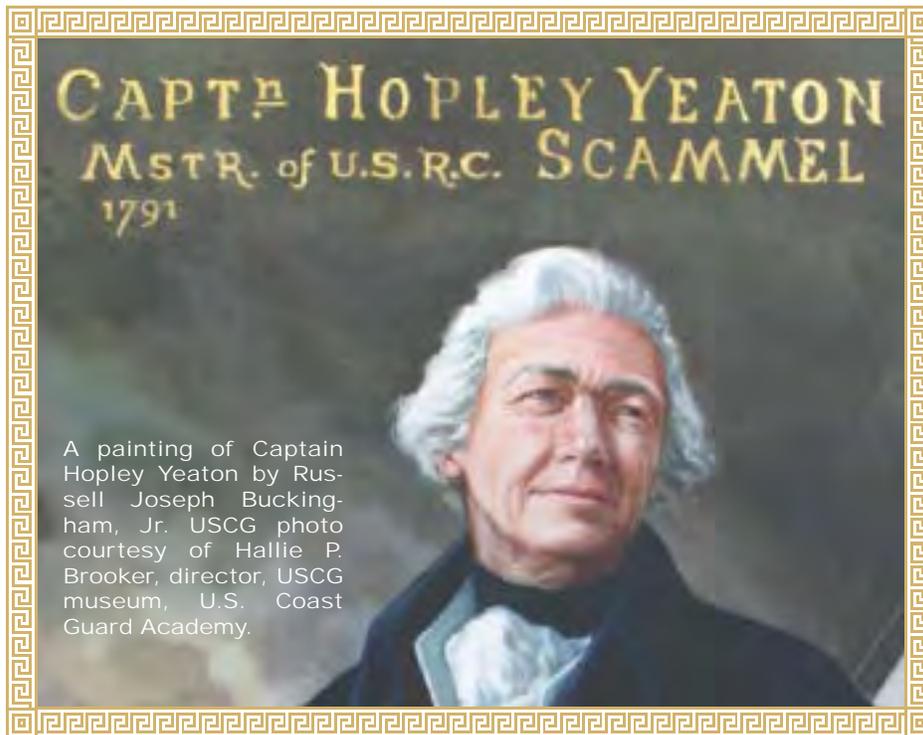


CAREERS



Merchant Marine Officer Contributions

by CAPTAIN ROBERT STANLEY BATES
U.S. Merchant Marine



A painting of Captain Hopley Yeaton by Russell Joseph Buckingham, Jr. USCG photo courtesy of Hallie P. Brooker, director, USCG museum, U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

plete history of these careers would fill volumes. Years ago, there were estimates that graduates of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy went to sea for an average of only a half-dozen years before going ashore to numerous positions once they had sufficiently upgraded their Coast Guard-issued licenses.

Some of the most interesting maritime careers that merchant mariners followed led into the Coast Guard, with especially valuable contributions to merchant marine safety. It is from that perspective that these stories of past careers may suggest a viable alternative career path for

current members of industry, whether afloat or ashore.

From Merchant Mariner to Coast Guard Officer

When the Coast Guard was given the authority to enforce merchant shipping laws and regulations in 1942, many of the senior Department of Commerce masters and engineers from the predecessor authority, the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation (BMIN), were made commissioned officers in the Coast Guard.

In order to encourage mariners to change their career paths abruptly and entice them to transfer into the Coast Guard, a number of concessions were made. Some of those concessions included exemption from permanent change of station orders during their Coast Guard careers, better retirement benefits, active duty perks, and some unofficial promises. The unofficial promises were lost along the way as the BMIN officers

When he was master of the commercial brig *Olive*, merchant marine Captain Hopley Yeaton was the first of many to come from the sailing industry, abruptly change his career path, and enter the Revenue Marine. Captain Yeaton has the honored place in Coast Guard history that John Paul Jones has in naval history.¹ He and those merchant marine masters, mates, and engineers of the Revenue Cutter Service, the Steamboat Inspection Service,² and the Bureau of Navigation are the commercial mariners that comprise the very taproot of this part of Coast Guard history. Even in more recent Coast Guard history, merchant mariners played a very big and important role in the Coast Guard's development into the service it is today.

In the merchant marine there are as many individual career paths as there are ships, companies, private enterprises, and governmental agencies. To look at a com-

retired and Coast Guard Academy graduates, school-ship graduates, warrant officers, and OCS officers filled the billets at marine inspection offices (MIOs).

During those early decades in Coast Guard marine inspection offices, seasoned merchant marine captains and engineers from the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation contributed an immense amount of knowledge and experience. These seasoned veterans, who had sailed the seven seas in merchant vessels and who came ashore to administer the laws, brought an impressive depth of expertise on how to carry out the various enforcement duties associated with the laws governing marine inspection. They were the teachers—they came from the culture, they knew how to talk to ships' officers and managing owners, and some of them were federally and state-licensed pilots who knew their inspection zones better than anyone else.

They stayed at one office for their tenure, providing a continuity that gave the industry a sense of stability in each port. Officers who entered the Coast Guard from other sources learned invaluable lessons from these keepers of the legacy upon assignment to marine inspection offices. It is interesting to note that when the transfer of function from the BMIN to the Coast Guard was made permanent after World War II, there was an unofficial promise that at least half of the USCG officers in any marine inspection office would be licensed merchant marine officers.

The Next Generation

Another group of career merchant marine officers flourished in the Coast Guard during the next twenty years (1960-1980), composed of those that served during WWII or shortly thereafter, but who were too young to have served in the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation. As their merchant sailing careers wound down, an opportunity for a second career presented itself in the Coast Guard marine safety field. They became the officers in charge, marine inspection in a number of offices and were as dedicated and as knowledgeable as the generation of licensed merchant marine officers from the BMIN. Unlike the preceding generation, they did not homestead in one office, and were assigned to sea duty on Coast Guard cutters.

From the 1960s, as the service demographics in this area began to change dramatically, some of the old-timers lamented that the Coast Guard's unofficial promise was not kept. Rather than keeping the marine inspection of-

fices at least half-staffed by licensed merchant mariners, the MIOs were staffed with greater numbers of Coast Guard personnel that had neither merchant marine licenses nor documents.

In 1967, after the formation of the Department of Transportation, the functions of vessel admeasurement and documentation were transferred into the Coast Guard. The Treasury Department admeasurers and documentation officers were transferred as civilian em-

ployees into the Coast Guard because they had the knowledge and expertise, much like how Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation personnel were integrated into the service. Regular Coast Guard service personnel were indoctrinated in these new functions at MIOs, knowing full well that soon they would be on their own to perform duties associated with this new set of complicated laws and regulations.

The Career Path Changes

In the 1970s the function of shipping commissioner, a legacy from the Bureau of Navigation, was eliminated as maritime unions took over many of those functions. Most notably, the comprehensive professional examinations for licenses envisioned by the predecessor authorities, a legacy from the Steamboat Inspection Service, became multiple-choice tests. By the 1980s there were fewer and fewer of those senior merchant mariners in Coast Guard uniform, and there were some overt indicators that the Coast Guard would welcome being relieved of all the duties associated with merchant marine safety. Some of those functions were successfully relegated to the American Bureau of Shipping, but the majority of the duties remained, and few merchant mariners made a career change to the Coast Guard.

It was during that next period, with the appearance of the 17 regional exam centers, that MIOs discontinued officer licensing and the documentation of seamen. When marine safety offices (MSOs) were established, marine inspection functions were merged with port security functions, leading to large organizational changes that would preclude the necessity to attract experienced merchant mariners into the Coast Guard.



U.S. Revenue Cutter Service logo. Courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard historian's office.



For the most part, their career paths stayed in the industry at that time, but their absence was being felt in the merchant marine safety field. The main influence from the industry came with the schoolship graduates, who had chosen to accept a reserve commission and an ostensibly different career path from their classmates at the maritime academies. Billets were stripped away from the marine inspectors' bullpens, and some commanding officers of MSOs had no previous experience in merchant marine safety, having spent the preceding years in billets such as Coast Guard aviators or lawyers.

The further folding of this function into larger operational units placed the enforcement of the laws governing marine inspection even more directly under the auspices of the operational Coast Guard, an armed force. Interestingly enough, such an issue was addressed in 1883.

Those Who Do Not Learn From History ...

During the years 1882-1883 there was an unsuccessful attempt to transfer all maritime-related services under the Treasury Department to the U.S. Navy in a new department that was to be called the Bureau of Mercantile Marine. The targeted departments under Treasury were the Steamboat Inspection Service, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Marine-Hospital Service, the Life-Saving Service, the Lighthouse Board, and the Revenue Cutter Service.

On January 2, 1883, a bill affecting transfers was introduced in the House of Representatives upon the recommendation of the secretary of the Navy. The bureau heads soundly rejected it, and the bill was defeated for several reasons, but primarily because the concerned bureau heads said that they



Photo of a building sculpture relief. Courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard historian's office.

did not want to entrust the administration of civil law to one of the armed forces.

The reason the fighting Coast Guard was able to prove the exception in 1942 was through its ability to assimilate experienced, licensed merchant mariners into the officer corps. That historical perspective alone suggests that the administration of merchant marine safety programs today might better involve some senior merchant marine officers who wish to follow a career path in the Coast Guard, as they did during the decades after World War II. With some of the old perks to entice them and minimal indoctrination to assimilate them, a valuable human resource could be revitalized and that career path reopened.

Involving more merchant marine officers might lessen much of the current opposition by legislators and the industry for merchant marine safety to remain in the Coast Guard, and at the same time free up other Coast Guard officers to move from administrative duties to operational units.

Looking Forward

At the other end of the pipeline, there is another potential benefit to reintroducing experienced, career merchant marine officers into the Coast Guard. Part of this perspective suggests retooling a small part of the curriculum at the Coast Guard Academy. A recent task force report chartered by the Chief of Staff, VADM Robert Papp, suggests, in part, that the Coast Guard Academy not just turn out college graduates, but rather, emphasize training toward becoming Coast Guard officers.

That report and the recent hearings held by Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., chairman of the full Transportation Committee, strongly indicate that the Academy's Cadet Maritime Department, in cooperation with other departments, could play an important role. The dormitory facilities are under expansion, and Coast Guard personnel from sources other than the academy already train at the academy. With half of the Coast Guard officers in merchant marine safety and related programs, the suggestion is that more emphasis be placed on maritime studies, with an academic standing for those destined to become marine safety personnel.

Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations Chapter I, Subchapter B has already authorized the eligibility of a Coast Guard Academy graduate for a maritime license, either third mate or third assistant engineer. Few graduates are aware of this opportunity, and few could pass



Photo of the author, who is also the co-creator of the Coast Guard Museum exhibit "Regulating the Merchant Marine." USCG photo by CDR Craig S. Swirbliss.

through the Coast Guard license gates without independent study. A combination of the types of courses taught at merchant marine academies, maritime union schools, civilian colleges with maritime degrees, and the USCG Training Center in Yorktown, Va., together with summer programs similar to what is known as "industry training" in the Coast Guard, may point to such a specialized basis of training and academic courses for a degree.

It is critical to make the distinction that the Coast Guard Academy's mission is quite different from merchant marine academies, maritime union schools, and civilian universities offering maritime studies. The curriculum committee for the Coast Guard Academy would have to be acutely aware of that distinction, but courses at other accredited institutions could be applied, and more student exchange programs initiated.

As in the days before, seasoned merchant veterans could be brought aboard to teach and mentor cadets who would receive initial assignments to MSO and National Maritime Center billets. License preparation, merchant ship design and layout, history of regulating the U.S Merchant Marine, marine law and policies, ocean and coastal operations, port control, shipboard terrorism and piracy, maritime casualty studies, and

other professional studies leading to a degree, a commission, and a license is a goal to which cadets could aspire. Without much preparation in this regard, the Coast Guard Academy Class of 2004 was the first to send its graduates directly to merchant marine safety billets.

Another possibility would be for merchant mariners to be commissioned officers in the U.S. Merchant Service, like faculty and staff at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. It would enrich and enhance the function if key officers assigned to merchant marine safety had senior licenses and merchant marine experience, and gave deserving merchant marine men and women one of many satisfying career paths.

About the author:

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Endnotes:

1. "Biography of Captain Hopley Yeaton" by R.W. Gerald D. Foss, First Senior Steward of the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire (unpublished manuscript), courtesy U. S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT.
2. "Steamboat Inspection Service, Its History, Activities, and Organization, Institute for Government Research, Service Monographs of the United States Government No. 8," by Lloyd M. Short, D. Appleton, and Company, New York-London, 1922.

