOUR COAST GUARD

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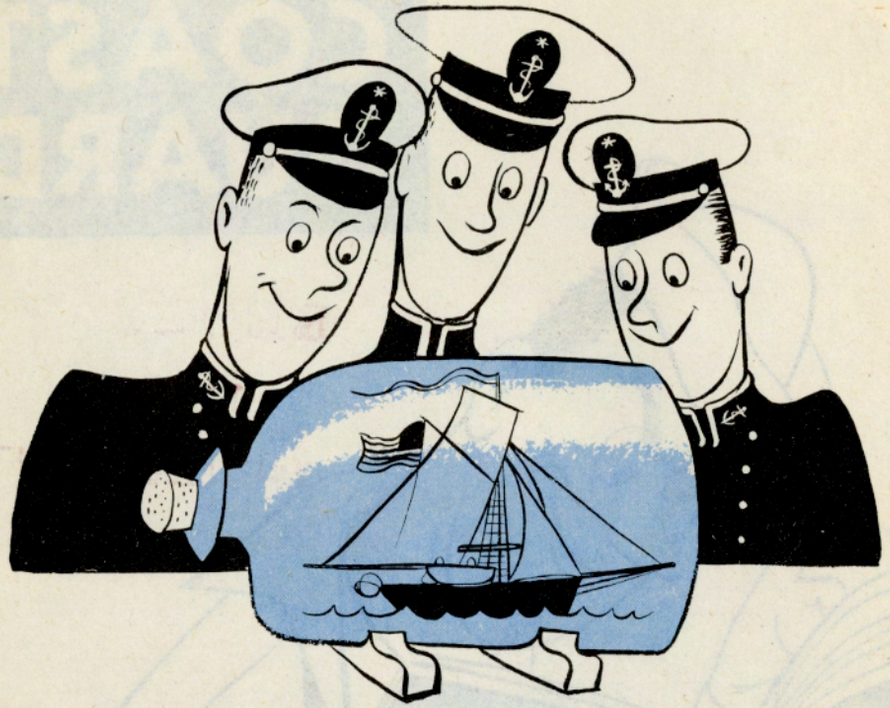


THE United States Coast Guard is almost as old as the United States itself.

The nation dates from the signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. But actually George Washington was not sworn in as first President and the First Congress did not convene in New York, the first capital, until the year 1789. In the next year, on August 4, 1790, Congress passed and Washington approved a bill authorizing the first ships of the early Coast Guard.

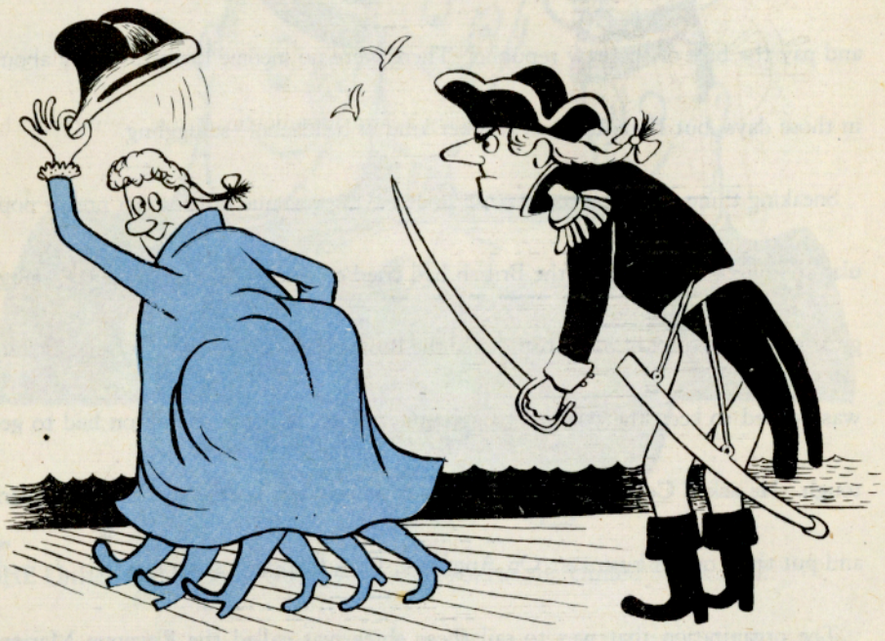
Just as Washington was the Father of His Country, so Alexander Hamilton was the Father of the Coast Guard.

Hamilton was the first Secretary of the Treasury. His job was to collect the taxes and pay the bills of the new republic. There were no income taxes to worry about in those days, but Hamilton had another kind of headache—smuggling.

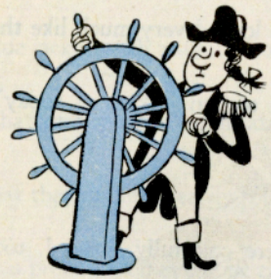
Sneaking things into the country without paying revenue duty was a pretty popular pastime. Earlier, when the British had tried collecting taxes on imports, smuggling had been an act of patriotism—like the Boston Tea Party. But now the revenue was needed to keep the young, struggling nation solvent. So Hamilton had to get tough. He asked Congress for permission to build "ten boats" to chase smugglers and put them out of business. On August 4, 1790, Congress said okay

The organization that was to sail these ships was called the Revenue Marine. Later, it was the Revenue Cutter Service. Not until 1915, when it was merged with the Lifesaving Service, was it given the now famous name—United States Coast Guard.

The ships that were built for Hamilton were made of wood and cost only about $1,000 apiece. They were called cutters, which in those times meant a vessel with a heavy keel so that it could carry plenty of sail aloft for speed. They wouldn't



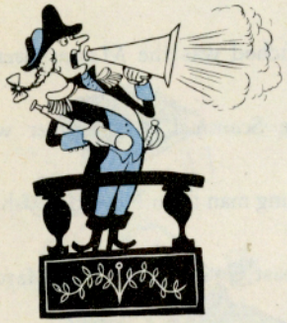
have looked like much alongside modern Coast Guard cutters. The first cutters were manned by a crew of eight. These early vessels were armed with 'swivels,' guns that could be turned in any direction. Their displacement was not as great as that of the present-day 165-foot class. But they were something in their day, and they very quickly had the smuggling situation in hand and the smugglers in the brig.



THE first cutter launched was the *Massachusetts*. The second was the *Scammel*. Its skipper was Hopley Yeaton, a sailing man from New Hampshire who was the first Coast Guard officer. In March, 1791, President Washington himself signed the commission that made Yeaton "Master of a Cutter in the Service of the United States."

Nowadays, the highest deck of a cutter, the bridge and wheelhouse, is forward near the bow. From there the captain runs his ship. On the early cutters, the highest point was in the stern to give the man at the tiller elevation so that he could keep a weather eye on the seas ahead and on the set of his sails. This was the poop deck and it was from there that Hopley Yeaton directed his ship.

Captain Yeaton must have cut a right smart figure on the poop of the *Scammel*. Like the sea captains of that day, he wore a cocked hat over his hair tied up in a short cue, a blue swallow-tail coat with gold button and epaulets, knee britches and boots. He probably had a speaking trumpet, too, through which to call commands to his crew and to order ships suspected of smuggling to heave to for a boarding party.



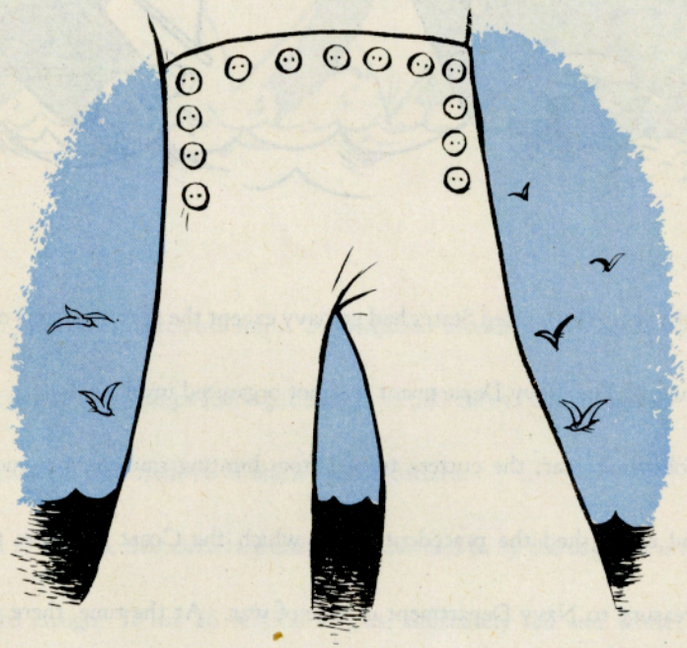
All in all, he must have looked very much like the dashing characters you see on jackets of today's best sellers.

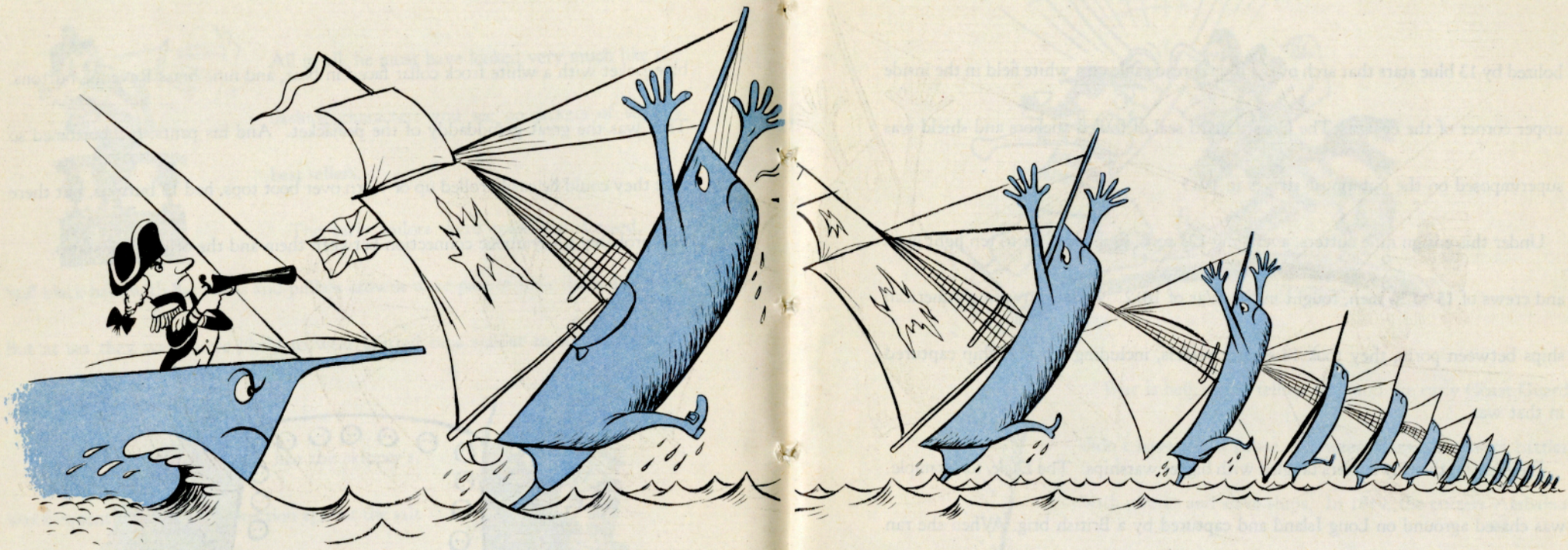
The early sailors were colorfully dressed, too. Stiff black hats with flat brims and pillbox crowns were part of their dress uniforms. But at sea they were more likely to wear knitted caps similar to the watch caps Coast Guardsmen wear today.

Their hair, tied up in a knot like the skipper's, was frequently tarred for protection against the salt spray and foul weather. To catch drippings from these pigtails, they had broad collars that hung down in the back of their jumpers. This was the origin of the collars on present-day Coast Guard uniforms.

The ancient mariner's uniform was similar to the modern one in other respects, also. He wore a short

blue jacket with a white frock collar faced in blue, and nine brass Revenue buttons. That was the great granddaddy of the peajacket. And his pants, bell-bottomed so that they could be easily rolled up or worn over boot tops, had 13 buttons, but there was probably no symbolic connection between them and the original 13 states.





FOR eight years the United States had no navy except the fleet of cutters of the early Coast Guard. The Navy Department was not organized until 1798.

The following year, the cutters turned from hunting smugglers to more serious work and established the precedent under which the Coast Guard is transferred from Treasury to Navy Department in time of war. At the time, there was an undeclared war between the United States and France. French privateers were playing

havoc with American merchant ships. So Benjamin Stoddert, first Secretary of the Navy, sent out 12 Navy ships and eight cutters to take care of the situation. Twenty French ships were captured, 16 of them by the cutters.

It was in 1799, also, that cutters were first authorized to fly the flag that is now the Coast Guard ensign. It has 16 vertical stripes, alternately red and white, for the 16 states that comprised the Union at that time. The original 13 states are sym-

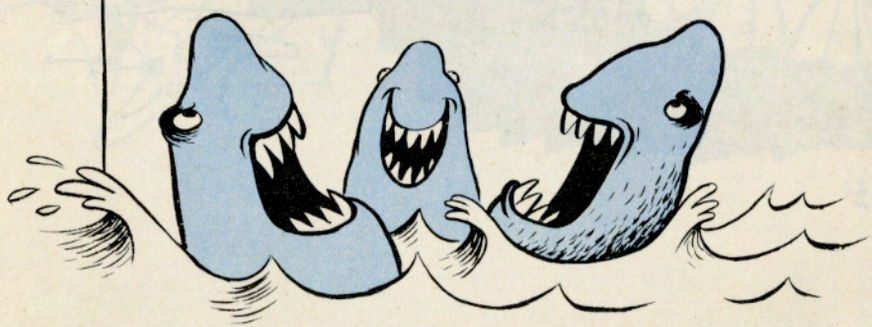
bolized by 13 blue stars that arch over a blue spread eagle on a white field in the inside upper corner of the ensign. The Coast Guard seal of fouled anchors and shield was superimposed on the outermost stripes in 1915.

Under this ensign nine cutters, averaging 125 tons, each with six to ten light guns and crews of 15 to 30 men, fought in the War of 1812. While convoying American ships between ports, they took 14 enemy vessels, including the first ship captured in that war.

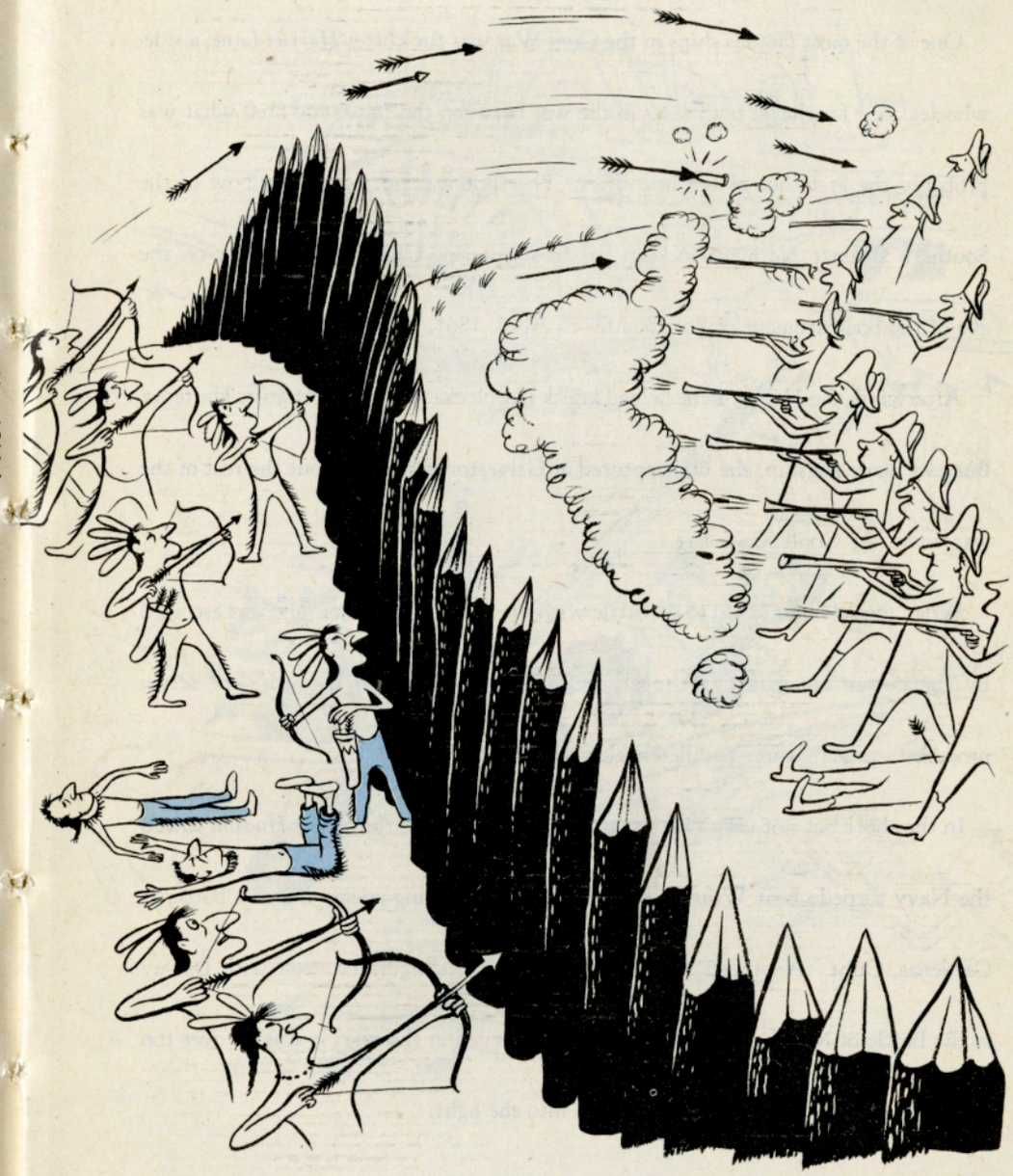
Frequently, the tiny cutters tangled with bigger warships. The *Eagle*, for example, was chased aground on Long Island and captured by a British brig. When she ran out of ammunition, her crew used the log book to make cartridges and fired back the enemy shot that had lodged in her hull.

In 1813, the cutter *Surveyor* engaged the man-of-war *Narcissus* in the York River, near Yorktown, Virginia. The battle ended with the British crew of 50 overwhelming the American crew of 15 in hand-to-hand fighting. After the surrender, the British skipper returned to Captain William Travis of the cutter "the sword you had so nobly used."

War is hell, as the fellow said, and the early Coast Guard didn't have much peace. Between wars there were battles with pirates and slave ships. In 1819, the cutters *Alabama* and *Louisiana* captured the ship of a lieutenant of the notorious pirate Jean La Fitte, and then wiped out a pirate island headquarters in the Gulf of Mexico. Later, the *Alabama* took three slavers, while the *Louisiana* helped round up five more pirate ships.



Then came the Seminole Indian uprising in Florida in 1836. In this minor-league war, the cutter *Washington* put the Army ashore on enemy territory in what was probably the first amphibious operation of combined U. S. forces. Eleven years later, cutters made this same double play on the Tabasco River in the big-league Mexican War.

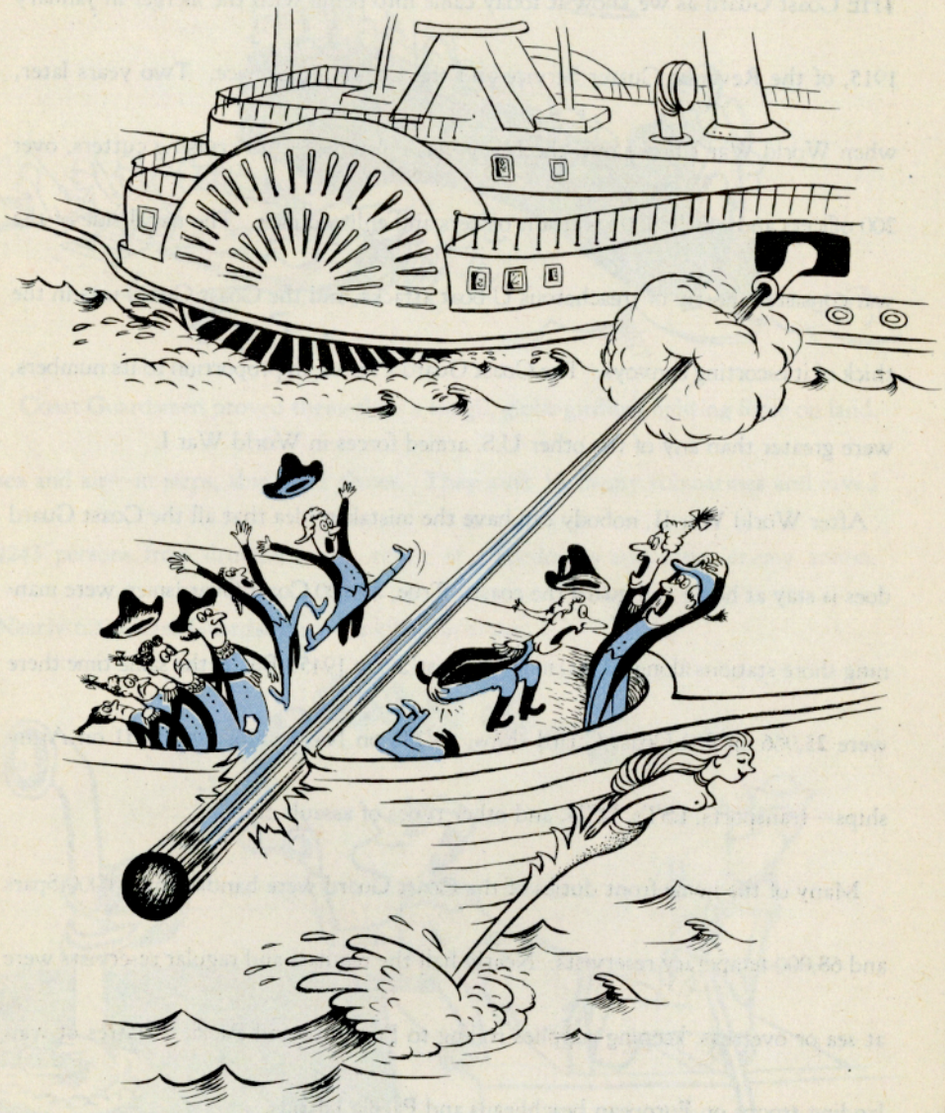


One of the most famous ships in the Civil War was the cutter *Harriet Lane*, a side-wheeler. She fought on both sides in the war between the states and fired what was probably the first shot of the hostilities. The shot was put across the bow of the Southern steamer *Nashville* to keep her from entering Charlestown harbor on the eve of the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April, 1861.

Afterward, the *Harriet Lane* helped knock out blockade-runners' bases at Hatteras. But as a Navy flagship, she was captured at Galveston and served out the rest of the war under the Confederate flag.

When the *Monitor* sailed to do battle with the *Merrimac* in 1862, she was escorted by the cutter *Naugatuck*. Altogether, 28 cutters fought in the war—11 screw propeller steamers, three paddlewheelers and 14 sailing ships.

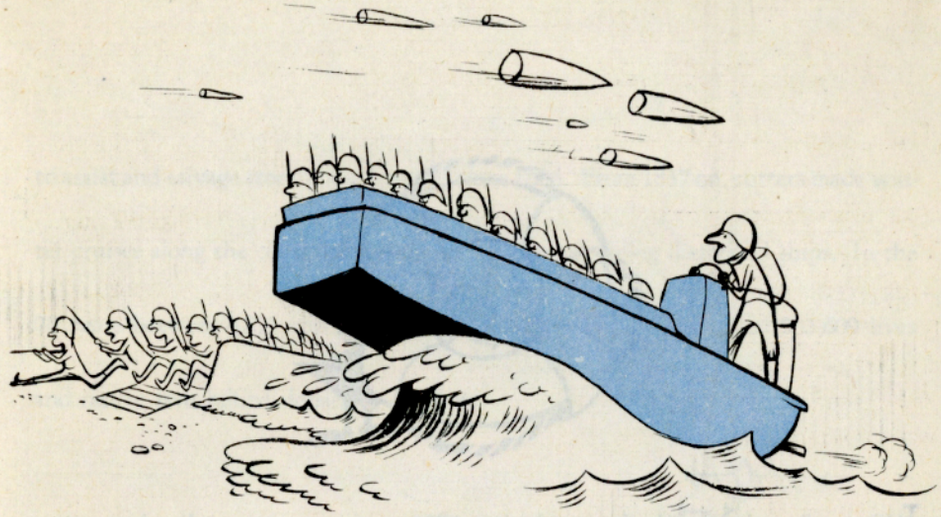
In the short but not very sweet war with Spain in 1898, the cutter *Hudson* towed the Navy torpedo boat *Winslow* out of range of withering enemy fire in a battle at Cardenas, Cuba. Another cutter, the *McCulloch*, distinguished itself with Dewey in the Battle of Manila Bay. Eighteen cutters served in the war; it was all over too quickly for three others to get armed and into the fight.



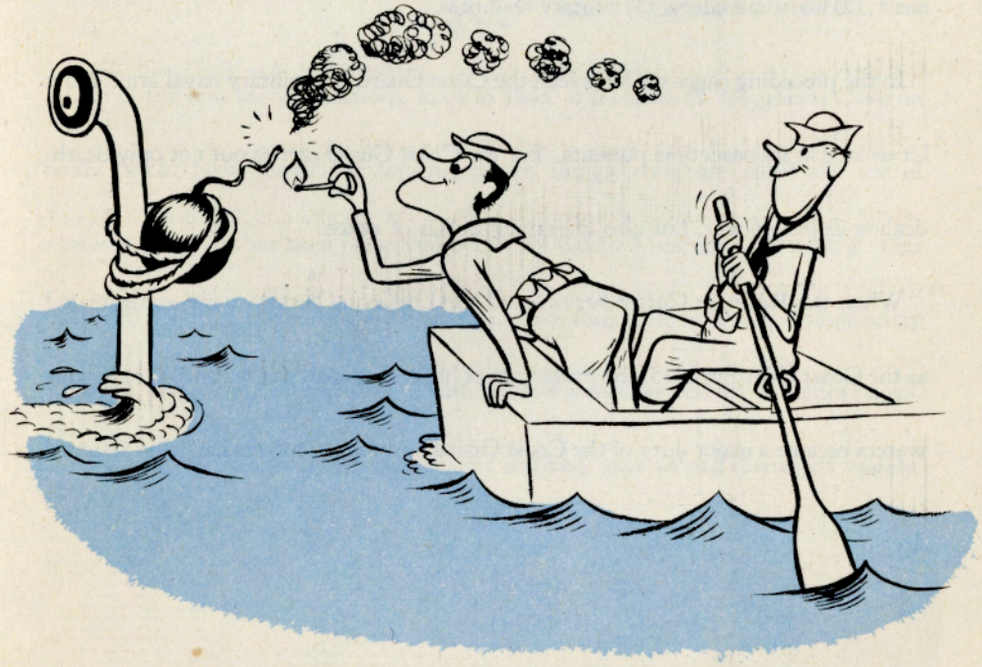
THE Coast Guard as we know it today came into being with the merger in January 1915, of the Revenue Cutter Service and the Lifesaving Service. Two years later, when World War I broke out, the Navy was bolstered by 15 cruising cutters, over 200 officers and nearly 5000 warrant officers and enlisted men. The naval side of the war consisted mostly of treacherous U-boat attacks, and the Coast Guard was in the thick of it escorting convoys. The Coast Guard's losses, in proportion to its numbers, were greater than any of the other U.S. armed forces in World War I.

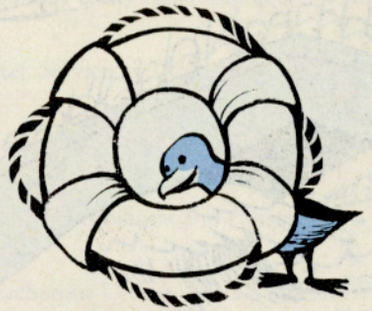
After World War II, nobody can have the mistaken idea that all the Coast Guard does is stay at home and guard the coast. True, 89,100 Coast Guardsmen were manning shore stations along 40,000 miles of coastline in 1945. But at the same time there were 25,966 on 802 Coast Guard ships; 49,283 on Navy ships; and 6851 on Army ships—transports, LSTs, LCIs, and other types of assault craft.

Many of the home-front duties of the Coast Guard were handled by 10,000 Spars and 68,000 temporary reservists. Nearly half the regulars and regular reservists were at sea or overseas, keeping supplies rolling to European and Pacific theatres of war. landing troops on European beachheads and Pacific Islands.



Coast Guardsmen proved themselves a tough, globe-girdling fighting force on land, sea and air—in jeeps, ships and planes. They sank 12 enemy submarines and saved 4243 persons from drowning as a result of torpedoings and other enemy action. Nearly 600 Coast Guardsmen were killed in action.





THE tiny fleet that was built away back in 1790 to stamp out smuggling has grown into a mighty arm of the government in the course of 160 years. Its duties, too, snowballed with the years, as more and more tasks were assigned to it.

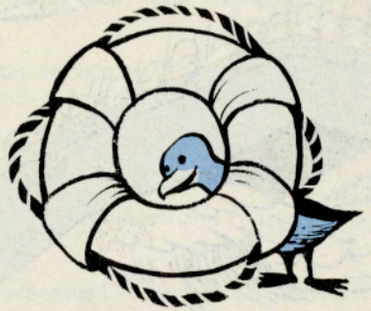
Today's Coast Guard activities fall into three main categories: (1) law enforcement; (2) maritime safety; (3) military readiness.

In the preceding pages we have seen the Coast Guard as a military naval arm. Now let us look at its peacetime pursuits. For the Coast Guard carries out not only death-dealing duties of war, but also life-saving duties of peace.

When the Revenue Cutter Service and the Lifesaving Service were amalgamated as the Coast Guard in 1915, the protection of life and property at sea and on navigable waters became a major duty of the Coast Guard. Actually, cutters had been assigned

to assist and salvage storm-tossed vessels since 1836. From 1837 on, cutters made winter cruises along the coast for the specific purpose of aiding distressed ships. In the 70 years between 1871 and 1941, cutters and lifeboat stations saved 203,609 lives and nearly two billion dollars in property.

One of the first lifeboat stations, built in 1848, still stands at Spermaceti Cove on Sandy Hook, New Jersey. A weather-beaten shingle structure about the size of a two-car garage, it has been preserved as a Coast Guard Museum. Among the relics enshrined there are the station's ancient log books, fragments of wrecked ships, early surfboats, water-tight dinghies called surfcars that were operated like breeches buoys, and a variety of cannons and projectiles for shooting lines aboard distressed vessels.



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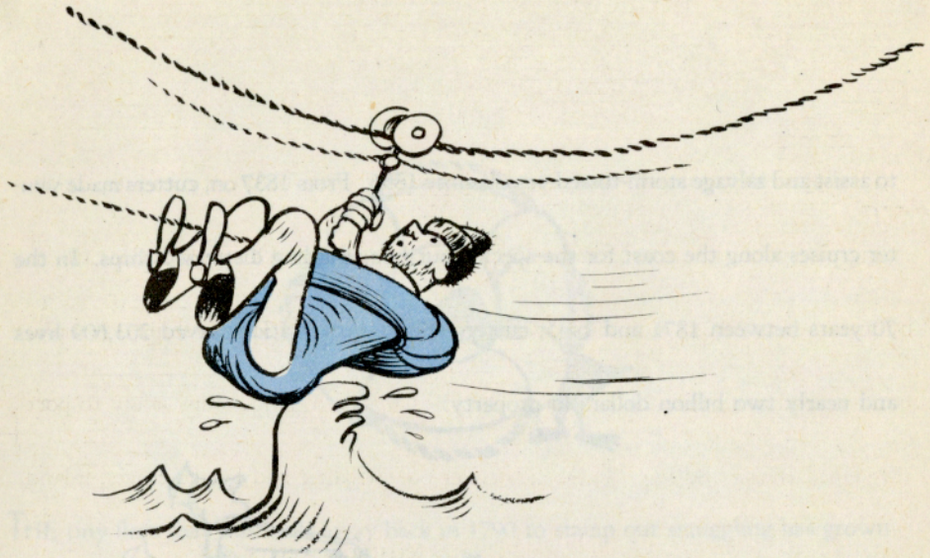
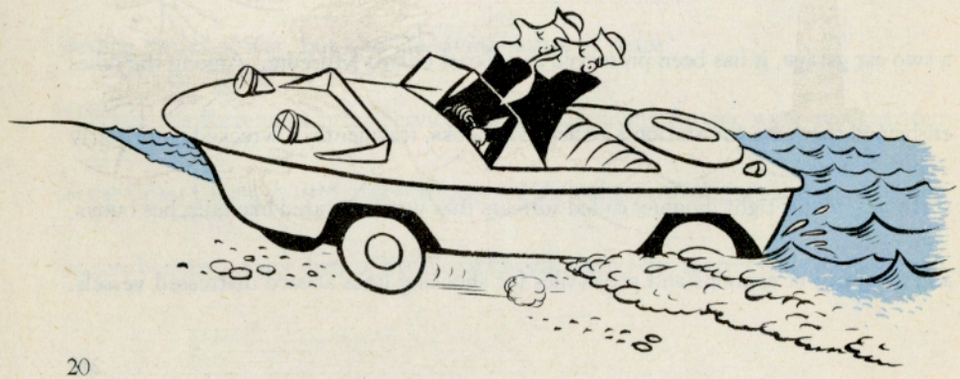


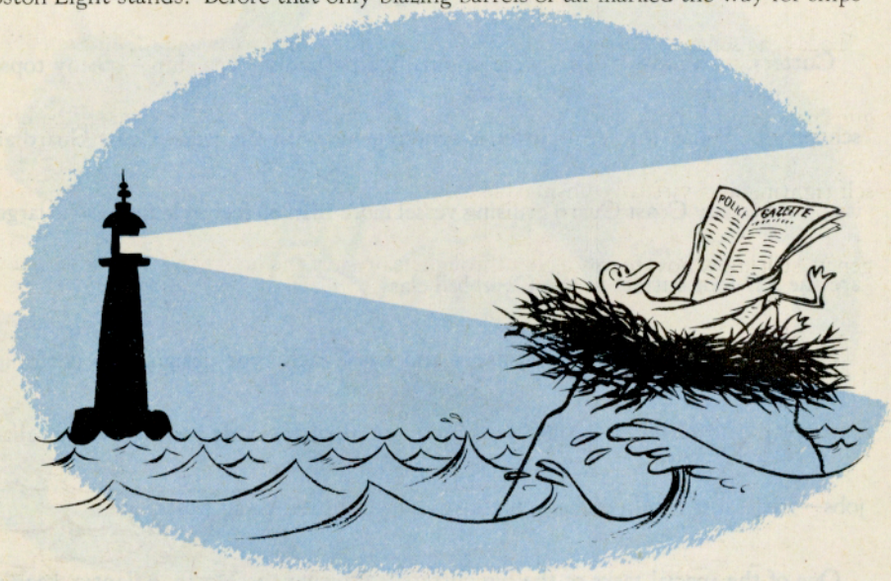
Some of the projectiles Spermaceti's big berthas fired are so formidable that any ship hit by them would have been in distress indeed.

Today, at some 200 lifeboat stations maintained by the Coast Guard, efficient Lyle guns have replaced the old blunderbusses, and surfboats are motor-driven, self-bailing, self-righting and virtually unsinkable. But Coast Guardsmen, trained for any emergency, still know how to row a boat through heavy surf and how to rig a breeches buoy.



The Coast Guard doesn't wait until a shipwreck occurs before it goes into action. A big part of its job is to keep accidents from happening. One way it does this is by maintaining 36,284 aids to navigation—500 lighthouses, 31 lightships, 140 radio beacons, and more than 20,000 buoys and fog signals—to guide ships safely to port through darkness and fog. These aids cover our Atlantic and Pacific coasts, inland waterways, the Great Lakes and United States territorial waters.

The first lighthouse in America was erected in 1716 on the spot where the present Boston Light stands. Before that only blazing barrels of tar marked the way for ships



entering harbors at night. Shipwreckers used to imitate these lights with bonfires to lure unsuspecting ships onto the beach where they could be plundered.

That was a far cry from the Lighthouse Service that the Coast Guard took over from the Department of Commerce in 1939. Today there is the 5,500,000-candlepower Hillsboro Inlet light that guides ships up and down the Florida coast. And there are electronic wonders—like ANRAC, radio remote control for operating lights and signals; LORAN, which gives longitude and latitude of air and surface craft; and RACON, a radar beacon that gives bearings at distances up to 120 miles.

Cutters, as we saw earlier, were originally a particular type ship—speedy topsail schooners. Today the term cutter is synonymous with the name Coast Guard and is applied to any Coast Guard cruising vessel more than 83 feet in length. The largest are the 327-foot cutters of the *Campbell* class.

Cutters come in a variety of shapes and sizes, each type designed to perform a particular kind of duty. In addition, there are auxiliary craft for highly specialized jobs—icebreakers, buoytenders, fireboats, picket boats, crash boats, etc.

One of the special tasks of the big cutters is cruising the North Atlantic, keeping

an eye out for icebergs and derelicts that are a menace to shipping. This International Ice Patrol by the Coast Guard was the outcome of a conference of principal maritime nations meeting in London in 1913, after the $7,500,000 liner *Titanic* had hit a berg on her maiden voyage and gone down with 1500 lives.

The area patrolled is 45,000 square miles or about the size of Pennsylvania. Through it passes the heaviest shipping traffic in the world. And into it drift an average of 428 icebergs a year.

During the ice season, which generally extends from April to July, the region is blanketed in fog. It is conceivable that, despite modern detection devices, a berg might elude Coast Guard ships and planes. But while the Coast Guard has maintained

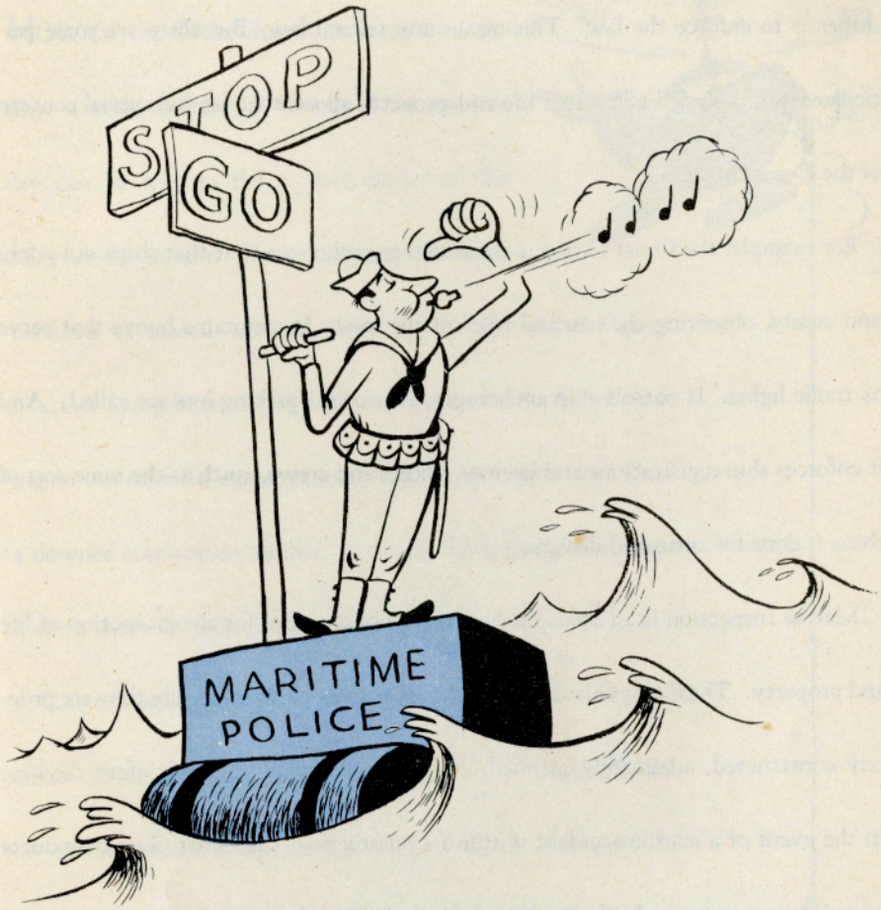
the patrol since 1913, no ship has been sunk through collision with a berg. However, during World War II, the patrol was suspended and one ship was sunk.

Big cutters serve also as ocean weather stations. These Weather Patrol Ships stay for periods of 20 days at mid-ocean posts of 10 miles square, riding out the worst storms, so that meteorologists can make observations and radio the data to the Weather Bureau for dissemination to commercial ships and planes.

The importance of the Weather Stations has increased with trans-ocean air traffic. And it has, like the Ice Patrol, its international aspects. Of 10 Atlantic weather stations provided by international agreement five are manned completely by the U. S. Coast Guard, one jointly by the U. S. Coast Guard and Canada. There are also U. S. Coast Guard-manned weather stations in the Pacific.

The first United States ship to call at Alaska, following the purchase of the Territory from Russia in 1867, was the cutter *Lincoln*. Afterward, the Coast Guard's Bering Sea Patrol carried out many functions for other branches of the government in those distant regions. It provided intelligence for the Navy, enforced laws and apprehended criminals for the Justice Department, carried mail for the Post Office,

supervised educational and sanitation facilities for the Department of the Interior. There were also a thousand and one other chores in addition to regular Coast Guard duties. Coast Guard Officers helped increase the wildlife population by enforcing commercial hunting and fishing laws; and the human population by performing marriage ceremonies whenever there wasn't a preacher handy and by carrying doctors and nurses into the wilds.



IN a way the Coast Guard is like an amphibious police force. For on the navigable waters of the United States and its possessions, on the shores bordering those waters, and aboard American merchant ships on the high seas, one of the Coast Guard's

duties is to enforce the law. This means any federal law. But there are some particular laws, designed to protect life and property afloat, that are the special concern of the Coast Guard.

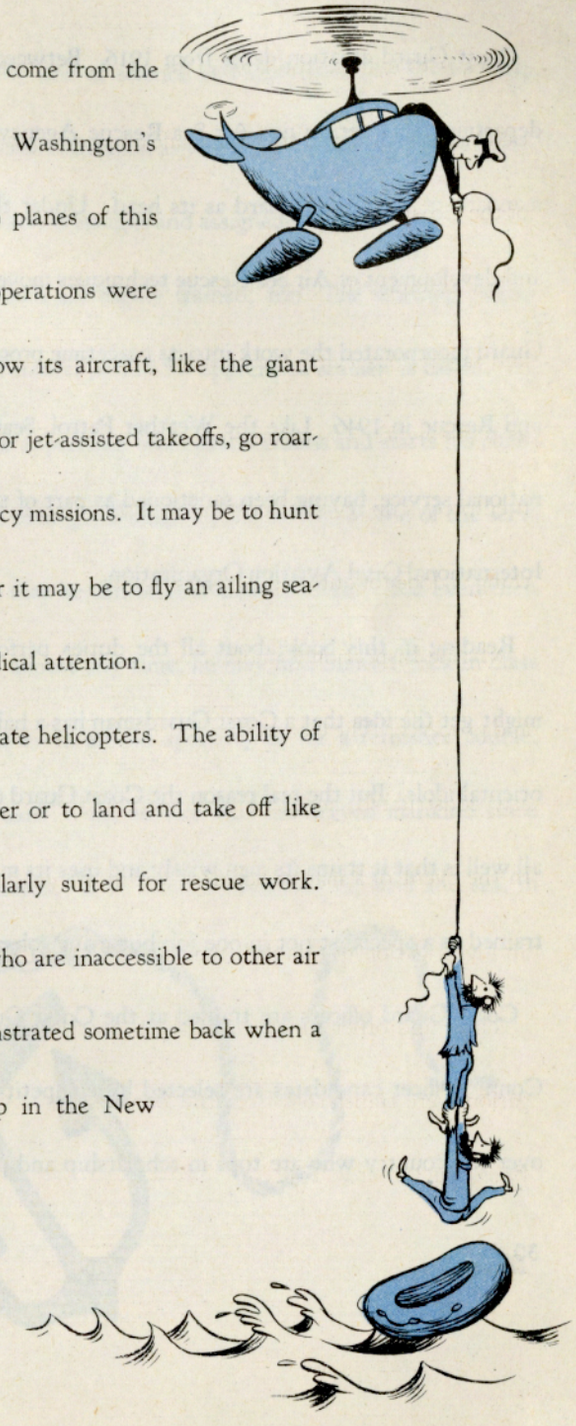
For example, the Coast Guard is the traffic cop who sees to it that ships sail safely and sanely, observing the nautical rules of the road. It maintains buoys that serve as traffic lights. It patrols ship anchorages, as nautical parking lots are called. And it enforces ship registrations and licenses officers and crews, much as the same sort of thing is done for autos and drivers.

Marine Inspection is another phase of these police duties for the protection of life and property. The Coast Guard inspects merchant vessels to make sure they are properly constructed, adequately manned, and equipped with required safety devices. In the event of a marine accident within its jurisdiction, the Coast Guard conducts an investigation to establish the cause and the blame, if there is any.

These and other functions of the former Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation were transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Coast Guard by Executive Order in 1942.

HOW far the Coast Guard has come from the tiny wooden cutters of George Washington's day can be seen in the modern planes of this 160-year-old service. Once its operations were confined to coastal waters. Now its aircraft, like the giant Mariner flying boats, equipped for jet-assisted takeoffs, go roaring far out over the ocean on mercy missions. It may be to hunt a downed trans-ocean airliner, or it may be to fly an ailing seaman to shore for emergency medical attention.

Coast Guard airmen also operate helicopters. The ability of these "flying windmills" to hover or to land and take off like an elevator make them particularly suited for rescue work. They can get to crash victims who are inaccessible to other air and surface craft, as they demonstrated sometime back when a trans-Atlantic plane cracked up in the Newfoundland wilds.

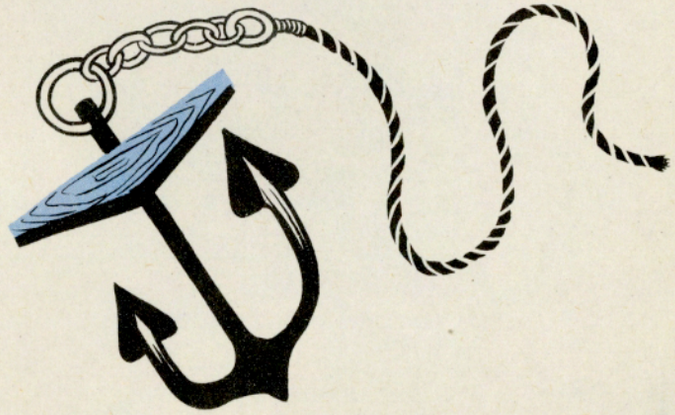


Coast Guard aviation dates from 1916. Between 1943 and 1946 a special inter-departmental, inter-service Air Sea Rescue Agency was developed, with the Commandant of the Coast Guard as its head. Under the pressure of the war, research and development of Air Sea Rescue techniques moved fast. After the war, the Coast Guard incorporated the work into its peacetime program, renaming the agency Search and Rescue in 1946. Like the Weather Patrol, Search and Rescue is now an international service, having been sanctioned as part of the American contribution to the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Reading in this book about all the duties performed by the Coast Guard, one might get the idea that a Coast Guardsman has a half dozen hands—like one of those oriental idols. But the real reason the Coast Guard can do so many jobs and do them all well is that it trains its men wisely and uses its manpower efficiently. Each man is trained as a specialist not in one job but many jobs.

Coast Guard officers are trained at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn. Officer candidates are selected by competitive examinations from youths all over the country who are tops in scholarship and physical prowess. The four-year

course at the Academy is basically one of science and engineering, together with military and naval training in the cadet battalion ashore and on practice cruises at sea. On graduation, cadets are commissioned ensigns and assigned to active duty.

Enlisted men of the Coast Guard are highly trained, too. The training begins with "boot camp," as the indoctrination period for apprentice seamen is called. As he serves and learns new skills, the apprentice takes examinations and starts his climb up the promotion ladder to higher ratings. Eventually, he may go to one of the service schools to learn a specialty so that he can become a petty officer. But even then his training is not at an end. At almost any time, he may find himself back in class to learn newly-developed techniques in an old specialty or for a refresher course.

This, then, is "Your Coast Guard"—the service that has served mankind since 1790. Like its motto "Semper Paratus," it is "Always Ready," on land and sea, in peace and war.