



History of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

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Pleasure boating emerged as an American sport in the 1930s - for those who could afford it. Improvements in small, gasoline-powered engine technology let companies like Chris-Craft and Dodge mass-produce boats that the upper middle class, at least, could buy in considerable numbers. By the end of the decade, despite the pressures of the Great Depression, over three hundred thousand motorboats and four thousand sailing yachts with auxiliary power were registered in the United States.

Presiding over this armada, at least in theory, was the U.S. Coast Guard. The service's mission included the enforcement of federal laws and safety standards relating to recreational watercraft, but statistical reality eroded the Coast Guard's ability to carry out that mandate. Budget cuts had reduced the service's manpower to about ten thousand officers and enlisted men. Few of those personnel were stationed on inland waterways (where the majority of pleasure boats operated), and most the Coast Guard's energy was siphoned off by its other duties.

The 1915 act creating the Coast Guard described it as "an armed service," but it differed from the Army and the Navy in at least one fundamental respect: The Coast Guard had no peacetime reserve. The idea of creating one had surfaced occasionally (the oldest reference to such a concept dates from 1851), but the federal government had never acted on it.

In the summer of 1934 a yachtsman named Malcolm Stuart Boylan planted the seed that eventually sprouted as the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Boylan had just been elected commodore of the newly-created Pacific Writers' Yacht Club, which was about to undertake a cruise from its home in Los Angeles to Catalina Island. Boylan asked a Coast Guard acquaintance, LTCDR C.W. Thomas of the cutter *Hermes*, to inspect the club's boats before their departure.

Another of the *Hermes*'s officers, LT F.C. Pollard, made the trip to Catalina on board Boylan's yacht, and the two men had a long discussion about the relationship between the Coast Guard and the boating community. On August 23, 1934, Boylan sent Pollard a letter outlining a basic concept for a Coast Guard reserve: ...A Coast Guard Reserve would be an excellent thing to perpetuate its traditions, preserve its entity and, more particularly, to place at the disposal of CG officers, auxiliary flotillas of small craft for the frequent emergencies incident to

your...duties. A copy of Boylan's letter made its way to Washington, and to the desk of CDR Russell Waesche, an aide to the Commandant of the Coast Guard. Waesche saw merit in the idea, but it languished for some five years.

In 1936 Waesche was promoted to rear-admiral and appointed Commandant. He was a forceful, energetic man, and the creation of a Coast Guard reserve became one of his favorite projects. With the backing of the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of the Navy, and several influential Congressmen, RADM Waesche finally was able to gain Congressional approval for the concept.

The Coast Guard Reserve Act of 1939, passed on June 23 of that year, created an institution that was unique in the federal government. The new Reserve was to have four broadly-defined purposes:

In the interest of (a) safety to life at sea and upon the navigable waters, (b) the promotion of efficiency in the operation of motorboats and yachts, and (c) a wider knowledge of, and better compliance with, the laws, rules, and regulations governing the operation and navigation of motorboats and yachts, and (d) facilitating certain operations of the Coast Guard, there is hereby established a United States Coast Guard Reserve...which shall be composed of citizens of the United States and its Territories and possessions...who are owners (sole or in part) or motorboats or yachts....

The Army and Navy Reserves were conceived as readily-available sources of trained manpower in the event of war; many Army and Navy Reservists were World War I veterans. The new Coast Guard Reserve was to be a civilian organization. Members were not to hold military ranks, wear uniforms, receive military training, or "be vested with or exercise any right, privilege, power, or duty vested in or imposed upon the personnel of the Coast Guard." Reservists were invited to place their boats at the disposal of the Coast Guard "in the conduct of duties incident to the saving of life and property and in the patrol of marine parades and regattas" - with the understanding that each such boat would be commanded by a regular Coast Guard officer or petty officer.

Nor were Coast Guard Reservists to be considered government employees. Apart from a provision that "appropriations for the Coast Guard shall be available for the payment of actual necessary expenses of operation of any such motorboat or yacht when so utilized" (i.e., the Coast Guard would pay for the gas), it was expected that the Reserve would cost the government no money whatsoever.

The basic unit of the new organization would be the flotilla, consisting of ten or more boats and presided over by an elected civilian with the title of Flotilla Commander, with a Vice Commander and a Junior Commander to assist him. Five or more flotillas would compose a division, with an elected Division Captain, Vice

Captain, and Junior Captain at its head. The Coast Guard's administrative structure was divided into fourteen districts, corresponding to the naval districts established by the Navy Department. The Reserve Divisions within each district would be administered by civilian officials called the District Commodore and Vice Commodore. The Coast Guard would administer the Reserve through a regular officer with the title Chief Director of the Reserve, whose office would be in Washington. He would be assisted by fourteen District Directors.

The idea of a civilian reserve organization was new, and no one could have been blamed for being skeptical about it. Initial membership benefits consisted of the right to buy a Coast Guard Reserve ensign (a blue rectangular flag bearing the Coast Guard emblem in white, with "United States Coast Guard Reserve" in the ring around the shield) and a lapel pin. The response in both the Coast Guard and the civilian boating community was, however, remarkably enthusiastic. By June of 1940 CDR Merlin O'Neill, the first Chief Director, and his District Directors had enrolled twenty-six hundred men and twenty-three hundred boats in the Coast Guard Reserve. With the support of ADM Waesche, Coast Guard bases began offering training courses for reservists. Those who passed the courses were appointed to three "reserve grades": Senior Navigator, Navigator, and Engineer.

War

In its original form the Coast Guard Reserve lasted less than two years. By early 1941 the Coast Guard was preparing for war. Events in Europe had demonstrated what demands for manpower and boats the service could expect to confront when, as now seemed inevitable, the United States entered the Second World War.

On February 19, 1941 Congress passed a law restructuring the Coast Guard Reserve. Henceforth the Coast Guard was to operate two reserve forces. The existing civilian reserve organization was renamed the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. A new U.S. Coast Guard Reserve was to function on a military basis as a source of wartime manpower, like the reserves of the other armed services.

Members of the new Coast Guard Reserve were to be divided into two categories. "Regular Reservists" were paid for their services, had to meet normal military physical standards, and when on active duty could be assigned to stations anywhere the Coast Guard deemed appropriate. Men who, for any reason, were unable to meet those requirements were invited to become "temporary members of the reserve." A "Coast Guard TR" was a volunteer who served only in some designated geographic area (usually near his home or workplace) and less than full-time. Age limits for TRs were seventeen and sixty-four, and physical requirements were not stringent. Members of the Auxiliary were invited to enroll in the Reserve as TRs - and bring their boats with them.

The officers running the Coast Guard appreciated the staggering demands that war would put on it, and the value of the new reserve system in helping them meet those demands. By the summer of 1941 the District Commanders were sending Coast Guard headquarters lists of boats owned by Auxiliarists that would make good patrol craft - and requisitioning Lewis machine guns, Thompson submachine guns, rifles, and pistols for them.

On November 1, 1941, President Roosevelt signed an order transferring the Coast Guard from the Treasury Department to the Navy Department. A few weeks later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the Coast Guard's reserve system was put to the ultimate test. On the night of December 7, amid rumors of Japanese invasion, twenty Coast Guard Auxiliarists from the 13th District took their boats out of Seattle on the service's first wartime patrol cruise. In May, 1942 the Secretary of the Navy authorized uniforms for the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Between 1941 and 1945 the Auxiliary was the Coast Guard's general-purpose assistant. The Auxiliary was supposed to be, in the words of a headquarters directive of May, 1943, "a civilian organization which is engaged in the training of its members to qualify them for active duty whenever needed with the CG, as temporary members of the CG Reserve." In some districts the Auxiliary did indeed function as a recruiting and training agency for the reserve; the wartime training courses became the nucleus of the Auxiliary's public education program. In other districts the jobs performed by Auxiliarists and Reservists were virtually indistinguishable. No one seemed to mind.

Early in 1942 five German U-boats arrived off the east coast of the United States, inaugurating the heartbreaking season known as "Bloody Winter." The Navy and the Coast Guard, woefully short of escort vessels with the necessary anti-submarine weaponry, could do scarcely anything to keep the U-boats from running amok in the shipping lanes.

In desperation the Navy ordered the acquisition of "the maximum practical number of civilian craft in any way capable of going to sea in good weather for a period of at least 48 hours...to be manned by the Coast Guard as an expansion of the Coast Guard Reserve...and operated along the 50-fathom curve of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts." Motorboats and sailing yachts, with numbers preceded by "CGR" painted on their bows and depth charges stowed awkwardly on their decks, began appearing on patrol stations all along the coasts. Many were donated by temporary members of the Reserve, or bought outright by the Coast Guard. Others were owned and manned by Auxiliarists. Known variously as "the Putt-Putt Navy," "the Splinter Fleet," and "the Corsair Fleet," they made up much of the American response to the U-boat threat in coastal waters during the early months of the war. As newly-constructed warships took over the load, the Coast Guard

abandoned the concept. None of the two thousand CGR craft ever sank a submarine, but they rescued several hundred survivors of torpedoed merchant ships and may have driven some U-boats away from tempting cruising grounds.

Perhaps the Auxiliary's most important contribution to the war effort came in the form of the Volunteer Port Security Force. An executive order of February, 1942 directed the Secretary of the Navy to take the necessary steps to prevent "sabotage and subversive activities" on the nation's waterfronts. The task of protecting the hundreds of warehouses, piers, and other facilities that kept the American shipping industry in business fell to the Coast Guard, which in turn delegated it to the Reserve and the Auxiliary.

In each port city a Coast Guard officer with the title Captain of the Port was placed in charge of a Port Security Force, consisting of TRs, Auxiliarists, and other civilians recruited for the purpose. The precise organizational structure varied from city to city. The Coast Guard set up a Reserve Training School in Philadelphia to train TRs in such subjects as anti-espionage methods, fire prevention, customs inspections, and small arms handling. Eventually some twenty thousand Reservists and Auxiliarists participated in port security patrols. About two thousand women enrolled as "TR SPARs," attending to the mountainous paper work that dispatched ships, cargoes, and troops overseas.

As the war went on and the Coast Guard's resources were stretched thinner, Auxiliarists and TRs were called upon to fill gaps wherever active duty Coast Guardsmen left them. Auxiliarists' boats patrolled the waterfronts and inlets looking for saboteurs, enemy agents, and fires. At least one unit of temporary Reservists, recruited from the Auxiliary, patrolled east coast beaches on horseback. Other Auxiliarists manned lookout and lifesaving stations near their homes, freeing regular Coast Guardsmen for sea duty. When a flood struck St. Louis in the spring of 1943, Coast Guard Auxiliarists and Reservists evacuated seven thousand people and thousands of livestock.

The Auxiliary and the Reserve attracted their share of celebrity members. Actor Humphrey Bogart took his yacht on several patrols out of Los Angeles, and Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra, put in his twelve hours per week on patrol duty in Boston Harbor.

By 1945 the Coast Guard Auxiliary boasted a membership of 67,533, and 53,214 men and women (most of them Auxiliarists) were serving as temporary members of the Reserve. At the end of the war the Coast Guard TRs were "honorably disenrolled." Many remained Auxiliarists for years afterward. Wartime service had earned them no veterans' benefits and precious little other public recognition. In 1946 the TRs were awarded the Victory Medal. Auxiliarists who had not joined the Reserve had to be satisfied with the thanks of ADM Waesche:

The Auxiliary during the war years was indispensable. Many thousands of you served faithfully and loyally as Auxiliarists and as temporary members of the CG Reserve, performing hundreds of tasks and relieving thousands of Coast Guardsmen for duty outside the continental limits. The Coast Guard is deeply appreciative of this service.

Peace: What Next?

By the middle of 1944 the Coast Guard was making plans for its postwar operations. Where the Reserve and the Auxiliary would fit in them no one was quite sure. The 1939 legislation had made it clear that Congress wanted a peacetime civilian Coast Guard Reserve. During the last months of the war Auxiliarists in various districts held meetings to define how that organization should work.

The war had changed the character of the Auxiliary. It had been conceived as an boaters' organization; during the war the Coast Guard had used it as a means of recruiting and training temporary members of the Reserve. Virtually anybody who wanted to be a TR and could commit the time was welcomed. Many TRs did not own boats and, understandably, took little interest in the old Coast Guard Reserve's peacetime activities.

One subject of argument was the institution's name. The 1939 law had called it simply the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve. That title, however, had been usurped by the military "regular" reserve that had been created in 1941. When the Coast Guard got funding to retain a small military reserve after the war, the civilian institution was left with the label "Coast Guard Auxiliary." That development generated some grumbling; as the minutes of one postwar planning meeting put it, "the present name is too closely allied with women's organizations which are adjunct to military or church groups." But nobody came up with a better one.

In December, 1945, just before ADM Waesche retired, he appointed a board of senior Coast Guard captains to "determine policy with respect to members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary performing Coast Guard duties." The board stridently reaffirmed the need for a peacetime Auxiliary. Among its functions, as identified by the board, were:

(a) To provide orderly and efficient means for bringing to the attention of the Coast Guard recommendations for improvement in matters of maritime safety for which the Coast Guard is responsible. (b) To provide continuous liaison between the Coast Guard and small craft interests. (c) To provide means for the prompt and efficient mobilization of volunteer resources in case of local casualties. (d) To provide nucleus for assistance in mobilization of personnel and small craft resources in case of National Emergency. (e) To encourage universal safe and

courteous operation of vessels by precept and example of members of the Auxiliary and to assist in dissemination of safe marine practices.

On March 19, 1946, the District Commodores and Directors of the Auxiliary held a three-day conference at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington. This meeting of Auxiliarists and regular Coast Guard officers produced a blueprint for a streamlined Auxiliary that would function as a civilian arm of the peacetime Coast Guard. Each Auxiliarist would be required to own at least a twenty-five percent interest in a boat, airplane, or amateur radio station, or "by reason of...special training or experience" be "deemed by the Commandant to be qualified for membership in the Auxiliary." Inactive members would be encouraged to disenroll. As a 9th District Coast Guard publication put it, "a smaller number of strong flotillas is better than many weak ones. Get rid of the deadwood. Let's have a well-knit organization of active members - no matter how small. If we are strong and healthy, we will grow." By mid-1947 Auxiliary membership had shrunk to 24,273.

An official publication entitled Instructions: U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary (the predecessor to the current U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Manual) laid out the new regulations for Auxiliary membership and organization. Auxiliary boards were set up to assist the district commodores and division captains.

One ever-present bone of contention concerned rank designations. On several occasions Auxiliary units had suggested that they needed a system of ranks and ratings like the Coast Guard's, with corresponding uniforms and insignia. Coast Guard Headquarters had vetoed the idea, insisting that, "to clearly indicate the non-military status of the Auxiliary, [its] uniform...shall be sufficiently distinctive so as not to be confused with the uniform of the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Reserve."

The Coast Guard and the Auxiliary worked out a compromise. The Auxiliary would offer two lines of advancement. In the first, labeled "Navigation," the Auxiliarist could progress by passing examinations through the ratings of Navigator, Senior Navigator, and Master Navigator. The second advancement system, designated "Service Specialties," offered training in five branches: Seaman (Boatswain's Mate, Coxswain); Artificer - Radio; Artificer - Engine Room Force; Aviation (Pilot and Machinist's Mate); and Special Branch (Yeoman, Storekeeper, and Pharmacist's Mate). Auxiliarists who passed the appropriate examinations would be rated as chief, first class, second class, and third class petty officers.

The uniforms of the postwar Coast Guard Auxiliary were similar to those of regular Coast Guard officers, with distinctive Auxiliary buttons and insignia. A sleeve badge similar to that of Coast Guard enlisted personnel, minus the eagle, indicated each member's grade in specialty.

Airplanes joined the Auxiliary informally during the Second World War. The first official mention of a Coast Guard Auxiliary pilot dates from 1943. Public Law 451, passed by the Congress in September, 1945, added owners of aircraft and radio stations to the list of those eligible for membership in the Auxiliary. Auxiliary aviators were particularly welcome in the late forties. The Coast Guard, fully aware of the value of aircraft in its search and rescue missions, had lost most of its regular aviation component to postwar cutbacks.

By 1950 several Auxiliary Districts had air flotillas. Pilots from the 11th District, operating out of Vail Field in Los Angeles, flew SAR patrols over the mountains and deserts of southern California. The 14th District formed two air divisions in Hawaii, where the Coast Guard's air strength consisted of two obsolescent planes.

In 1947 two of what would be the four "cornerstones" of the modern Auxiliary were established: vessel examination and education. The Courtesy Motorboat Examination (now known as the Courtesy Marine Examination) program quickly became one of the Auxiliary's most important assignments. The Coast Guard published a booklet of safety standards and regulations, and gave the Auxiliary the authority to train its own members as inspectors. The recreational boating community accepted the concept with enthusiasm. In May, 1947 the Auxiliary issued more than a thousand CME decals in the Miami area alone.

The Public Education (PE) program got under way in January, 1948, when Auxiliarists offered a series of free courses at the annual Motorboat Show in New York City's Grand Central Palace. The boating public responded enthusiastically. June 23, 1949, the organization's tenth anniversary, was declared Coast Guard Auxiliary Day in New York.

The 1950s

A national conference of Commodores and Directors in 1951 made major changes in the Auxiliary's organizational structure. The positions of National Commodore and National Vice Commodore were created. Those officials would preside over a National Board of the Auxiliary, which would also include all the District Commodores and the immediate past National Commodore. The first National Commodore, elected in 1951, was Bert C. Pouncey, Jr.

By the early 1950s the Auxiliary was offering an eight-lesson course in "Outboard Safety." During the next few years one-lesson and three-lesson basic courses were added. Individual flotillas experimented with their own education programs. In Falmouth, Massachusetts, for instance, the Auxiliary helped organize a Young Sailors' Organization for teenagers. By the mid-fifties more than thirty thousand men and women had taken part in Auxiliary education programs. A strong boost came from the insurance industry. Several major insurance firms began charging

reduced premiums for boats that passed CMEs and owners who passed the courses.

In 1958, largely due to lobbying efforts by the Coast Guard Auxiliary, Congress passed Public Law 85-455. The President of the United States was thereby authorized "to proclaim annually the week including July 4th as National Safe Boating Week." The event was later moved to the second week of June. It is marked each year by a stepped-up campaign to encourage boat owners to get their CMEs, along with boating safety displays at regattas, boat shows, and shopping malls. Movie and television stars, along with other national celebrities, have helped publicize National Safe Boating Week over the years.

The third cornerstone is "Operations." The Auxiliary assists the Coast Guard in several of its non-military functions, including search-and-rescue (SAR), safety, regatta, and harbor patrols, and checking aids to navigation (ATON).

The postwar Coast Guard had a Congressional mandate to cut its personnel from a wartime high of more than 175,000 to 18,000 - before all its wartime duties were completed. As late as 1947, for example, regular Coast Guardsmen were still manning several big Army transport vessels that were bringing troops home from Europe and the Far East. The Coast Guard came to rely on the Auxiliary to fill in the gaps. Postwar austerity threatened to close several Coast Guard stations on the Great Lakes; Auxiliarists manned them until the Coast Guard could find the necessary manpower. When another series of floods struck the Mississippi Valley in 1947, 9th District Auxiliarists used their boats to evacuate victims and carry supplies.

In 1952 the Commandant of the Coast Guard, ADM Merlin O'Neill (earlier the first Chief Director of the Auxiliary), authorized the creation of Auxiliary Operational Units (AUXOPS). Specially-trained groups, each consisting of fifty Auxiliarists, five boats, two aircraft, and two radio stations, would be organized to assist the Coast Guard in emergencies. A few years later the arrangement was converted to a specialized, rigorous training program for individual Auxiliarists. A member who passed seven courses (Administration, Communications, Patrols, Piloting, Seamanship, Search-and-Rescue, and Weather) would be eligible for the coveted AUXOP status, symbolized by an insignia incorporating a wreath of excellence.

Fellowship is the Coast Guard Auxiliary's fourth cornerstone. Membership in the Auxiliary is a source of pride, satisfaction, and fun. Meetings on the flotilla, district, division, and national levels give Auxiliarists the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, exchange ideas, and share their good will - not only with each other but with members of the public. Since 1964 the culminating event of each year has been the fall National Meeting, which features an address by the Commandant of the Coast Guard.

The legislation creating the Auxiliary opened membership in it to citizens of the United States, without restriction as to gender. Just when the first woman joined the Auxiliary is unclear. At least a few women were members in the 7th District by late 1941, and by 1945 Coast Guard regulations for female Auxiliarists' uniforms were in print.

The reception accorded female Auxiliarists by their male counterparts apparently varied from place to place. When four women joined Flotilla 61 (Sacramento, California) in 1957, the minutes of the next flotilla meeting hailed their arrival: "Welcome aboard, girls! It's time we glamourized a bit." In other cases, perhaps because they felt unwelcome in the existing flotillas, women formed their own. In the late forties at least one flotilla, #525 in Boston, consisted entirely of women; it had no boats or aircraft, and its operations apparently consisted of performing clerical work for its division. By the end of the fifties all-female flotillas were operating in Detroit, Louisville, Memphis, Mobile, and Massaguan, New Jersey.

The 1950s saw the creation of the Coast Guard Bronze Plaque of Merit. Known informally as the "A" Award, it is presented by order of the Commandant of the Coast Guard to Auxiliarists who save lives at the risk of their own. A few years later the Coast Guard established the Certificate of Merit, or "B" Award, presented at the Commandant's discretion for "exceptional meritorious services in furtherance of the organization and its purposes."

In 1955 the Auxiliary inaugurated an effort to assist the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut in attracting qualified potential cadets. That concept METAmorphosed by 1966 into the Academy Introductory Mission (AIM).

Each year the Auxiliary selects about 125 academically- and physically-qualified high school juniors to spend the first full week in August at the Coast Guard Academy, getting a taste of cadet life and learning about career options for Coast Guard officers. Since 1976, when New London opened its doors to female cadets, young women have participated in the program. The Academy regards the AIM program as one of its most important and successful recruiting tools.

The 1960s

Shortly after midnight on May 23, 1960 a seismic wave hit southern California. The resulting current surges tore piers loose on the Los Angeles waterfront and damaged boats in the harbor of San Diego. Coast Guard Auxiliarists provided assistance to over a hundred boaters that day.

By the early sixties the number of registered yachts and motorboats in the United States had surpassed five million, and membership in the Coast Guard Auxiliary

had reached twenty-two thousand. The task of administering the organization had outgrown the capacity of the National Board.

In 1968 the staff at the national level was reorganized. The elected National Commodore and Vice Commodore were authorized to appoint a staff of forty additional officers, who would preside over four Departments: Comptroller, Public Relations, Operations, and Education. Each Department was divided into divisions, which were in turn subdivided into branches - a scheme system similar to that of the Coast Guard. In 1969 the position of National Rear Commodore was added.

More recent organizational changes have elaborated on the system that was worked out in the sixties. There are now three National Rear Commodores, representing the Eastern, Central, and Western Areas. The number and titles of Departments have fluctuated over the years. In 1996 the number stood at nine: Public Affairs, Finance, Education, Information Services, Legal Affairs, Member Resources, Operations, Training, and Vessel Examination.

The first national-level Auxiliary journal was a newsletter called Under the Blue Ensign, which began publication in 1959. Since a national boating magazine used that title for its column of Auxiliary news, the name of the journal was changed in 1960 to U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary National Publication - a masthead that, though descriptively accurate, had little to recommend it aesthetically. Later that year a contest was held to find a better name. The winner was The Navigator, which has been the title of the Auxiliary's magazine since 1961.

The Navigator is subtitled "an official informational and educational tool for the Coast Guard Auxiliary." It serves as a means by which the National Board communicates policy and regulation changes, announces the recipients of awards, and passes on ideas to improve the Auxiliary's operations and programs.

One of the Auxiliary's functions since its early days had been to provide the Coast Guard with reports on errors in official nautical charts. In 1962 that function was formalized when the Coast Guard and the Auxiliary signed an agreement with the National Oceanic Service. NOS was to provide copies of its charts to members of the Auxiliary, who were to identify and report any discrepancies. The sheer number of Auxiliarists constantly checking the accuracy of their charts became a significant asset to both NOS and the Coast Guard.

Since the Second World War the Coast Guard has been barely large enough to perform the missions assigned to it. On many occasions the Auxiliary has stepped into the breach. In the early sixties, for example, it became clear that there were not enough Coast Guard radio stations in California. Auxiliarists of Flotilla 47 put their CB sets to work, and eventually set up a permanent radio tower on the roof

of a restaurant in Santa Cruz. It has since been responsible for handling hundreds of distress calls.

During the Vietnam conflict several Coast Guard cutters were taken off their normal stations and sent to Southeast Asia. Auxiliarists put their boats to work on patrol duty, and the 11th District set up a "Vietnam Cutters Fund" to buy books, magazines, and other recreational materials for the Coast Guardsmen who had taken their ships to war.

In December, 1967 the retired British ocean liner Queen Mary ended its final voyage at Long Beach, California, where the great ship was to become a permanent tourist attraction. Hundreds of pleasure boats formed an unofficial welcoming committee; the Queen Mary's captain commented that "there were more craft than at Dunkirk." Eighty-seven Coast Guard Auxiliary boats kept the channel into Long Beach Harbor clear.

In 1967 the Coast Guard took the Auxiliary with it from the Department of the Treasury to the Department of Transportation. The DOT's budgets were not generous to the Coast Guard. Headquarters had to accept that a greater role for the Auxiliary was not only desirable but necessary.

The 1970s

Four years later Congress passed the Federal Safe Boating Act of 1971, which expanded the Coast Guard's role in supervising boating on inland waterways. The act also provided that the Auxiliary be placed at the service of individual state governments when they asked for its assistance.

Early in 1973 budget cuts forced the closing of seven Coast Guard stations on the Great Lakes. At the request of the affected communities, Congress ordered the stations to be re-opened and operated by the Auxiliary. The local division captains took responsibility for manning them and ensuring that Auxiliarists' boats were always available to assist distressed vessels. The Auxiliary later took over seven more stations on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.

Auxiliarists Lillian Phillips and Mary Roeder, of Tacoma, Washington, originated a water safety education program called "Water 'n' Kids" in 1973. The Auxiliary adopted the course nationally, and since then more than a million children have taken it. Phillips and Roeder received Certificates of Administrative Merit from the Commandant.

Any publicized event near the water attracts a swarm of enthusiastic but often careless boaters. Auxiliarists performed maritime crowd control service at each Apollo moon shot and Space Shuttle launch, and for OPSAIL '76, the parade of

sail training vessels through New York Harbor on the nation's bicentennial. In August of 1979 President Jimmy Carter and his family took a cruise down the Mississippi River from St. Paul to St. Louis on board the sternwheeler Delta Queen, escorted by Coast Guard and Auxiliary vessels.

On June 5, 1976 the Teton Dam in Idaho burst, flooding a considerable area and washing toxic chemicals out of a warehouse into the reservoir below the dam. Coast Guard Auxiliarists warned boaters to evacuate, and helped build a levee that saved the city of Idaho Falls.

In 1976 the Coast Guard commissioned a study of the Auxiliary by a private research firm, University Sciences Forum of Washington. After interviewing key personnel in the Coast Guard and the Auxiliary and analyzing questionnaires filled out by about two thousand Auxiliarists, the researchers concluded that that Auxiliary was in good health. "In summary," they wrote, "we consider the Auxiliary the greatest economical resource readily available to the COGARD. It performs in an outstanding manner and its personnel are among the most professional group of volunteers in the nation...."

Another study, conducted the following year by a Coast Guard "Long Range Planning Board" chaired by CAPT G.L. Kraine, was not quite so euphoric. The Kraine study complimented the work done by the Auxiliary, but urged the regular Coast Guard to do a better job of utilizing Auxiliary resources and play a bigger role in its administration. One sentence in the report echoed the sentiments of many Auxiliarists: "Many Coast Guard personnel are not familiar with the Auxiliary nor aware of its capabilities."

The Coast Guard, to the extent that its budget would let it, took the Kraine Board's recommendations to heart. Information about the Auxiliary was added to indoctrination courses in Coast Guard boot camp and officers' candidate schools. Coast Guard officers newly appointed as Auxiliary Directors were put through a week-long special training course. The Auxiliary's data processing system, AUXMIS (Auxiliary Management Information System) was revised up to keep better track of Auxiliary activities, including individual Auxiliarists' service records. A Goal Attainment Program (GAP) enabled the Directors to set challenges for each flotilla on the basis of its capabilities and performance.

By the end of the decade Auxiliarists felt more a part of a truly national organization. In 1979 Auxiliary membership surpassed forty-six thousand - a figure that exceeded the numerical strength of the Coast Guard by about twenty-five percent. Another study by a Coast Guard board in 1981 concluded that "developments in the Auxiliary program in the last four years have to a great extent resolved the problems outlined in the 1977 report."

The 1980s

The new decade opened with two tragic accidents in Tampa Bay, Florida. On the night of January 28, 1980 the Coast Guard tender Blackthorn sank after a collision with the tanker Capricorn, with the loss of twenty-three Coast Guardsmen. On May 9 of the same year the freighter Summit Venture rammed the main span of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, knocking over twelve hundred feet of roadway into the water and killing thirty-five people. In both cases the Auxiliary helped with SAR operations.

In the spring of 1980 the government of Cuba suddenly announced that it would permit a massive emigration through the port of Mariel. For three weeks a steady stream of small boats of every description, averaging two hundred to three hundred per day, made their way from Cuba to Florida. The Coast Guard mobilized all its resources in the area. Auxiliarists manned radios, performed SAR along the Florida coast, and stood watch at the stations in the Coast Guardsmen's absence.

In 1984, in an effort to set standards for training and efficiency in the Auxiliary, Coast Guard Headquarters initiated the Boat Crew Qualification Program. In order to participate in operations on the water each Auxiliarist would have to pass a rigorous series of courses, supervised by specially-trained Auxiliarists certified as Qualified Examiners (QEs).

The reaction to the new program among Auxiliarists was mixed. Many welcomed the opportunity to get the new training; others were unable or unwilling to commit the time. Another development that sapped enthusiasm was a toughening of Coast Guard policy regarding assists to vessels in trouble. One of the Auxiliary's most common activities had been towing boats that ran out of gas, developed engine trouble, or had other mechanical problems. Pressure from commercial towing firms led the Coast Guard to emphasize that Auxiliarists were authorized to pass towlines to other boats only in genuine emergency situations.

The combination of rising standards and declining opportunities to be of service probably was responsible for a decline in Auxiliary membership during the mid-eighties. In 1987 membership stood at 39,144 - a decline of nearly twenty percent since 1976. Those figures attracted the attention of Congress, which ordered the Secretary of Transportation to prepare a detailed report on the subject.

The Coast Guard thereupon undertook another study of the Auxiliary, this one chaired by Capt. William P. Hewel, Deputy Chief of the Office of Boating, Public, and Consumer Affairs. A Washington research firm, Development Procurement International, distributed questionnaires to Auxiliarists - and former Auxiliarists who had disenrolled - and analyzed the results. The study group suspected that

the decline in membership was a natural, temporary consequence of the Boat Crew and Non-Emergency Assistance policies. But, the group noted, "the present size of the Coast Guard Auxiliary is not large enough to satisfy Coast Guard requirements from the present to the year 2000." In order to keep up with the demands of the recreational boating community, Auxiliary membership needed to expand at a rate of about three percent per year.

The eighties saw a number of massive public events on the water, each attended by a throng of undisciplined small craft. Auxiliarists assisted the Coast Guard in patrolling two more "tall ship parades," OPSAIL '80 in Boston and OPSAIL '82 in Philadelphia. During the Olympic Games at Los Angeles in 1984, the America's Cup races of 1983 and 1988, and the Pan American Games of 1987, Auxiliary vessels kept the yacht race courses clear of spectator craft. For the centennial of the Statue of Liberty on July 4, 1986, more than thirty thousand watercraft descended on New York Harbor. Some 100 Coast Guard vessels and 380 Auxiliary boats provided safety patrols in the largest peacetime operation in Coast Guard history.

The 1990s

In 1989 the Coast Guard Auxiliary was fifty years old. In the following year the Coast Guard celebrated its bicentennial, and in 1992 the United States observed the four-hundredth anniversary of the first voyage of Columbus. The latter occasion inspired OPSAIL 92, another parade of sailing vessels in New York Harbor. The Auxiliary again provided crowd control and SAR services.

The years 1992 and 1993 saw the Auxiliary's ingenuity and dedication tested by disasters precipitated by weather and international politics. Auxiliarists evacuated hundreds of people from the path of Hurricane Andrew, and from the scenes of devastating floods in the Midwest. In 1994 a military coup in Haiti released another surge of immigrants heading for Florida. The Coast Guard and the Auxiliary mobilized in the largest search-and-rescue operation since the Second World War.

Recipients of the Bronze Plaque of Merit ("A" Award)

The Plaque of Merit may be awarded by the Commandant or District Commanders "in recognition of extreme skill in performing an assist or rescue that involves risk to the Auxiliarist's life." The following are examples of the achievements that have been recognized by the "A" Award.

Miguel A. Colorado. On October 27, 1953, Colorado rescued two survivors of a boat that had capsized off Caballo Blanco Reefs, Puerto Rico. A dedicated long-time Auxiliarist, Colorado was elected District Commodore for the Tenth District in

1963.

Orville A. Fuller. The Army Corps of Engineers dredge William T. Russell foundered in Coos Bay, Oregon, on September 10, 1956. Auxiliarist Fuller, at extreme risk to his own life, rescued ten survivors.

Charles R. Zeller. On August 13, 1961, in a yacht basin near Brooklyn, New York, the 45-foot yacht Jolly Roger exploded. Auxiliarist Zeller rescued three survivors, two of them badly burned. Though suffering from severe burns himself, Zeller made sure that the Jolly Roger's gasoline valves were shut off and oversaw efforts to take the burning vessel in tow before it drifted into any of the boats that were moored nearby.

Wayne Johnson. A 30-foot fishing troller, AK 1056A, became entangled in the shallows near Juneau, Alaska on September 18, 1967. The CGC Cape Coral arrived on the scene but was unable to get close enough to heave a line. Auxiliarist Johnson took his 36-foot motorboat Norma Jane alongside the stricken troller and rescued the one man on board.

Herbert E. Brack. On September 17, 1967, two small boats foundered in the mouth of the Ipswich River in Massachusetts. Brack, who was fishing on board his boat, the Grand Slam, answered the distress call and, despite swells and 10-foot breakers, rescued three survivors.

Bettie Sue Klein. Hurricane Agnes struck Alligator Point, Florida, on June 18, 1972. Klein stayed by her CB radio station, relaying information that enabled all the families in the area to be evacuated before the worst of the storm hit. When the rising sea threatened her house she withdrew to the mainland, but as soon as the hurricane passed she returned to Alligator Point to help in marking navigational hazards, removing debris, and controlling looters.

Aime R. Bernard, Frank Scott Powell, Charles Samperi, and Wayne St. Morris. On August 11, 1974, these four Auxiliarists attempted to rescue two young boys who had been reported adrift in a rubber raft off Lanakai Beach, Hawaii. They launched Powell's boat, Courtesy I, from Kailua Beach and spent several hours attempting to locate the raft. They eventually received word via Coast Guard radio that the boys had made it to shore on their own. The Coast Guard none the less recognized the Auxiliarists' skill and the risks they had taken with the Plaque of Merit.

Kenneth A. Anderson. When the tender Blackthorn sank in Tampa Bay on the night of January 28, 1980, Anderson was among the first on the scene. A certified diver, he made five dives on the wreck over a span of fifteen hours and assisted in the recovery of four Coast Guardsmen.

Leo Braun. On April 20, 1980, a boat capsized just outside the breakwater at Marina del Ray, California. When the Auxiliary vessel Dorothy B. arrived, four men

were in the water. Braun, a crewman on board the Dorothy B., leapt from its deck to the slippery surface of the breakwater and rescued two of the survivors.

Geraldine and Milt Entwistle. The Entwistles' boat, the Searcher, was returning to Monterey, California after a 9-hour SAR patrol on April 23, 1982, when the nearby Coast Guard station radioed that two swimmers were being swept out to sea off Black Point. The Entwistles, despite 8-foot waves and a dangerous undertow, managed to rescue one of the two - and two others spotted by another Auxiliary vessel.

James and Lois Toth. On September 6, 1982, the Toths answered a distress call from a pontoon boat that had caught fire on the Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. James Toth used the fire extinguishers on board his boat to put out the fire, and he and his wife rescued five of the six survivors who had jumped into the water. The sixth was picked up by another boat.

Richard P. Cash. When a 34-foot cabin cruiser caught fire off South Haven, Michigan, on June 29, 1987, Cash and his boat picked up the MAYDAY signal and offered assistance. Three of the burning boat's occupants, two children and their mother, were already in the water. Displaying excellent seamanship, Cash hauled all three on board with his boathook. The children survived; the mother, despite Cash's attempts at artificial resuscitation, died. Cash rescued her husband, who had stayed on board his boat and extinguished the fire.

Robert and Jean Colby. On September 16, 1990, the tanker Jupiter caught fire at a pier in Saginaw Bay, Michigan. The Colbys were on standby SAR duty at the nearby Coast Guard station. Their 20-foot outboard and a 41-foot Coast Guard utility boat were on the scene within eight minutes of the first distress call. Despite the danger that the Jupiter would explode, the Colbys pulled five survivors from the water, took them ashore, and provided medical attention until an ambulance arrived.