

## **Bravo Zero: The Coast Guard Auxiliary in World War II**

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**United States Coast Guard Auxiliary**

### **In the Beginning. . .**

In *Spirit of the Times's* 1901 history of American yachting, the author surveyed the activities of prominent yacht clubs around the country. According to the popular sporting magazine, the members of the Seawanhaka-Corinthian Yacht Club on Long Island--the home club of the Roosevelt family--were the first to promote of the idea of an American naval militia. Local boosterism aside, club members needed only to have read British yachting history to know that in England yachtsmen and the Royal Navy had had a close relationship going back to the Napoleonic Wars. At the time royal yacht club squadrons frequently participated in maneuvers with the navy. During the American Civil War, private American yachts were loaned or leased to the U.S. Navy. The New York Yacht Club's famous racing schooner, *Henrietta*, was loaned and commanded by its owner, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., son of the owner of the *New York Herald*. During World War I, the U.S. Naval Reserve organized yacht clubs like "The Boston" "into submarine watches to ease fear along the coast and raise morale by giving everyone a greater piece of the action." The BYC also formed a volunteer harbor patrol, although it soon disbanded due to cessation of hostilities. The 1916 naval reserve act provided for enrollment of civilian boats and crews "suitable for naval purposes in the naval defense of the coast." 1.

Given this history it is not surprising that during the 1930s, American boaters and yachtsmen began to press the U.S. Coast Guard for a role in its operations. One of these was Malcolm Stuart Boylan, Commodore of the Pacific Writers' Yacht Club in Los Angeles, California. On August 23, 1934, he wrote a letter to Lt. Francis C. Pollard of the Coast Guard, following a cruise Pollard had taken with the club. Boylan suggested the formation of a Coast Guard Reserve. The letter, in part, read:

This brings me to the suggestion that a Coast Guard Reserve would be an excellent thing to perpetuate these traditions, preserve its entity, and, more practically, to place at the disposal of Coast Guard officers, auxiliary flotillas of small craft for the frequent emergencies incident to your twenty-two prescribed and countless unexpected duties.

Later Boylan made trips to Washington to promote the idea which bounced around Coast Guard headquarters for five years. As the war clouds darkened over

Europe and the Pacific, Coast Guard officials began to recognize the need for more manpower on the homefront should hostilities break out. Within the Coast Guard itself, the future commandant Adm. Russell R. Waesche became the “prime mover and chief official angel” of the formation of the Auxiliary. He believed such a civilian organization could help lessen boating accidents and encourage adherence to laws and regulations.

By the mid-1920s, America had become largely a middle class society and was taking to the water like it was taking to the highways. The Coast Guard could not keep up with the growth of the recreational boating industry. This was greatly due to manufacturing technologies that dated to the development of mass-manufactured interchangeable parts in the mid-nineteenth century. To some extent, Henry Ford only added the assembly line. During the 1920s Christopher Columbus Smith's Chris Craft Company was the first to begin the mass manufacture of recreational boats. By 1936, the family cruiser had become the backbone of the U.S. motorboat industry. These cruisers would become the backbone of the World War II Auxiliary and CG Reserve small boat fleet. Without these social, economic, and technological advances that had been building in the country for more than a century, America would not have been able to provide the vessels that protected its coasts during World War II.

Giving voice to these demands in January 1939, Rear Adm. Thomas Molloy, USCG, gave a speech on small boat safety in New York in which he cited the increasingly large number of calls for assistance the Coast Guard was receiving from boaters. Three hundred thousand pleasure boats were cruising federal waters and an unknown number were operating on sole state waters. An estimated 150,000 outboards were skirting around the country, being the jet skis of their day. The Depression-era dam- and reservoir-building programs had brought man-made lakes under federal control and hydroelectric plants such as the Hoover Dam needed protection. Thus, the Coast Guard's prewar responsibilities had mushroomed considerably, in spite of the economic doldrums of the Depression.

In his speech, Molloy also recalled the work of civilian boaters in World War I. “Should a similar crisis arise in our national life again, your boats and your experience will be needed.” As a result of these factors and concerns on 24 April 1939, Rep. Schuyler Otis Bland of Virginia introduced Bill No. 5966 which would create a Coast Guard Reserve as a volunteer civilian force to promote small boat safety and to facilitate Coast Guard operations.

In testifying before Congress, Acting Treasury Secty. Steven P. Gibbons stated, “The Coast Guard had [sic] felt for some time a definite need for such an organization to assist in the performance of its duties. . .such as the conduct of regattas marine parades. .

.which might require facilities beyond those available to the regular Coast Guard.” The bill was signed into law on 23 June 1939. After its passage, the Coast Guard began to enroll volunteer crews and boats and established training programs for them. The basic operating unit, known as a flotilla, was comprised of a minimum of ten boat owners. Uniforms, insignia, flags, and burgees were designed. A Coast Guard officer would serve as the chief director in Washington and additional officers would direct Coast Guard District activities. By the end of 1940, the Coast Guard Reserve numbered 3,000 members who owned 2,700 boats, organized in 150 flotillas. 2.

As the prospects for U.S. involvement in World War II heightened, officials also saw the need for a military, as well as a non-military reserve. The Coast Guard required a force that could be called to active duty and whose personnel would be subject to military discipline and the articles of war. Thus on 19 February 1941, Congress amended the 1939 act to create the Coast Guard Reserve as a military reserve, and renamed the 1939 civilian reserve, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, maintaining its volunteer status and purposes. Under the terms of the February legislation, a Coast Guard petty officer would be assigned to every Auxiliary patrol.

A 1941 *Popular Science* article enthusiastically touted the virtues of the newly-minted Paul Reveres of the sea. The author recognized that two different sets of skills were needed to handle merchant ships versus small boats. While merchant mariners were entering the Navy, the Coast Guard was:

concentrating on its friends, the yachtsmen, whose knowledge of seamanship, navigation, and gas engines, plus familiarity with local waters and boatmen, makes a national-defense asset immediately convertible to a useful purpose. These men would be greenhorns aboard a battle-wagon, but along the line of their own hobby, many of them are extremely good. And so are their boats.

The *New York Times* reported in August 1941 that in nearly every yacht club along the East Coast “a batch of members had banded together in a Coast Guard Auxiliary flotilla.” By 1943, there also were approximately 100 women members; many were boaters on Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin. Initially these men and women assisted with search and rescue and the enforcement of the 1917 Espionage and the 1940 Federal Boating Acts and carried out collateral duties such as making deliveries to lighthouses. They also patrolled regattas like the Harvard-Yale boat race. 3.

During 1941, as German submarine attacks on U.S. ships became sporadic, in spite of its neutral status, America’s Battle of the Atlantic began. The Germans had been waging war against British shipping since 1939. American lives had been imperiled when British or neutral ships on which U.S. citizens had been traveling were torpedoed.

After the torpedoing of the U.S. merchant ship, *Robin Moor*, on 27 May, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared an Unlimited National Emergency.

In July, the Coast Guard called for the enrollment of 270 Auxiliary and other civilian vessels for use by Coast Guard Districts; each boat was to have six crew members. Waesche specifically cited the need to protect the Tennessee River Valley Authority lakes and other defense sites. Vincent Astor's 263-foot yacht, *Nourmahal*, "donned CG gray for the duration as a floating meteorological station." The service also commissioned 100 Reserve officers and 126 warrant officers. These men and vessels were added to a fleet of 276 cutters (72-foot or longer) and 199 picket boats. Most of the temporary Reserve boats were 30- to 40-feet in length and used for harbor patrols. More than 100 of the largest U.S. yachts had already been taken into service by the British government.

In September 1941, the German submarine threat was such that the Navy began convoying merchant shipping from Newfoundland to Iceland. On 1 November 1941, the Coast Guard was transferred from the Treasury Department to naval command, as required by law in wartime. 4.

On 7 December 1941, Japanese fighters and torpedo bombers attacked Pearl Harbor naval base in Honolulu, Hawaii, as well the Army's nearby Hickman Air Field. The surprise attack resulted in more than 3,500 casualties and America's entry into World War II. Members of the Honolulu Coast Guard Auxiliary rushed to the Coast Guard Station and conducted patrols of the harbor until the afternoon when they were relieved by regulars. San Francisco flotillas began night and day patrols on 7 December. Flotilla 27 of Seattle assisted the Navy by providing picket boats for its minesweepers doing checks of Puget Sound shipping lanes for enemy-laid mines. Nation-wide during the first six weeks of the war, the Auxiliary largely took over harbor patrols.

As a patriotic fervor swept the country following Pearl Harbor, hundreds of yachtsmen and other recreational boat owners flooded into existing Auxiliary flotillas and many new ones were created. Large numbers of men and women enrolled in order to qualify for commissions or ratings in the active duty Coast Guard. "Flotilla Commanders suddenly found themselves snowed under with work, day and night: patrolling, enlisting, organizing, teaching."

### **The "American Hunting Season"**

On 12 December 1941, five days after Pearl Harbor and one day after Germany declared war on the United States, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and Adm. Eric Raeder, naval commander-in-chief, met in conference and decided to send U-boats to raid American

commerce. They based these plans on hopes that the U.S. Navy would transfer ships to the Pacific. They might also buy time in the European war. What they did not know, however, was that it had already been decided with the British that if the United States entered the war, it would do so on a Europe-first strategic basis.

Even though the Mediterranean was a priority, Raeder sent six 500-ton submarines captained by “aces” to waters off the U.S. coast. Taking a month to deploy, by January an average of nineteen submarines operated in the U.S. Strategic Area on a daily basis. Their fuel capacity would allow them to operate in American waters for a two-week period. Each German submarine carried fourteen torpedoes and their deck guns were lethal enough to sink a ship by themselves. By the time the Germans arrived, U.S. forces had only been able to lay 365 mines off the Chesapeake Capes and submarine nets and booms off New York and other harbors. (New York was the busiest port in the world with an average of 50 arrivals and departures per day in November 1941.)

First blood was drawn on 12 January 1942 when the British passenger steamship, *Cyclops*, was sunk 300 miles off Cape Cod. In February, 432,000 tons of shipping went down in the Atlantic, 80 percent off the American coast. In March seventy ships were sunk along the coast. One of the factors that added to the casualty rate was that East Coast cities initially refused to dim their lights which silhouetted ships at night. Finally waterfront and sky signs were shut off on 18 April; a stricter order was imposed in May. Merchant ship captains sailing independently hugged the coastlines, believing the U-boats could not penetrate inshore which was not the case. In March, representatives of the petroleum industry met with Navy and War Department officers, warning them that if the rate of tanker sinkings were maintained, after nine months America's war-waging ability would be crippled due to lack of fuel oil. (They estimated a 40 percent further loss of ships and possibly the deaths of 3,000 more seamen.) The Germans proclaimed this period “the American hunting season.”

During this time, the U.S. government had its hands full supplying ships for two oceans. Moreover, initially, it responded ineffectively to the submarine threat. Adm. Ernest J. King, the new chief of naval operations, focused on the Pacific War and naval offensive strategy, and thought the submarine threat would soon diminish. Further, he lacked convoy escorts; officials would have staged maritime executions if they had bunched ships together without adequate protection. Moreover, King's dislike of the British was well-known in Washington and he received conflicting advice from the Royal Navy. However, Army General-in-Chief George C. Marshall was one of those who argued the importance of implementing defensive measures, as a result of his fear that he would lack transports to deploy troops overseas, which was a priority even at that early date. In May 1942, King finally ordered coastal convoying between Maine and Florida.

5.

Regardless of these problems, the coastal defense of merchant ships had to be provided for with a limited number of small military ships and acquired civilian vessels. In March, all Naval District Commanding Officers were ordered to “leave no stones unturned” in searching for vessels appropriate for antisubmarine work. In April, the number of vessels authorized for the Coast Guard Reserves was increased. By 1 April, the Eastern Sea Frontier Command had at its disposal sixty-five (75-90-foot) Coast Guard cutters, three 173-foot PC's, twelve Eagle boats and converted yachts and fourteen armed British trawlers. Eight-four Army planes and eighty-six Navy planes were flying out of nineteen bases. The Royal Navy also loaned the United States twenty-two converted trawlers whose crews had had substantial antisubmarine warfare experience.

Meanwhile other defensive measures were being implemented, the most important being the coastal convoy system. Army, Navy and Civil Air Patrol planes increased patrols. Because of the prevalence of night attacks, vessels were ordered to anchor overnight in the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays and behind Cape Lookout in North Carolina. They were also routed through Long Island Sound and the Cape Cod Canal. Later Navy destroyers were assigned the near futile task of hunting the U-boats, as President Woodrow Wilson had described it in World War I, like chasing hornets around a barnyard. Although potential losses diminished as a result of these efforts, the cumulative total rose as spring foliage bloomed along the East Coast. In a case in point, only one member of the Chilean freighter, *Tolten*, survived a torpedoing thirty miles from the Ambrose Channel that leads into New York Harbor.

During this time the Coast Guard Auxiliary was performing important security and search and rescue duties, freeing up Coast Guard assets. In Massachusetts, Salem and Marblehead flotilla members conducted 12-hour winter patrols in an open unheated sea skiff. (XX:71) New Jersey flotillas checked “commercial fishing boats and their crews upon departure and arrival at docks in Wildwood, Two Mile, and Cape May to guard against their carrying supplies to enemy vessels off-shore or bringing enemy agents ashore. . . .” The Auxiliary's Cape Fear, North Carolina Division patrolled twenty-six inlets on a 24-hour basis, enduring the blazing hot sun during the day and sand flies and other insects at night. During the war, members rescued 300 persons from marshes and waters between Wilmington, North Carolina and Fernandina, Florida, most of whom were victims of plane crashes and small boat cases.

German tactics introduced in May presented new dangers to patrol boats. Eleven mine fields were laid by submarines off U.S. seaports which fortunately caused little damage (six ships were sunk or damaged, five in the channel approaching the Chesapeake Capes). Seven were discovered and swept up; the presence of the other four was not made known until the end of the war through German records. 6.

The increased effectiveness of defensive measures on the East Coast caused the Germans to concentrate off Florida and the Gulf of Mexico at the end of April where pickings were better. Six submarines began operating in the area. In May, forty-one ships were sunk of which 55 percent represented tanker tonnage. Two target-rich areas were the Florida Straits and the Passes in the Mississippi below New Orleans.

On 7 December 1941, William M. Mansfield, a noted Florida sportsman, reported to the Fort Lauderdale, Coast Guard Station and offered his services to the commanding officer. Within the next few months Mansfield used his considerable network of friends to enroll hundreds of boat owners in the Coast Guard Auxiliary. By September 1942, flotillas had sprung up in sixteen coastal cities. Members had offered 165 30-100-foot boats for use as operational facilities.

The area of the Florida Straits off the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse was a prime hunting ground for submarines, as it was lit, had a deep narrow shipping channel, and was fifty miles from the nearest small boat station. Small Auxiliary vessels patrolling offshore with no running lights risked being rammed by merchant ships that were also blacked out. Crews were in danger of being shot at by newly-trained naval gun crews then aboard merchant ships or mistaken for the enemy by the Coast Guard. On 28 April 1942, the District Director of the Coast Guard Reserve and Auxiliary reported that on 9 April orders had been issued to dispatch as many Auxiliary vessels as possible to the shipping lanes between St. Augustine and the Jupiter Light, 7:00 P.M. to sunrise, to look for distress signals and to rescue survivors. The report noted that given the dangers of mistaken identity, "The possibility of loss of Auxiliary personnel and boats on this patrol should be considered." It concluded that in the future it would be safer to station vessels close to the beaches. In this way they could be out of the shipping lanes, but be near enough to be able to respond to distress calls. On 5 May, the Commandant of the Coast Guard sent the following to the 7th District Commander: "In view of the heavy losses among personnel of torpedoed vessels along the coasts, the Commandant directs that immediate steps be taken to utilize vessels and members of the auxiliary to the fullest extent for the purpose of rescuing survivors."

In spite of hazards, during one 2-week period, Auxiliary crews rescued 151 survivors of submarine sinkings. The tanker, *Halsey*, was torpedoed just before dawn on 7 May. Coast Guard Auxiliary and commercial fishing vessels rescued 32 men. Also in May two Mexican tankers were sunk, a week apart. Members from three Auxiliary flotillas rescued 22 survivors from the *Petrero de Lano* that was engulfed in flames "while hundreds of civilians lined Miami Beach or watched [the rescue operation] from skyscraper hotel windows," as the ship was torpedoed a short distance from shore. The Auxiliarists "drove their little boats right into the flames" that had spread over the water

to take on the men. Active duty Coast Guard crews rescued 28 from the second Mexican ship. Auxiliarist Kit Johnson and crew rescued 22 merchant seamen from lifeboats off the SS *Java Arrow* that had been torpedoed on the night of 5 May. Johnson's overloaded boat was in a sinking condition when he brought it into the dock at the Fort Pierce Coast Guard Station.

In what was perhaps the largest Auxiliary/Reserve rescue of the war, on 8 July 1942, Dr. E. E. Kitchens and Mr. B. R. Smith, both members of Miami flotillas, were on vacation with their families in the Keys. The American tanker, *J. A. Moffett, Jr.*, was torpedoed eight miles off shore. Coast Guard boats were laid up with repairs, so Kitchens and Smith took the crews on board their two boats and left in heavy seas for the scene. Before they reached the tanker, survivors in two lifeboats were located. Kitchens took them on board and started to return to the station. Smith, with eleven survivors including the Chief Engineer, continued on to the tanker to try to find the captain, retrieve the ship's papers, and determine salvage needs. The captain was found dead, caught in the lifeboat falls. Meanwhile, Kitchens found sixteen more survivors and was now dangerously overloaded with at least thirty people on board. To return, he had to navigate without lights, in heavy seas, and through shallow channels. For his feat in bringing his boat and victims into port safely, Kitchens earned a commendation from the Commandant.

Willard Lewis became a local celebrity after he and crew members met up with a German submarine. While patrolling in a 38-foot cruiser off Ft. Lauderdale, Lewis was ordered to search for survivors of a tanker that had been torpedoed. Soon they came upon a U-boat whose diving fins had apparently been damaged by shots from the deck gun of the tanker; it was diving and surfacing repetitively. After it dove a second time and Lewis waited for it to resurface, he told his crew "the boys" back at the base would never believe that they had seen a sub. Suddenly with "crunching impact" the submarine surfaced under them, lifting the cruiser and tumbling Lewis and crew onto their deck. Lewis's boat limped back to the station with the paint marks of the U-boat as souvenirs and proof of their encounter.

Records state, "Time after time, these Auxiliarists took their tiny boats out, a few armed with rifles, others with boat hooks and flashlights, to haul drowning, burned, merchant seamen from the sea." Ultimately, the Coast Guard Auxiliary rescued more than 500 seamen from the sea during this dark period of the war.

Members also supplied vital local information and identified potential hiding places of submarines. At least four female temporary Reservists conducted patrols as operators and crew. In the case of Jean Linderman, the Coast Guard considered it too costly to train and house crews on her Florida Key, so they assigned her her own patrol

area of responsibility. In her finest hour, she led authorities to a military deserter who had been living on a local island. 7.

Early in 1942, the 7th District detailed the assignment of Coast Guard boats in the state. As an example at Key West there were: 2 examination vessels; 4 boats for convoy anchorage; 2 boats for carrying men and messages for convoys; 6 boats for harbor patrol; 6 boats for bridge patrols on keys; 1 fire boat.

By the end of May 1942, the German submarines had made their way into the Gulf of Mexico. Coast Guard commanders there had many fewer ships and aircraft to deal with the threat than had their counterparts on the East Coast. At the beginning of April, only three yachts, nine Coast Guard cutters, and two destroyers were available. Army and Navy planes patrolled from Miami and West Palm Beach air stations. During May and June an additional thirty-four cutters, patrol boats, and minesweepers, along with one converted yacht were added to the ASW fleet. As in the North, officers improvised. They changed shipping routes, concentrated search boats, and set up killer groups of ships and planes. More aircraft also became available.

The submarine situation in the Gulf was so severe that local Coast Guard officers did not wait for the establishment of operations on a national basis. The Auxiliary Coast Patrol was formed as a task group, headed by the commanding officer of the 8th District. Five bases were manned by Regulars, Auxiliarists, and Reservists. In Morgan City, Louisiana, in November 1942, the Patrol consisted of 137 boats, 126 of which were owned by shrimp fishermen. Allowances were made for their livelihoods, as they could fish at random and took turns manning their stations. These crews operated all over the Gulf and were furnished with guns and radios. They were ultimately responsible for saving the lives of many survivors of torpedo sinkings.

As an example of the Auxiliary's work in the Gulf, at 0210 EWT on 29 June 1942, the British tanker, SS *Empire Mica*, was torpedoed off Florida. It was enveloped in flames and the majority of its crew was trapped below decks. At 0540 when the Auxiliary vessel arrived, it found no survivors. It then received a call of a sighting of a life boat four miles to the northeast. CGAV *Countess* proceeded to the location and took the lifeboat with fourteen survivors in tow.

Taking note of the Auxiliary's work, at a Washington conference in May, it was decided that the Coast Guard was to provide additional coastal patrol craft. Admiral King directed the Commander of the Eastern Sea Frontier to put out a call for boats which could remain seaworthy for forty-eight hours in good weather; these would constitute the Coastal Picket Force. The ESF Commander's order to the Districts stated:

The use of the Coast Guard Auxiliary vessels, operating from Coast Guard

Stations at various inlets along the Coast and patrolling inside and outside the shipping lanes, has already proven the feasibility of such a plan and warrants a much more extensive use of such vessels for rescues and observation purposes. A number of small yacht owners have signified their willingness to go to sea and, while cruising off shore, act as observation vessels.

All Commandants will therefore take steps to contact all yacht owners and, through the Coast Guard, after certification as to nationality, etc., get as many as possible of these craft at sea on observation duty. . . . Steps are to be taken also to induct into the Coast Guard Auxiliary service as many vessels as possible to act as rescue boats from Coast Guard Stations and as patrol boats for inside and outside sea lanes.

Aside from these measures, Washington hoped to replace lost ships. According to the *New York Times* in May, two armed merchant ships a day were coming off the production line. The government promised that by December this would be increased to three. 8.

### **The Coastal Picket Force**

To meet the on-going crisis in June of 1942, transfers to and enrollment in the Coast Guard Reserve on a part-time or intermittent basis were authorized under an Amendment to the 1941 Auxiliary and Reserve Act. Thus, more Auxiliarists transferred into these units on a part-time or intermittent basis without military pay or on a full- or part-time basis with military pay. The age limits for the Reserve were 17 to 64 and the physical requirements were not strict. For the most part then, Auxiliarists who could not meet the physical requirements of the Reserve stayed in the Auxiliary and those who were physically fit transferred into the Reserve. By 30 June 1942, the Auxiliary had 11,500 members with 9,500 boats from 400 flotillas; 1,000 boats and most of their crews already had been taken into the Reserves.

Men and women--sometimes married--from all walks of life now flooded reserve units. Members included accountants, secretaries, doctors, janitors, teachers, construction workers. In one case a bank president stood watch with his clerk. Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Boston Pops, joined, as did a former Governor of Maine. World War I veterans were represented in force. The Boston area distinguished itself by having the largest enrollment in the Auxiliary and, hence, as temporary Reservists. There were approximately 13,000 Auxiliary members. Of this number, nearly 10,000 enrolled as temporary members of the Reserves. Flotilla 201 of Portland, Maine had the largest number: 431, as of 1943. By the end of 1945, the 3rd Naval District in New York counted 11,318 members and 3,487 boats.

By July 1942, two developments spurred even greater organizational efforts. First was the unremitting toll on merchant shipping. In the Gulf, between 6 and 20 May of 1942, there were eighteen attacks on merchant vessels in which ten were sunk. In June, two teams of four German saboteurs each were landed on Long Island and near Jacksonville, Florida, from submarines. In reaction, enrollment in the Coast Guard Reserve on a full-time paid, but intermittent, basis was begun aggressively. In the same month, an integrated Army-Navy-Coast Guard "Sea Frontier" defense system was fully established that included beach, inshore, and offshore patrols; volunteer port security units; and a coastal picket force. (6:XVII:3-11; 6:XX:21, 24, 37) The system that was established was for Auxiliary and small Reserve vessels to do inshore and near offshore patrols and larger, seaworthy vessels of the Coastal Picket Force to conduct patrols along a 50-fathom curve of the Atlantic and Gulf seaboard, sometimes as far as 150 miles out to sea.

Both motor- and sailboats were used for the Coastal Picket Force. Boston Auxiliarists enrolled 60 sailboats and 40 motorboats in the CPF. In New York, a 7-member committee consisting of Coast Guard and Auxiliary officers and some of the premier names in American yachting, such as Charles F. Chapman, author of the classic, *Chapman Piloting*, worked at the New York Yacht Club for two months enrolling boats and crews. The two largest CPF bases in the New York region were at Greenport, Long Island and Manasquan, New Jersey. It appears that the Auxiliary's major role in the CPF was to enroll the vessels. However, a number of yachts and crews were manned by Auxiliarists who transferred into the Reserves. An "associate" membership category was created to accommodate those who were not boat owners and, thus, civilian crews flooded into units. 9.

The first Coastal Picket Force boat, *Two Pals*, left the Greenport base on 29 July 1942. Stations were assigned according to the Army's Interceptor Command system. This divided the U.S. littoral into 15 nautical-square-mile sectors and boats patrolled grid areas for specified periods of time. Crews were to "observe and report the actions and activities of all hostile submarine, surface and air forces."

From June until December 1942, many Reservists came into the CPF full-time with pay, serving one- to five-month periods. In the middle of December, the temporary members of the Reserves were given the choice of enrolling in the Reserves on a full-time paid basis, staying in as Reservists on a full or part-time basis without pay, or separating from the service.

By mid-September of 1942, 480 CPF vessels were working along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts out of more than thirty bases. By December, nationwide, there were 2,093

Reserve vessels. Together with Coast Guard craft (regular and acquired), the total number of vessels operating offshore was 3,256.

The large 50- to 100-foot sailboats were the signature vessels of the CPF. They became important assets for antisubmarine patrol, as they could hear submarines more easily than motorboats and the Germans could not hear them. In addition, they had longer cruising ranges and could take heavy weather better.

Members of the CPF at Greenport, Long Island lived up to their hardy sailor reputations. As the winter of 1942 approached, the Coast Guard wanted to transfer many of the boats south, because of the particularly severe weather conditions. The members, however, pleaded to stay in operation, saying they thought they could “take it.” As a result, the group sustained operations during the winter in all but the most severe weather conditions.

In December of 1942, Adm. Adolphus Andrews, commander of the Eastern Sea Frontier, sent the following (excerpted) letter to all task group commanders. He ordered that the letter be posted at all coastal picket stations:

'On three recent occasions coastal picket vessels have been caught offshore by sudden winter gales. Certain of these vessels have been severely punished by the elements and faced conditions which made it impossible even to maintain fires in their stoves for cooking or for heating. . . . One picket boat with all hands busily engaged in an effort to keep afloat in the high seas, had an additional task of extinguishing a fire which broke out in the engine room. Another boat, after battling head winds and high seas for a day and a night, exhausted its fuel supply. In consequence of the excellent seamanship displayed by the commanding officer of this boat, and of the assisting boat, fuel was transferred at sea under the existing difficult conditions. . . . In spite of the discomfort and danger connected with their tasks, it is noted that those men who have undergone these experiences are uniformly anxious to refit as expeditiously as possible, and return to their patrols. Such morale on the part of the coastal picket men is commendable in the highest degree.

To effect their anti-submarine work, CGR vessels were armed with four 300-pound depth charges, one (usually .50 caliber) machine gun, and a radio. The key to this work was to man the listening devices and keep contact with and track the submarine. 'Often other vessels were sent to pick up contact, and if the source were located the area was 'developed'. If vessels with heavier armament took up the search, the Coastal Pickets resumed their patrols.' Planes might be sent to investigate. Navy vessels and convoys were informed of the contacts. As long as the small boats could keep the submarines submerged, the probability of sinkings lessened. Due to the necessity for greater speed, the German submarines tracked the convoys and usually attacked surfaced, and at night.

The doctrine for the CPF was very clear and worth quoting at length:

'It may be assumed that enemy action will take one of the following forms:

- (a) Submarine activity against shipping
- (b) Aircraft attack on New York vicinity
- (c) Surface craft employed as raiders or scouts
- (d) Attempts to land ground forces
- (e) The laying of mines in coastal waters by submarine, surface vessels, or aircraft
- (f) Bombardment of shore objectives by submarine or surface vessels.

Therefore the mission of the CPF boats was fourfold: a) report instantly b) maintain observation c) attack when armament permitted and d) report distress of U.S. forces and assist. Orders emphasized that protection could only be afforded if convoys were adequately warned. Therefore, crews must be constantly alert and their radios had to be in good working order, Further:

Contact with the enemy having been established by sight or sound will not be broken as long as it is possible to maintain it. . . . This may mean certain destruction of a picket boat but may save a convoy. Men in the old Life Saving Service confronted with the necessity of launching through a dangerous surf had a slogan which seems applicable also to the Pickets, 'You have to go out, but the Regulations don't say you have to come back. . . .

The performance of the third part of the mission is simple. If you have 'cans' [depth charges] use them. Your Lewis guns are not able to compete with the 9" or even the 20 millimeter guns of the enemy but by vigorously rushing him you may prevent him from manning these guns and may thus force him to submerge.'

Aside from the submarine work, the Picket Force's other main duty was search and rescue of survivors of torpedoed vessels and of other distress cases. They also were

responsible for recording sightings, unidentified sounds and significant flotsam and jetsam.

As an example of a CPF case, on 17 May 1942, the English vessel, *Peisander*, was torpedoed 300 miles off Bermuda and three lifeboats were launched. The CGC *General Greene* received orders to join the search on 24 May. In the meantime, lifeboats 4 and 6 (22 and 21 survivors respectively) were located and towed in by CGR-37 and a CG lifeboat from Maddaket Station. On 25 May, *Greene* departed Nantucket with two CG reserve vessels in search of the third lifeboat. At 0945 hours, it sighted it and a sub as well. It swung its bow around to try to ram the submarine, but the U-boat dove. *Greene* dropped three depth charges and an oil slick 400 feet in diameter appeared and no sound contact was made for the next twenty-five minutes. The *Greene* then took on board the eighteen survivors from the lifeboat and they explained that the submarine had been trailing them. When the SS *Plow City* had attempted a rescue four days before, it was torpedoed (thirty crew members of the *Plow City* were picked up five days later). At 1601 hours the CGC *Greene* arrived in Nantucket and all the survivors from the three lifeboats were taken to Newport, Rhode Island.

In another incident on 19 September 1942, in the 4th ND, a Civil Air Patrol (CAP) plane spotted a submarine and dropped a smoke bomb to identify its position. The smoke was seen by CGR-4436 which proceeded to the sighting at full speed. The plane dropped another smoke bomb off its bow. The CGRV dropped a depth charge which resulted in the eruption of a large column of water with black oil. By the time the submarine was attacked, five CAP planes, four Navy planes, one Navy blimp, and two Navy vessels had joined in on the case.

The case of the CGR 3070, a.k.a., *Zaida*, became legendary. In December 1942 as it was ending its week-long patrol, the 58-foot yawl with her crew of nine nearly rolled on its beam in gale force winds that snapped the mizzen mast and caused other damage. Skipper Curtis Arnall, one of the radio voices of comic book hero, Buck Rogers, was able to send a distress message. Then he headed the boat southwest, running sometimes with winds so strong that they sailed barepoled. Over the course of the next twenty days, more than twenty-five planes and ships of the U.S. Army and Canadian Air Forces, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. and British navies searched for the sturdy craft. During this time, all the while experiencing a number of wrenching failed rescue attempts, *Zaida* sailed 3,100 miles from off Nantucket Shoals to Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina. Finally the boat was sighted fifteen miles from shore by a blimp and was taken in tow by a Coast Guard cutter. The hunt for *Zaida* constituted the largest search and rescue operation in the Atlantic by Allied Forces during World War II.

A significant duty of CPF vessels was to record critical incidents and sightings. Vessel logs recorded: sightings of submarines, aircraft, unidentified vessels, fishermen and lifeboats; floating drums, mines, loose buoys, and targets; gunshots and explosions heard; oil slicks discovered and oil samples taken for analysis; towing and other SAR cases. CGR-3065 even recorded the landing of a homing pigeon with an injured leg. 10.

## **Port Security**

During the war, thousands of Auxiliarists, serving as Reservists, also performed port security duties. Uniquely in the First and Third Districts, the Auxiliary (as temporary members of the Reserve) was solely responsible for port security. Commands known as Volunteer Port Security Force Units were organized in twenty-two port cities as temporary Reserve units. Although most other Auxiliary/TR units operated separately, VPSF units were enrolled from the Auxiliary in southern California, the upper Midwest (9th ND), and in the Northwest (13th ND). Los Angeles and Long Beach California Auxiliarists held dual titles as members of the Auxiliary and the local VPSF Unit. In other cities, Auxiliary/TR units afloat cooperated with VPSF ones.

Prior to and during World War II new regulations, laws, and amendments increased the Coast Guard's enforcement powers in harbors and at waterfront facilities. Following the 1939 Neutrality Proclamation, the Coast Guard was charged with sealing ships' radios to prevent communication with the enemy. Ships were checked to make sure armaments were not being brought into ports. Anchorage regulations were revised and the Dangerous Cargo Act of 1940 was passed. Explosive regulations were implemented in April 1941. In June 1942, all port security responsibilities were delegated to the Coast Guard.

Port security duties included: controlling entrance, movement, and anchorage of vessels; fire prevention and fighting; supervision of loading and storage of ammunition and explosives; sealing ships' radios; guarding piers, stored cargo, docked ships, and harbor areas; licensing of commercial vessels operating in local waters; issuance and checking of identification cards for access to waterfront facilities and for recreational vessels; enforcing regulations pertaining to use of cameras and binoculars. Because of the voluminous amounts of ammunition being shipped, fire prevention and detection (particularly because the dangers of smoking and of cutting and welding in repair facilities) was a primary duty. German sabotage was also a concern. The 1942 burning of the French liner, *Normandie*, that was being converted to a troop transport, moved the Coast Guard to augment cities' fireboat fleets by converting 150 small craft--tugs, luggers, tourist, fishing vessels--to fireboats. The service also built 103 30-foot Harvey boats that were equipped with four 500-gallon-a-minute fire pumps. Temporary Reservists manned fireboats in Portland, Maine; Providence, Rhode Island; Washington,

D.C.; Cleveland, Ohio; and Galveston, Texas. Units at St. Paul, Minnesota; Rock Island, Illinois; and Memphis, Tennessee were manned entirely by “TRs,” as they were popularly known.

Beating their dockside and ship posts TRs detained, interrogated, and arrested persons; detected and extinguished ship and pier fires; thwarted incidents of theft and assaults; assisted at large fires, medical emergencies, drownings and during storms; and enforced laws and regulations. Munition ship security details consisted of men at each hold; one on the weather decks; one for the gangway; and several on the piers. As an example of the work of the port security units, the Los Angeles Auxiliary/VPSF unit at its peak comprised 2,400 members, including 175 women. Members served as “commercial fishing boat inspectors, fire watchers, guards and sentries at docks and piers, in the ID office, and on transportation and radio watches, as well as on duty in vessels at piers.” Farragut Flotilla No. 25 Reservists from Camden, New Jersey saved twenty-four women and children from drowning on 19 August 1944 when the gangway of the steamer, *State of Pennsylvania*, collapsed while taking on passengers (a 12-year-old boy drowned and an elderly woman later died of a heart attack.) (Camden:45; XX:60-61) During the war, the port of Philadelphia that was manned by TRs in abundance, handled 100 million tons of shipping, yet there were no cases of uncontrolled fires or sabotage.

More than 2,000 women also served as temporary Reservists in VPSF units. In some Districts they received the same training as the men, including small arms training. They checked ID's in security booths, performed administrative duties, and served as drivers, messengers, and auto mechanics.

Nationwide Auxiliary/Reserve members were less active in beach patrols that included foot, canine, and mounted patrols; these were mostly conducted by active duty Coastguardsmen. Yet in Florida and other Districts, members stood lookout in watchtowers on beaches. In Panama City, Maj. Frank Wood's, USA (ret.), flotilla members also served in mounted units, as well as on every other type of patrol. New England members were extensively used on beach patrols, pounding lonely beaches on hot summer days and cold winter nights, often accompanied by trained dogs. A member of Flotilla 600 in Duxbury, Massachusetts on Cape Cod reported: “The beach itself is annoying rather than dangerous. During most of the year it is covered with round, slippery rocks concealed by slimy kelp; it is strewn with lobster-pots, barrels, ships' fenders, water-logged mattresses, flotsam, jetsam, and just plain skudge.” Approximately 15 percent of TRs on Lake Michigan stood lookout in lifeboat stations. Sightings included submarines, flares, suspicious lights, and unlit vessels. Beach patrols members saved people from drowning. During the worst of the submarine warfare in the spring of 1942, Daytona Beach Flotilla members located bodies during their rounds. 11.

Land and dock patrols were conducted by a mix of active duty members and temporary Reservists. Regarding harbor and inshore patrols, however, “Virtually all duty by Temporary Reservists enrolled by the Auxiliary was, in the earlier days, confined to the operation of patrol craft. . . . Uniforms were not issued until July 1942 and given the large influx of new members during the first months of the war, often men went on duty without proper uniforms. As one commented, “It is a wonder that a lot of us were not shot by men in the boats we stopped and boarded thinking we were enemies bent on sabotage or piracy.” In Booth Bay Harbor, Maine, Fuller Dunton and Cliff Huskins conducted two 12-hour night inlet patrols a week, after which they reported to their regular jobs in the morning.

The duties of harbor, inlet, and river patrol members were to constantly watch for fires and unauthorized craft with no or improper identification; report unidentified vessels; report and clear navigation and seaplane landing hazards; report aids to navigation that were off station; maintain a lookout for accidents and assist with search and rescue; assist at boat fires, drownings, and plane crashes; salvage planes and boats; and recover bodies.

A great number of landing craft, ranging from small infantry barges to large landing ships, transited south down the Mississippi River and its tributaries from Midwest factories during the war. Reservists were out in force on the rivers, serving as picket boats for this line of sail. Because of the need for local river knowledge, given the changing channels and strong currents, to say nothing of islands and debris, in some cases Reservists went on board Navy ships to act as advisory pilots.

Especially in the early days, most flotillas conducted their own training. Later specialized schools were established in some locales such as the Auxiliary “boot camp” in Bourne, Massachusetts. Members were also sent for Coast Guard training in such specialities as firearms and firefighting. Aside from the typical nautical topics of rules of the road, boat and line handling, aids to navigation and piloting, members were trained in such topics as military ranks, ratings, courtesy and customs; loading explosives; chemical warfare; first aid; radio communications; motor mechanics; blinker and semaphore communication. In many locales a combination of written and oral examinations qualified members.

The TR patrols compiled a staggering list of accomplishments. Three hundred TRs patrolled the lakes of the Tennessee River Valley Authority. In New Haven harbor, Yale undergraduates crewed two 6-hour night shifts seven days a week. Enthusiasm was so high that the reserve list totaled sixty men. On 19 August 1943, men were underway in fifteen minutes after having been called from their jobs in Middletown, Connecticut.

The crew reached the scene of a plane crash five miles off shore in thirty-five minutes. The body of the pilot was recovered by TRs after a two-day search by several agencies. A tugboat exploded in Port Angeles, Washington. TRs were first on the scene and to apply water to the fire; they saved the master who had been blown overboard; and stood by to render additional assistance.

On 3 January 1944, at 0640 a series of explosions shook the USS *Turner* a destroyer anchored approximately three miles from the Ambrose Lightship off New York City. Among other Coast Guard and Navy assets, twelve boats, partly manned by Reservists, were dispatched from Rockaway and Sandy Hook Lifeboat Stations reaching the disaster area between 0730 and 0755. CGR-1904 alone evacuated 39 survivors. Of the 156 survivors, 160 were taken off by the Coast Guard “in accordance with the traditions of the service.”

Natural disasters have always provided the Auxiliary opportunities to conduct dramatic rescues. The same was true during wartime. During a “big blow” in Bellingham, Washington on 15 January 1945:

Two-thirds of the TRs turned out for night-long special duty to save dozens of families from hunger and discomfort, and many craft from destruction. They protected small boats from damage by 30-foot logs broken loose from a boom which were sweeping about the harbor like battering rams. Later, a TR-manned Coast Guard vessel, hampered by high seas and heavy icing, provided food and livestock feed for 15 families in isolated inlets.

During the May-June 1943 disastrous Mississippi floods during which more than 6,000 families were affected or made homeless by 15- to 20-foot waters, 250 TRs assisted. Coast Guard members helped rescue 7,000 head of cattle, 17,000 hogs, 600 horses, 900 mules, and 20,000 poultry. Only six human lives were lost. 12.

As the submarine threat diminished after March 1943 and the need for overseas deployment increased, the roles of the Auxiliary and temporary Reservists shifted. From May 1943 on, Auxiliary efforts became directed at training men for active duty in the Reserves. By the end of 1943 most water patrols had ended and units were shifted to perform shore duties.

### **“You’re in the Army Now!”**

After the attack on Pearl Harbor that ushered America into the war, U.S. officials looked west to America’s Pacific possessions and allies that were seriously threatened by the Japanese military machine. During the 1930s two brothers from Long Island, A. Bruce and J. Sheridan Fahnestock, along with their mother and friends, had conducted two

highly publicized South Sea exploring expeditions sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History and other institutions. The Fahnestock family were also personal friends of President Roosevelt. As a result of their sailing experience, the Fahnestocks became impressed with the need to establish a small boat fleet if America became involved in the war. The southwest Pacific was riddled with islands and reefs that would make invasions difficult and afford little maneuverability for battleships, aircraft carriers, and other large warships. Thus in December 1941, "Mission X" staff consisting of the Fahnestock brothers, exploring crew members, and other analysts met in Washington to develop a plan to relieve the Philippines. However, given the swiftness of Japanese advances, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall saw that the real priority was to save Australia. After he evacuated to Australia from the Philippines in March, Gen. Douglas MacArthur determined that New Guinea would be its defensive line. In July 1942, Japanese forces invaded the north coast of New Guinea at Buna and other points. MacArthur spent the next two years retaking the inhospitable island.

In the spring of 1942, the Fahnestocks and others who had been commissioned as army officers arrived in Australia to cobble together a small boat fleet under the terms of a reverse lend-lease agreement. This motley assortment included ferries, fishing trawlers, coastal traders, pearl luggers, and more. It became known as "MacArthur's Navy." In November, the first invasion along the north shore of New Guinea at Pongani was headed by the Fahnestocks in their small boat fleet. Over the next few years, this force would serve as the major life line for MacArthur's forces on the island. These craft brought in everything from canned and powered food, to ammunition, to airstrip matting, to medical supplies. Crews also evacuated the sick, wounded, and dead.

Yet by the spring and summer of 1943, the Army was becoming increasingly short of not only boats, but crews, to supply MacArthur. Hence U.S. boatmen and mariners were recruited as civilian contract employees in the Army's Small Ships Branch of its Transportation Corps. Although the precise number is unknown, many Auxiliarists signed up for this duty. Edwin Dennis and five other members of their Queens, New York flotilla enrolled in the fall. Three weeks after his visit to an Army Brooklyn recruiting station and testing in California, Dennis found himself in New Guinea. He became the deck engineer on the *Jane Moorehead*, an 1885 72-foot ketch that had been brought into service as part of the Fahnestock fleet. It was equipped with two .50 caliber machine guns and had no electricity, refrigeration, or toilet facilities. Their boat ferried supplies up and down the New Guinea coast and into combat areas. As Dennis remarked, "If you could handle a small boat and you didn't mind going into a combat zone in a virtually unarmed vessel, you were signed on." Dennis later was transferred to a medical evacuation ship. In total approximately 1,300 Auxiliarists and other American mariners served in the Army's navy during the war in the Pacific. 13.

## **Above and Beyond Their Regular Duties**

The above catalogues only some of the highlights of maritime service contributed by members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Reserve during the war. However, their ancillary work demonstrated an even more impressive record. A few units established medical units: three completely equipped medical ships in the Seattle area; a floating hospital off Miami. A home economist established a small-boat cooking school in Seattle. In the 4th Naval District, men procured and trained dogs. More common corollary duties included as radiomen, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, painters, metalsmiths and more. Most units published their own newsletters, directives, and magazines; many District ones are still in print. The Third District established the Auxiliary press that published training manuals and news publications for the whole country. In a typical month, it completed 500,000 impressions. Members sold millions of dollars worth of war bonds, and bought them as well. The Auxiliary fielded a number of bands. The Cleveland one was awarded a distinguished service citation by the Music War Council. San Francisco Auxiliarists raised \$437,000 in war bonds in 1944 and fielded a 35-piece band. As was the case with other citizens, blood-giving became a habit. Among Auxiliarists there was a "two-gallon" club. In 1944, Temps conducted a recruiting drive for CG Women Reservists, known as SPARs, and active duty Reservists. Throughout the Auxiliary's existence, fellowship, has been a major cornerstone, so social activities such as dinners, dances, and clambakes, were organized that included the participation of active duty personnel. 14. (XX: 100-104)

## **Casualties**

It must also be noted that 137 of these men and women Reservists died while in active service during the war, relatively, a large number for homeland duty. A number of deaths resulted from pneumonia and heart attacks, no doubt due to winter patrols in open boats and the more advanced ages of the reservists. A significant number also sustained injuries: falls on docks and off decks, in car accidents, burns, slips on ice, etc. 15.

## **Conclusion**

So what is the historical significance of these 50,000 Auxiliarist and 50,000 temporary Reservists who played an extraordinary role in homeland defense during the war? Most obviously their importance was the number of Coastguardsmen they released for duty overseas. During the war, the Coast Guard manned 349 Navy vessels, 291 Army vessels, and 762 Coast Guard vessels (65-foot or longer) totaling 1,404 large craft. Given that most reservists volunteered 24 hours per week, a full-time equivalent has been estimated to be a ratio of 6 TRs for each active duty member released. The official number of Coast Guardsmen, thus, released for overseas duty is estimated at 8,250. Also at the end

of 1944 the Auxiliary's air wing which supports Coast Guard air operations had just been formed. Further, during the week large numbers of these volunteers were employed in wartime business. Because of their civilian training, they often brought extra skills to the Coast Guard. Their ancillary duties were also largely undertaken on their own initiative. Given this addition of skill and time, one must consider that their volunteer time was more valuable than if one new active duty recruit had replaced a Coastguardsmen deployed overseas.

Two other factors stand out in viewing the Coast Guard Auxiliary's record of service during World War II: the volunteer and maritime traditions in America. To many Americans the images of minute men and militias might seem to be quaint, candy caricatures learned in elementary school. The power of their real existence should not be underestimated, however. Militia proved their worth at Lexington and Concord and their presence was pivotal at the Battle of Saratoga during the Revolutionary War. America is the only nation whose society and government were built from the bottom up. Each frontier community largely was responsible for itself. Our Constitution declares that sovereignty resides with the people. One of the major reasons for the American Revolution was that the British government tried to impose an imperial government upon an already well-developed political entity. This fact, enforced by religious and political ideals and laws, has given Americans a sense of "ownership" of their government that, this author believes, is unique in the world. The spirit of volunteerism in America stems in good part from this sense of ownership and fact of societal development. The Coast Guard Auxiliary is just one shining example of this tradition.

Finally, there is an appeal in the maritime tradition that has few equals. As a boater stated to a *Time* magazine reporter in 1959, "Out there. . . a man's a boy and a boy's a man. When you're out of sight of land, life loses its complexity; it's just you and the sea, and suddenly north is important to you." And so we have seen that during World War II, bank presidents stood watch with their clerks. Orchestra conductors crewed with janitors. Both had to be clear about where north was and be responsible for each other. Moreover, all made meaningful contributions to the war effort whether it was checking identification cards, discovering a fire, rescuing a drowning victim, or depth charging a submarine. Today, a few World War II Auxiliarists are still members. There are many actively serving World War II veterans. This author believes it was and is the meaningful work and the maritime egalitarian traditions of shared knowledge, competency, and responsibility that created such a powerful, vibrant organization during the years of World War II and that continues to this day. The Coast Guard Auxiliary motto is a fitting one: "A Proud Tradition, A Worthy Mission." 16.

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