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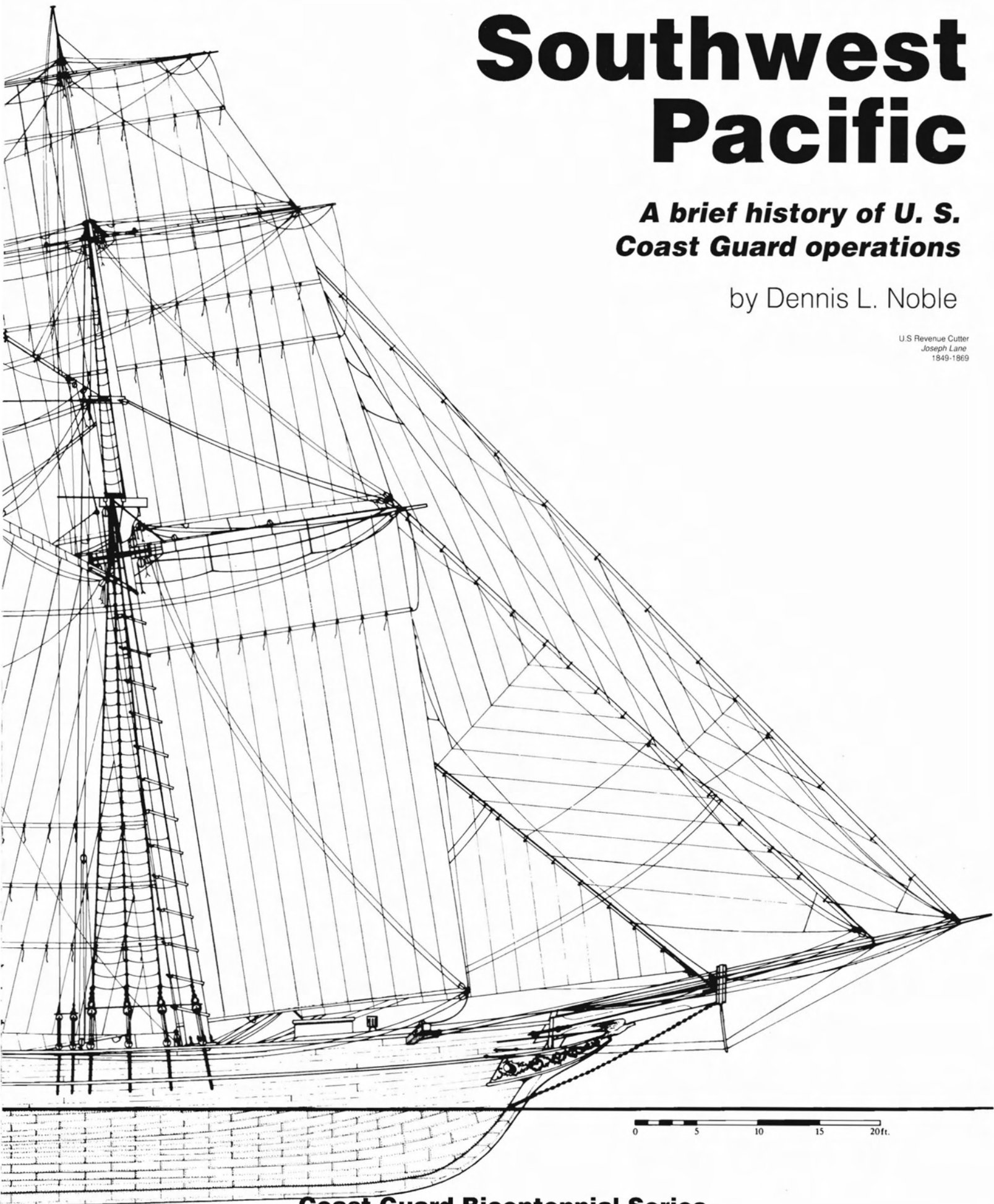


# Southwest Pacific

***A brief history of U. S.  
Coast Guard operations***

by Dennis L. Noble

U.S. Revenue Cutter  
Joseph Lane  
1849-1869



**Coast Guard Bicentennial Series**

**B**y the end of the Mexican War in 1848, the United States had taken possession of California, whose coastline was virtually unknown and devoid of any aids to navigation. In fact, not a single lighthouse existed along the entire West Coast. With gold fever running high and wag-  
ontrains full of pioneers pushing west towards California, the federal government tasked four small organizations to aid mariners and provide a federal law enforcement in the wild Southwest. In time, these four agencies would combine to form the modern day U.S. Coast Guard.

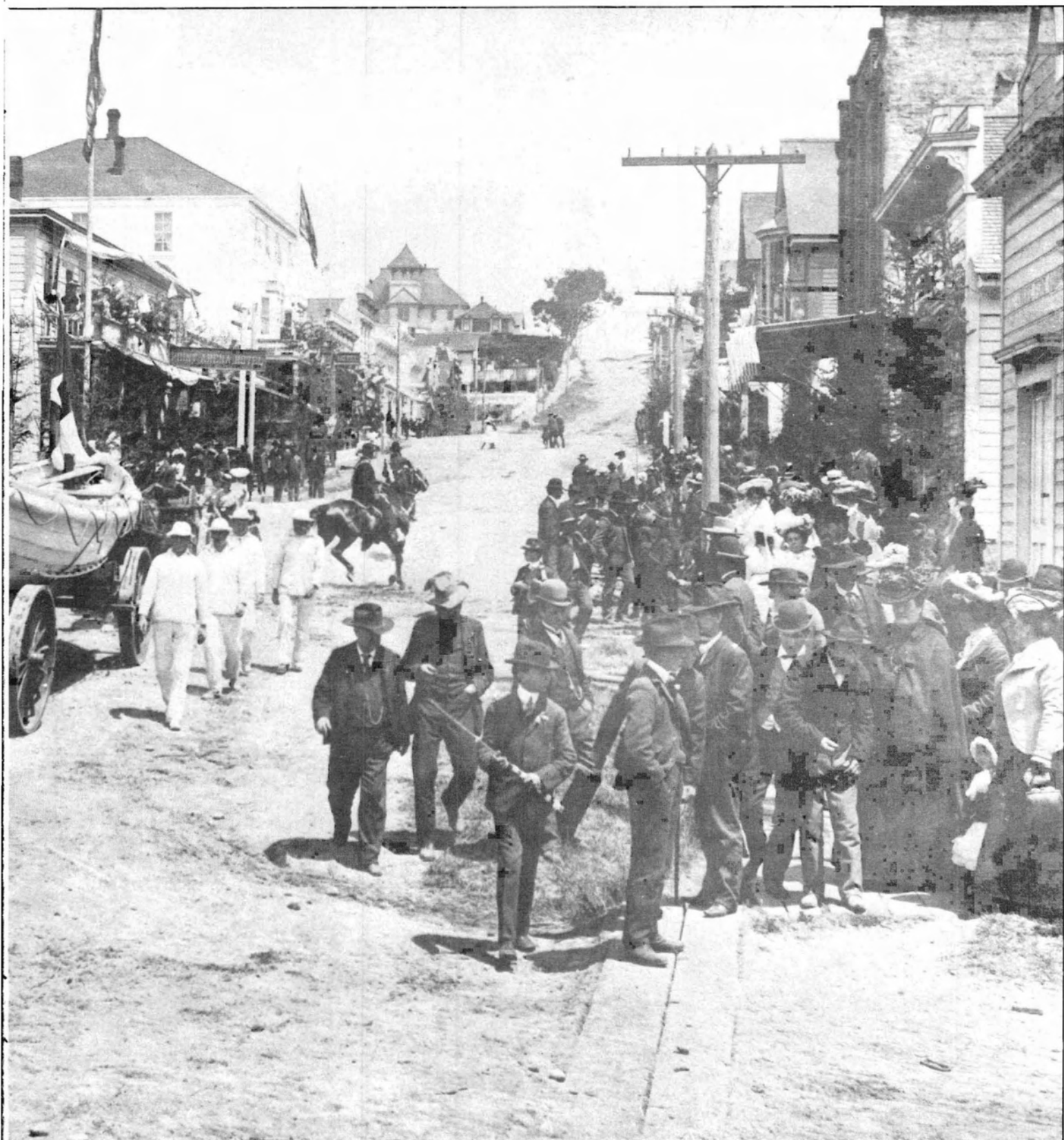


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*Design and layout by Victoria T. Bracewell for Commandant's Bulletin # 5-89*

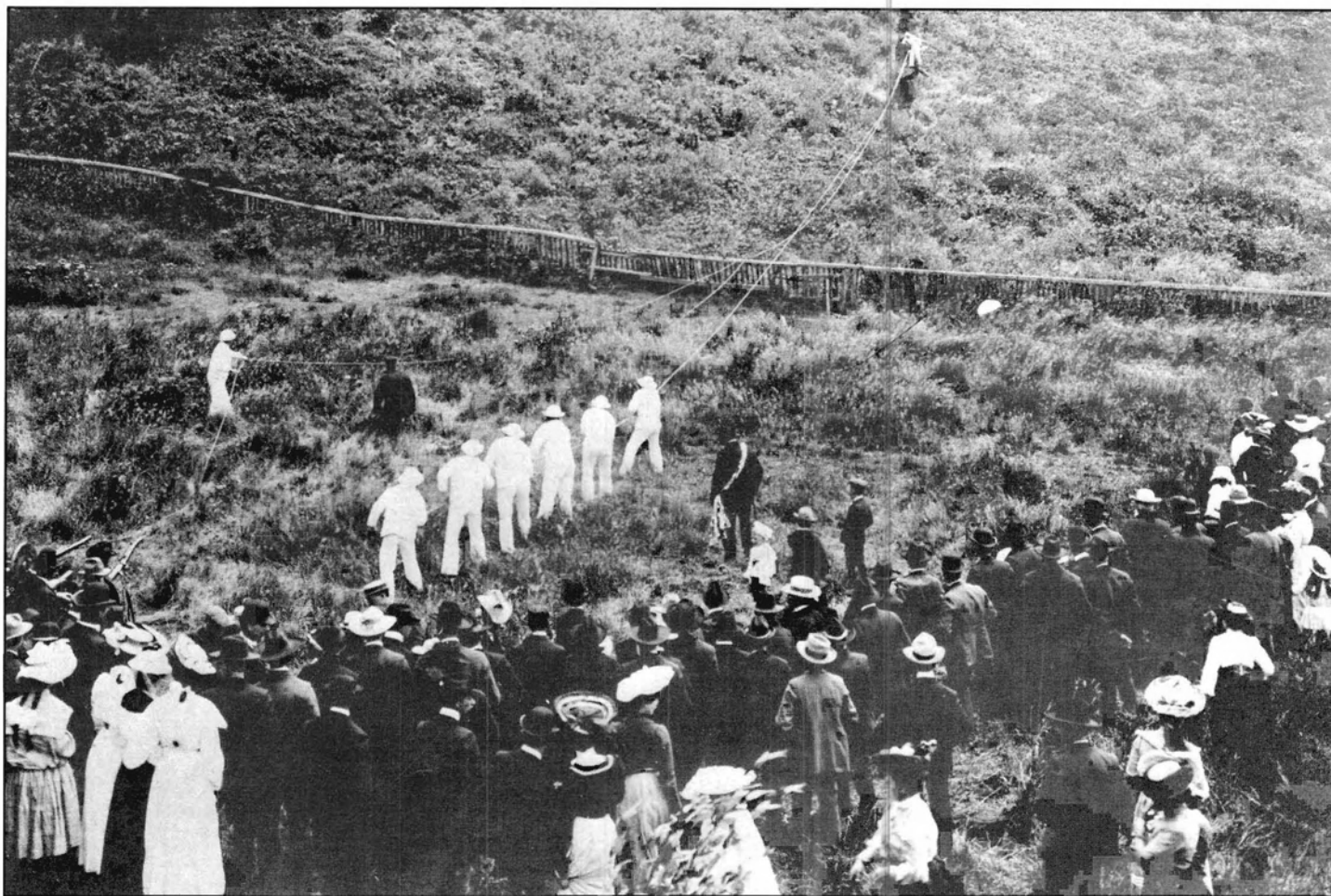


**Pt. Arena Lifesaving Station crewman with a horse-**



**drawn cart carrying a lifeboat down main street during the 1904 4th of July celebrations.**





The Pt. Arena Life-Saving Service Station crewmen demonstrates the operation of the breeches buoy, July 4, 1904

**T**he story of the U.S. Coast Guard in the Southwest, begins with the U.S. Lighthouse Service. Congress, realizing that aids to navigation were essential to maritime trade and the development of the West, authorized in 1848 the establishment of lighthouses along the coast. The primary problem at that time was that the majority of the Pacific coastline was unexplored, making it virtually impossible to locate sites and build lighthouses. The federal government mandated that an exploration survey be conducted to insure that the most advantageous lighthouse sites were located. The U.S. Coast Survey, later U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, was given the task. It was not until 1849, however, that a ship was able to conduct the survey. Eventually, Congress authorized the first group of lights in California at Fort Point, Fort Bonita,

Alcatraz Island, Point Pinos, Point Loma, Santa Barbara, Point Conception, the Farallon Islands, Humboldt Harbor, and Crescent City, in addition to other locations on the West Coast. Between 1852 and 1858, sixteen lights were erected in what today is California, Oregon, and Washington.

The Treasury Department awarded the contract to build the lights to the Baltimore based firm of Francis X. Kelly and Francis A. Gibbons. The ship Oriole was dispatched, with men and supplies, to San Francisco. In December 1852, the foundation for the first lighthouse in California was begun on Alcatraz Island. By 1854, the first light shined from the West Coast on Alcatraz Island.

The construction firm's workers that arrived at the Farallon Islands met with an unexpected setback. The cost of eggs in San Francisco was so

high that egg-pickers were gathering seabird eggs on the island and selling them for a nice profit. The entrepreneurs strongly felt that a lighthouse would drive away their source of income and prevented the construction crews from coming ashore. A Coast Survey ship, with armed sailors was dispatched to ascertain and mediate the situation. Upon seeing the armed landing party, the egg-pickers quickly surrendered, deciding that a lighthouse would not be harmful to the birds.

California, with its long coastline, needed more and more lights as trade increased throughout the nineteenth century. Some of the lighthouses were a real test of ingenuity and expertise for nineteenth century engineers. One of the most difficult to build was at St. George Reef. Built on Northwest Seal Rock, which is only 300 feet in diameter, it is one of the few wave swept



**Blunt's Reef Lightship** was commissioned June 28, 1905. Often stormy, the lightship was blown off station six times.

lights in the country. (A wave swept light is exposed to the full force of the sea.) During construction, work could only be accomplished on every fifth day due to the cycle of the pounding seas. The foundation of St. George Reef Light is a pier in an irregular oval shape, 86 feet in diameter, faced with cut granite and filled with concrete. The tower is also constructed of granite with the smallest block weighing 17 tons. The light stands 144 feet above sea level and was first lit on October 20, 1892. All total, it took an incredible ten long years to successfully complete the project, yet after 97 years St. George Reef Light still stands today.

The life of a nineteenth century lighthouse keeper, manning a lighthouse away from the pressures of life may seem idyllic to most modern Americans. However, the words most used by keepers in their diaries and

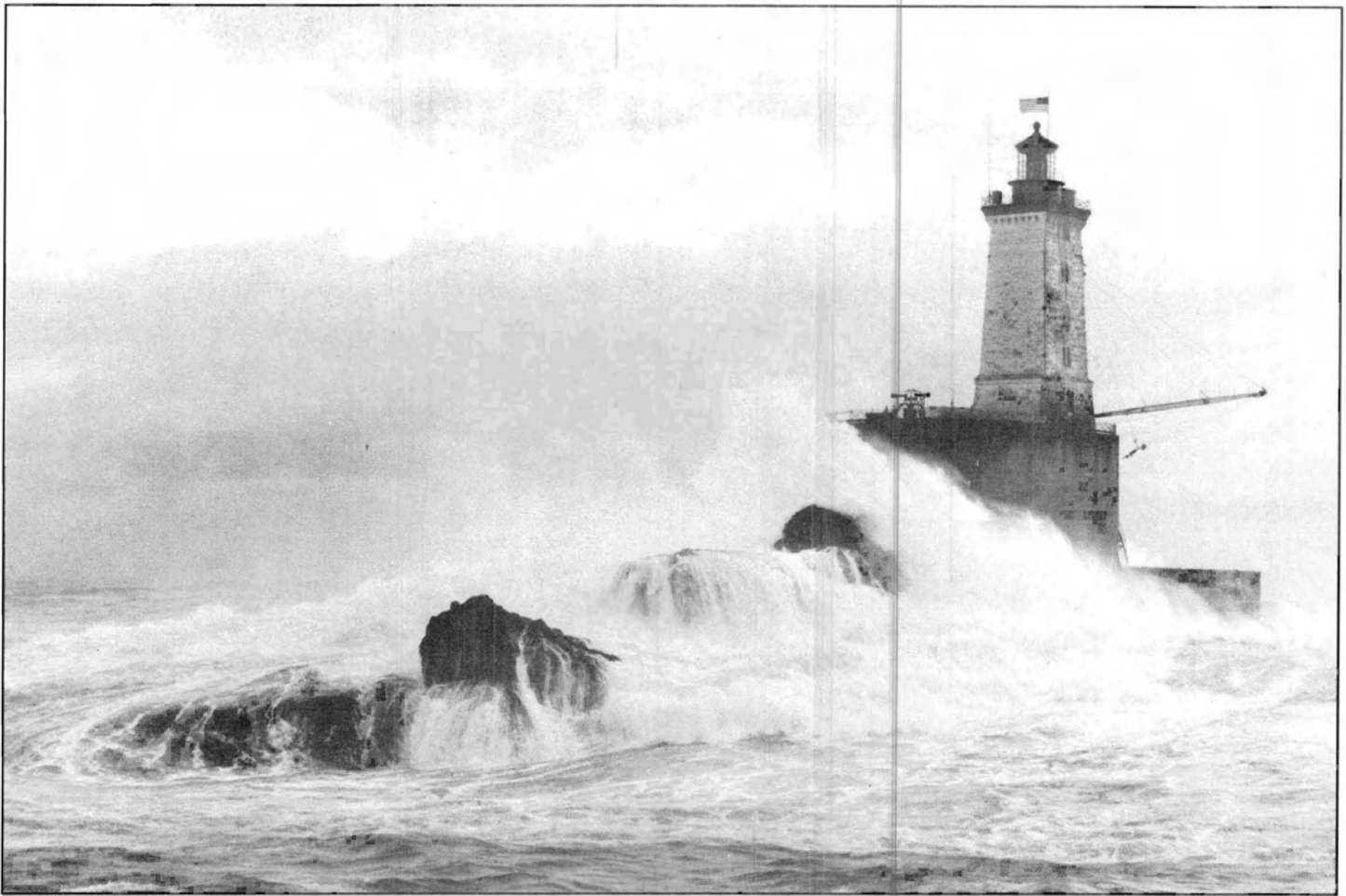
letters to describe their existence are "loneliness" and "monotony". A great deal of a keeper's life centered on the mundane duties of keeping the station and its equipment clean.

Lighthouses were by necessity placed in areas of danger and were in isolated regions. Before the advent of electricity, the lighting device was a lamp. Fuel for illumination ranged from whale oil, lard oil, rapeseed oil, and petroleum products. The wick of the lamp had to be carefully trimmed to produce a strong light and watched constantly throughout the night. This constant attention to wicks led to lighthouse keepers earning the nickname "wickies."

Unbeknownst to most people today, many light keepers were women. F. Ross Holland, one of this country's foremost authorities on lights, noted that lighthouses going back to the 1800's "at one time or

another had female assistant keepers; and a surprising number had women as principal keepers." This was not, however, because of an enlightened view on the part of the service. Rather, it was a means of saving money. It was not unusual to have a husband and wife team at a station. Both wives and children helped in running the light. For example, Mary Israel raised four children while assisting her husband at the Old Point Loma Light, near San Diego. Another example, Juliet Fish, keeper of the Angel Island station, in San Francisco Bay, once manually pounded a fog bell for twenty hours straight when the mechanical striker failed.

In addition to lighthouses along the California coast, there were two lightships stationed within the state's coastal waters, at Blunt's Reef, near Cape Mendocino, and outside of San Francisco Bay. These small, special



One of the most exposed lighthouses on the Pacific Coast, St. George Reef is an excellent example of a wave-swept lighthouse.

ships guarded areas where it was impossible to build a light structure. If lighthouse duty was monotonous and lonely, light-ships were doubly so, with the added danger of being rammed by ships in foul weather and the hazard of sinking. Forced by duty to remain on station no matter how fierce the storm has caused more than one lightship to capsize and sink during heavy gales. The first lightship in California took station outside San Francisco Bay on April 7, 1898.

Crews of lighthouses and lightships were also instrumental in saving lives of those in distress near their locations. The annual reports of the U.S. Lighthouse Service are filled with accounts of rescues. In 1916, for example, the small Blunt's Reef Lightship somehow managed to squeeze on board 150 survivors of the liner *Bear*. The San Francisco lightship, in 1902, had an unusual assistance case. Forest fires were sweeping Northern California, with a heavy pall

of smoke over the entire region. The ship suddenly found itself a haven for land birds ranging from humming birds to owls. When the smoke finally cleared, the birds returned to their natural habitat. Jefferson M. Brown and Sam Miller, of the Point Arena Light, along with a civilian volunteer, won the Gold Life Saving Medal, the highest award for lifesaving, for their rescue attempt on November 22, 1896. The men tried to assist the *San Benito* wrecked near the light. Three times the men attempted to reach the ship in a small boat, "only to be hurled back by the force of the sea."

The Lighthouse Service also operated their own fleet of ships, called Lighthouse Tenders. The tenders provided supplies and work parties to the scattered and isolated lighthouses, in addition to maintaining other lesser aids to navigation. The work was dangerous, as lighthouses were located in hazardous areas. The tenders and their crew were expected to go where

no other vessel could get to and work through storm, darkness and sunshine. The first tender along the Southwest coast was also the first steam powered tender, the *Shubrick*. She arrived in San Francisco on May 27, 1858.

**T**he next predecessor agency of the modern day U.S. Coast Guard to be stationed along the Southwest coast was the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service. Established in 1790 by Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, the service was formed to stop the loss of badly needed revenue by sea-going smugglers. The first ten small cutters were deployed from Maine to Georgia. The Service also soon found itself with a military role, participating in the Quasi-War with France (1798-1800). In fact, because the U.S. Navy was disbanded after the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Coast Guard, through the Revenue Cutter



Service, is the oldest, continuous federal sea-going force in the United States. In addition to its law enforcement and military duties, the Service, in 1836, was assigned "winter cruising" or performing lifesaving duties on the high seas.

When the first ship of the U. S. Revenue Cutter Service, the *Lawrence*, arrived in San Francisco, on October 3, 1849, the duties of the agency were well established. The newest maritime organization in the early Southwestern Region soon began a wide variety of duties, including the added task of exploring and reporting back to Washington D.C. on the economic possibilities of the area. Well into the twentieth century, the vast majority of the cutters were stationed in the San Francisco Bay area.

The duties of the early cuttermen was as varied then as they are today. A good example of life on board a cutter in the 1800's is the crew of the *Argus*. LT. William C. Pease, the cutter's commanding officer patrolled between San Francisco and Benicia, near the entrance to the Sacramento River. From March 8 to May 30, 1852, Pease boarded three ships, calmed a mutineer aboard another ship, helped free a grounded vessel, plus conducted normal patrolling. The *Argus'* work was so efficient that Capt. William Hunter, the senior Revenue Cutter Service officer, noted that "it would be almost impossible to smuggle goods by sea to Sacramento, or Stockton, as the entrance to those places are so well guarded" by the *Argus*.

Not all craft in the Service were sea-going. Customs duties also entailed the use of small harbor craft. One of the more venerable ships to serve in the Southwest was the *Golden Gate*. The 110 foot cutter was built in Seattle in 1896 and arrived in San Francisco on May 13, 1897. The *Golden Gate* performed law enforcement boardings, towing, helped fumigate vessels, and

patrolled regattas in the Bay area. One of her most unusual duties came during the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. A great deal of the city's destruction was caused by fires. The cuttermen of the *Golden Gate* served as firefighters and transporting officials and refugees. Then, in the midst of their work, the commanding officer of the cutter was given the

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*Seaman worldwide  
considered, San  
Francisco, the pivot  
point of the infamous  
Barbary Coast, the  
most exciting port...  
the zenith of debauch-  
ery at the turn of the  
century.*

added responsibility of taking on board the gold reserve from the Federal Bank in San Francisco. The cutter remained a floating bank until the fire danger was over. The skipper of the *Golden Gate* breathed a great sigh of relief when the gold was carefully counted and removed from his ship. The small cutter, after serving forty-eight years in San Francisco was decommissioned in 1945.

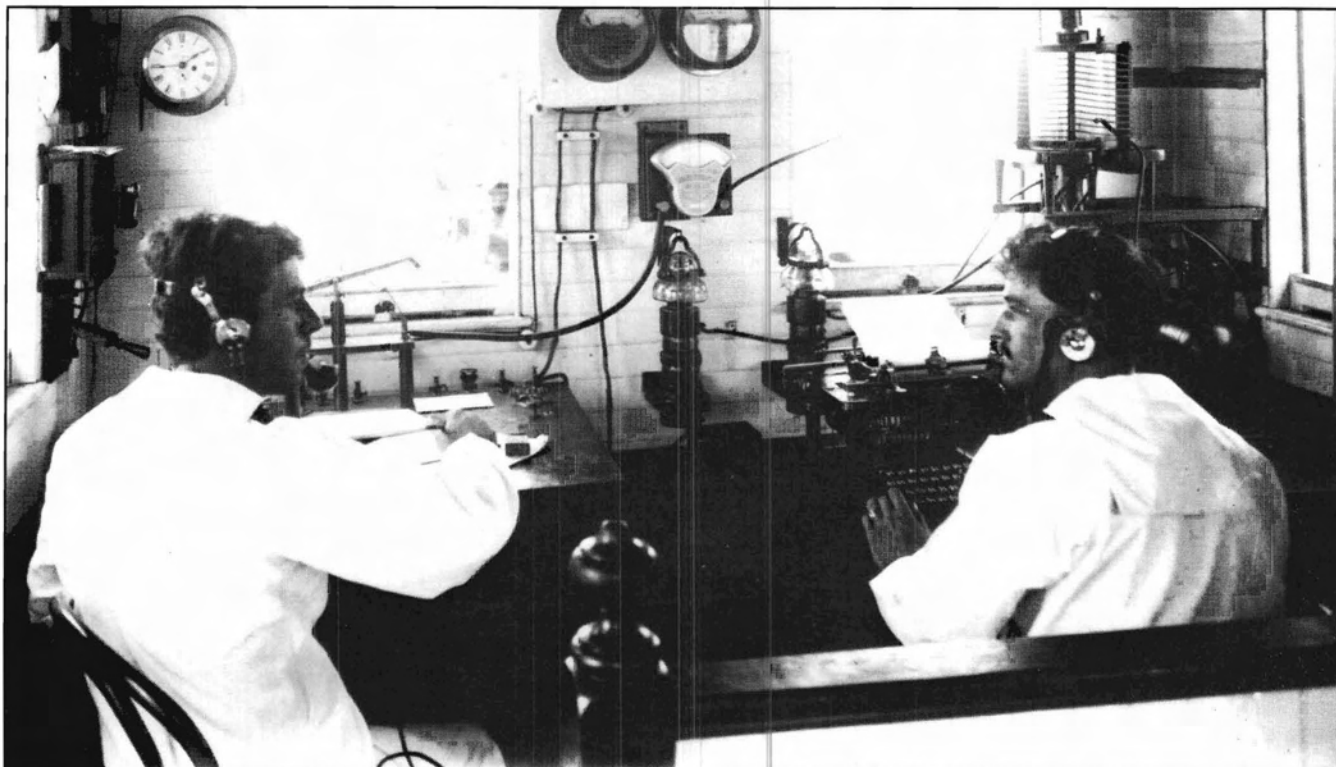
By 1914, the cutters of the Revenue Cutter Service were a regular sight in the Southwest, especially in the San Francisco Bay area. San Francisco served as the primary winter port along the Pacific coast. Many of the cutters would spend the winters patrolling California's coastal waters and in the summer sail for several months of sea-duty on the Bering Sea Patrol. Some of the legendary cutters,

such as the *Bear* and the *Thetis*, well known for their dramatic rescues of whalers and explorers trapped in the Arctic ice, dropped their anchors in San Francisco's harbor. To seamen, the gambling halls and bars of San Francisco's infamous Barbary Coast were paradise. The monotony of weeks and months at sea magnified the pleasures of shore leave, and San Francisco more than any other port in the world was the zenith of debauchery at the turn of the century. The crews of the Revenue Cutters, although they often stuck together when in port, were not immune to San Francisco's attractions.

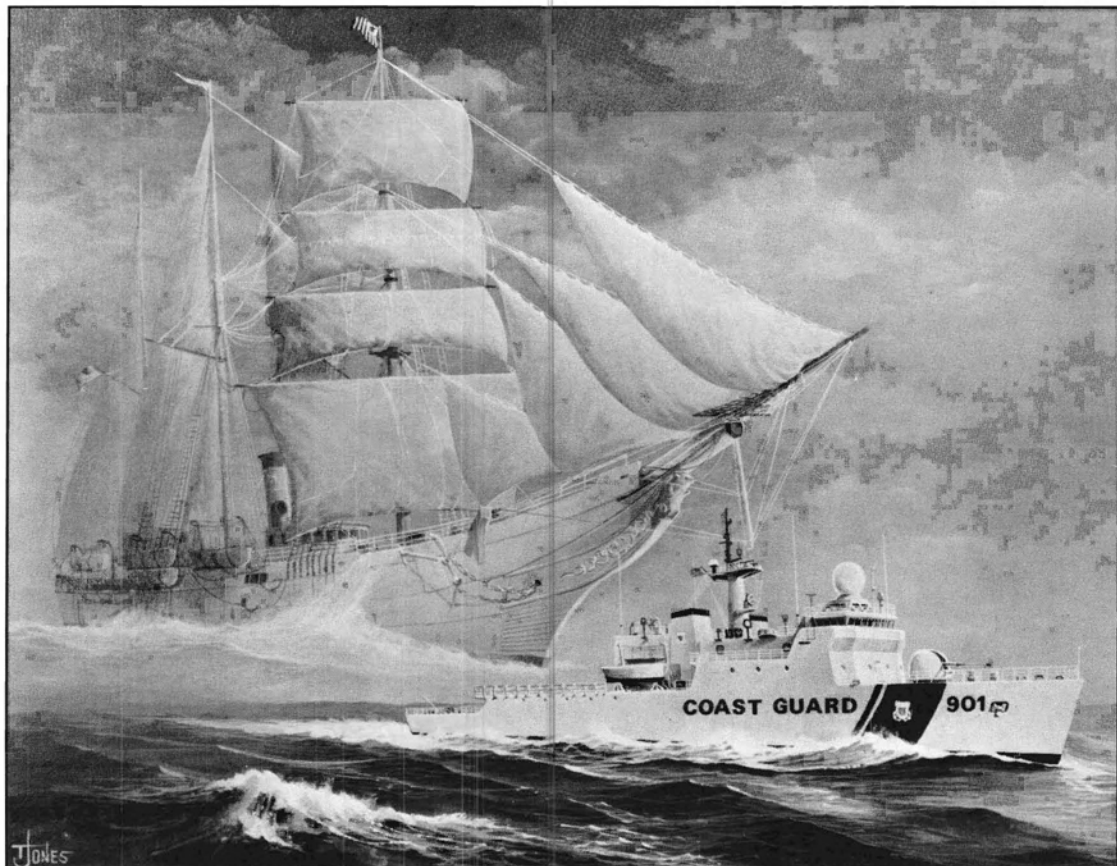
**T**he next predecessor agency of the U.S. Coast Guard in the Southwest is the one that probably most shaped the general public's perception of the Service as a lifesaver - the U.S. Life-Saving Service. The mission of this service was to launch small boats in an effort to rescue people shipwrecked close to shore. The Service began as a series of volunteer shore-based rescue stations along the Eastern Seaboard. In 1848, the federal government came on board. It was not, however, until 1871, when Sumner Increase Kimball took command, that the Service became highly respected. Under Kimball's strong and efficient leadership, more stations of the organization began to be established along the eastern seaboard, on the Great Lakes, Gulf Coast and, finally, on the West Coast. Stations at Golden Gate, in the present Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Bolinas Bay and Humboldt Bay were authorized on June 20, 1874. Other stations at Southside, Fort Point, Point Bonita, Point Reyes, and Arena Cove, soon followed.

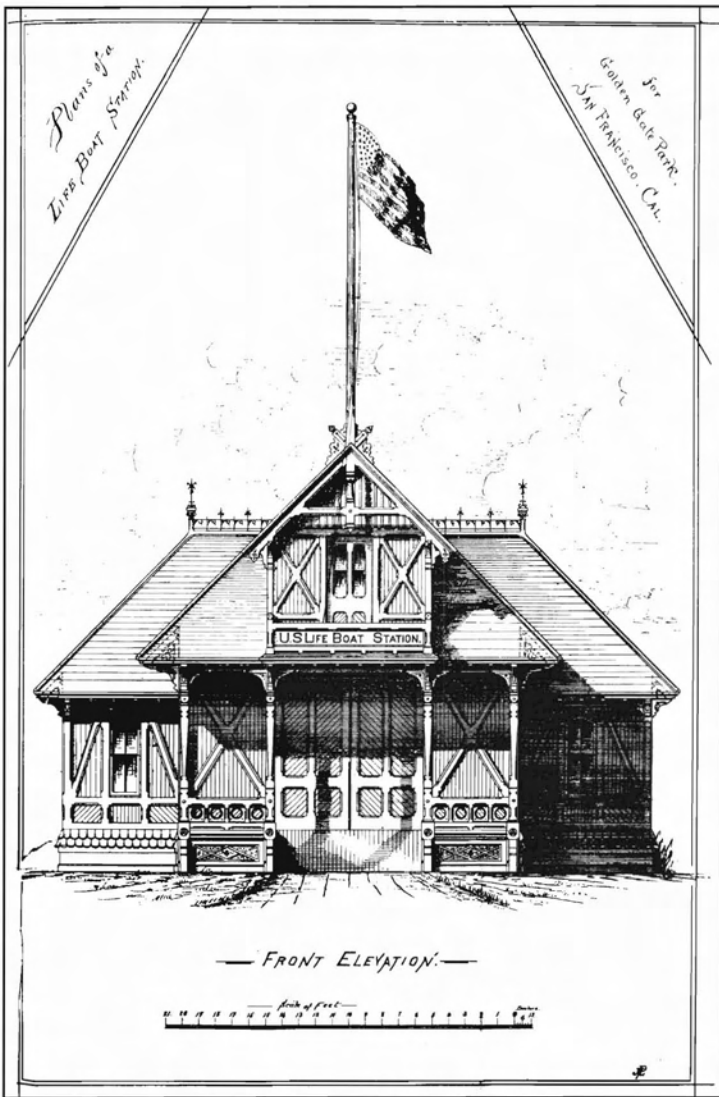
The duties of the men, called surfmen, who were assigned to these stations were deceptively simple: using lookouts and beach patrols to detect ships in trouble, they were to put out



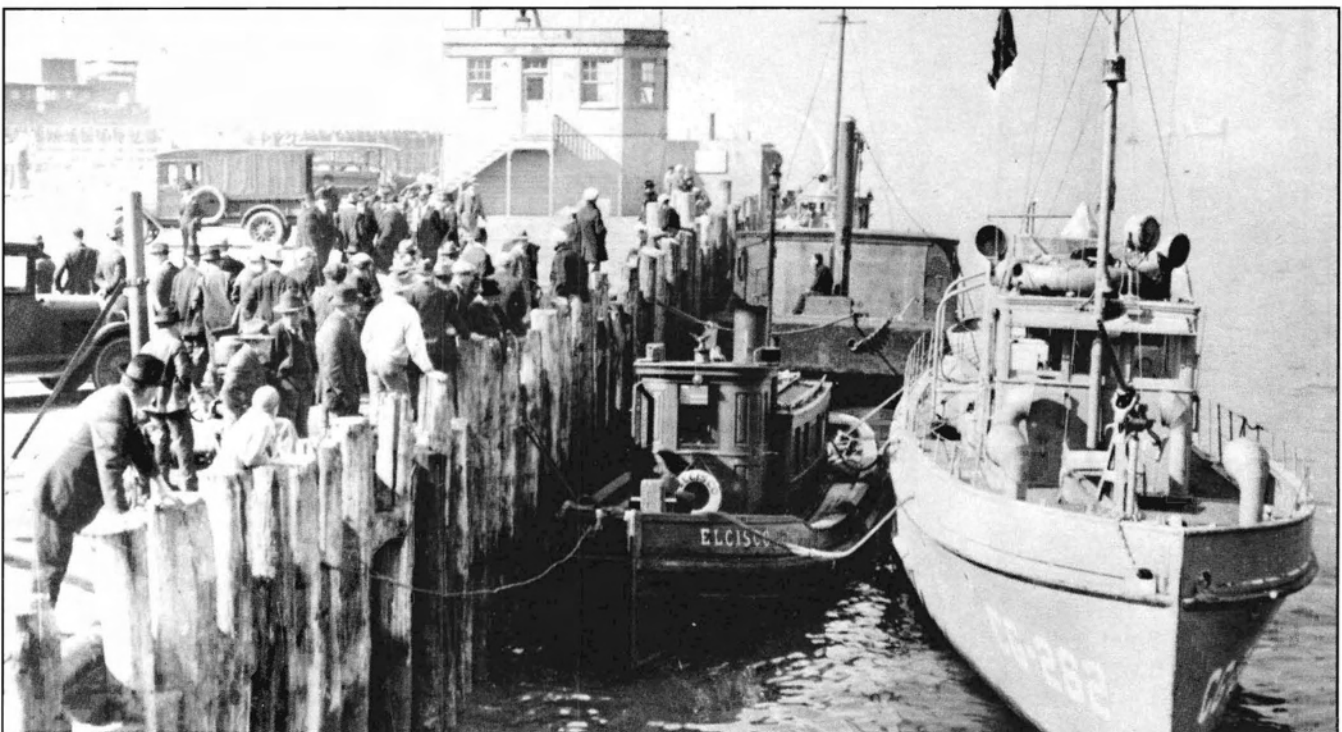


*Top:* A radio room on board a lighthouse tender off the southwest coast. Radios were introduced to the maritime community very early in the 20th. Century.  
*Right:* A painting depicting the cutter *Bear* from the time of the U.S. Revenue Cutter to the U.S. Coast Guard today.





**Left:** The original drawing for the Golden Gate Life-Saving Station shows an almost resort type of station. **Below:** The Farallon Island Light, put into operation on Oct. 15, 1856. Workmen had to carry the material for the light to the top of the peak. The island was the site of an eggpickers war when people would come to the Farallons to harvest seabird eggs for San Francisco food markets. **Bottom:** During the Rum War, 75 foot wooden patrol boats, known as "six bitters", were used as a second ring of defense against smugglers of liquor. The CG-262 has just brought in her prize, the *Elcisco*, into a San Francisco dock, circa 1927.





One of a series of **OLDTIMER LIFESAVERS** in the Life-Saving Service by M.J. Burns published in Harper's Weeklies, c. 1900.

to sea in small oar-propelled boats anytime a ship was in distress in their area of operations. If the seas were too rough for boats, the lifesavers used a line-throwing device, called a Lyle gun, to establish a strong hawser between the ship and shore. The amount of muscle power to ram a 700 to 1,000 pound surfboat, or a lifeboat that weighed between two and four tons, into towering surf is difficult to imagine. The men who served at the life saving stations, however, led lives consisting of hours of boredom, interspersed with seconds of sheer terror. The dramatic rescues performed by the surfmen caught the imagination of the public and the press. Reporters of the day gushed forth with praised for these mighty men, dubbing the surfmen "soldiers of the surf" and "storm warriors".

One example of a "storm warrior" was John Regnis, a surfman from the

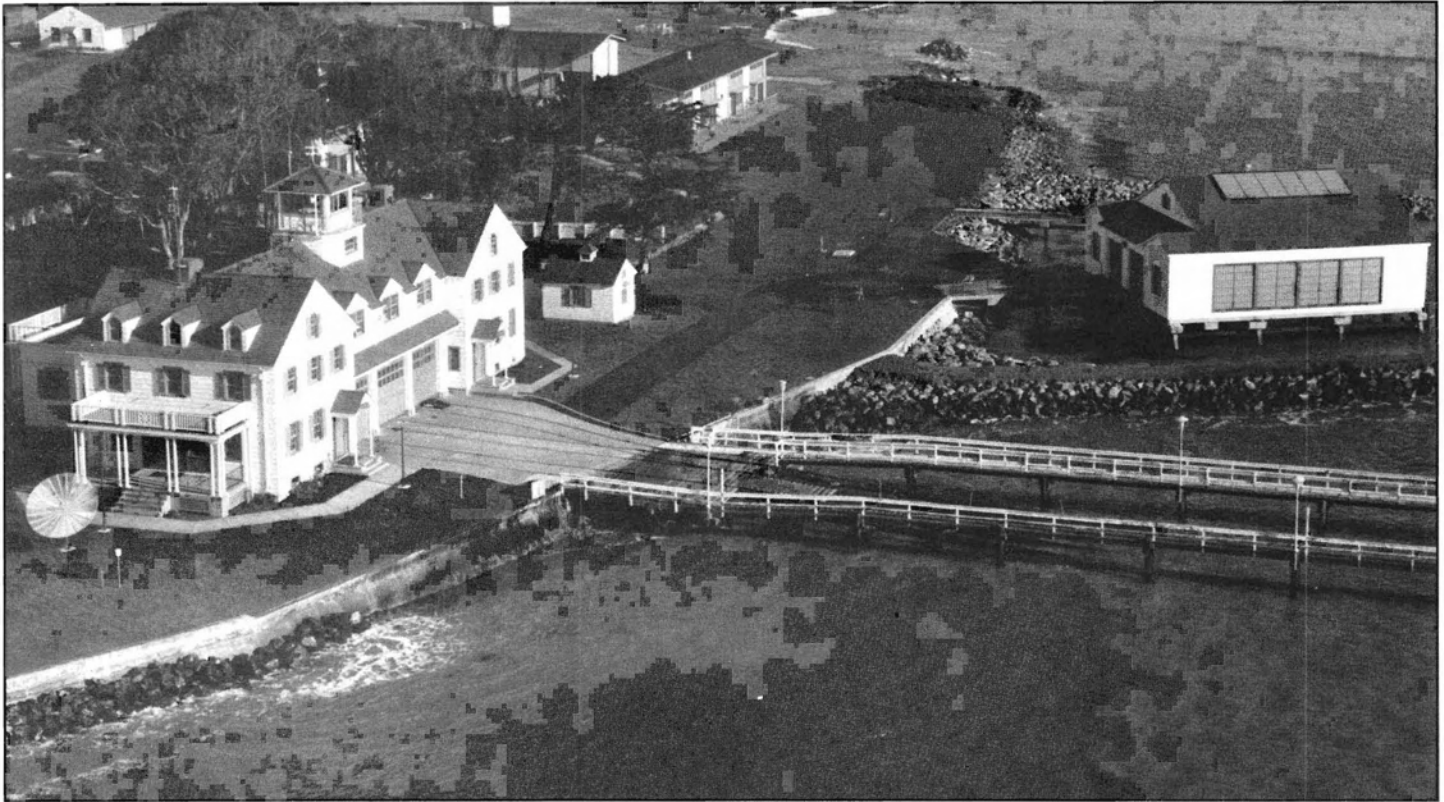
Humboldt Bay Station. On December 22, 1888, while working with his fellow surfmen in assisting the collier *Mendocino*, he saw the body of a small child that the station's surfboat could not reach. Surfman Regnis fearlessly plunged into the cold, pounding surf and recovered the body. For his courageous actions he was awarded the Gold Life Saving Medal.

**T**he last of the four predecessor agencies to form the modern day U.S. Coast Guard is also the least documented and studied. The Steamboat Inspection Service came about due to the large growth of steam powered ships and the resultant explosions of faulty boilers, with a great loss of life. After a number of terrible disasters, Congress hesitantly took action. On July 7, 1838, the first legislation was enacted to promote safety on board

steam ships. Thereafter, in fits and starts, other acts followed, usually after some accident pointed out safety weaknesses. In 1903, the Steamboat Inspection Service was transferred to the Department of Commerce and Labor. By 1911, the duties of the organization included: the inspection of vessel construction and equipment; the examination and licensing of marine officers; the examination of seamen and investigations of marine casualties and violations of inspection laws; establishing regulations to prevent collisions; and establishing regulations for the transporting of passengers and merchandise.

**T**he year 1914 marks a major change in the affairs of the predecessor agencies of the modern day U.S. Coast Guard. The Life-Saving Service was no longer attracting young men to its ranks.





The Humboldt Bay Station, authorized as a Life-Saving Station unit on June 20, 1874, was completely rebuilt in 1936.

This was due in part to the low pay and the lack of a retirement plan. It was not unusual to have men in their sixties and seventies manning the surfboats. In a move to streamline and improve government operations, the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service were combined on January 20, 1915, to form the U.S. Coast Guard.

One of the first major tasks of the new Service came in 1920 with passage of the Volstead Act, the social experiment to outlaw liquor in the United States. For the next 14 years, the U. S. Coast Guard waged a war against smugglers of illegal spirits. The Service soon found that it did not have the men nor the equipment to successfully wage this battle. Station crews were doubled, patrols were increased and a 75 foot picket boat class was added to the

U.S. Coast Guard's inventory, compliments of the U.S. Navy. Although these efforts helped, the flow of liquor was never completely cut off and only the passage of the 21st Amendment, the repeal of Prohibition, brought the rum war to a close.

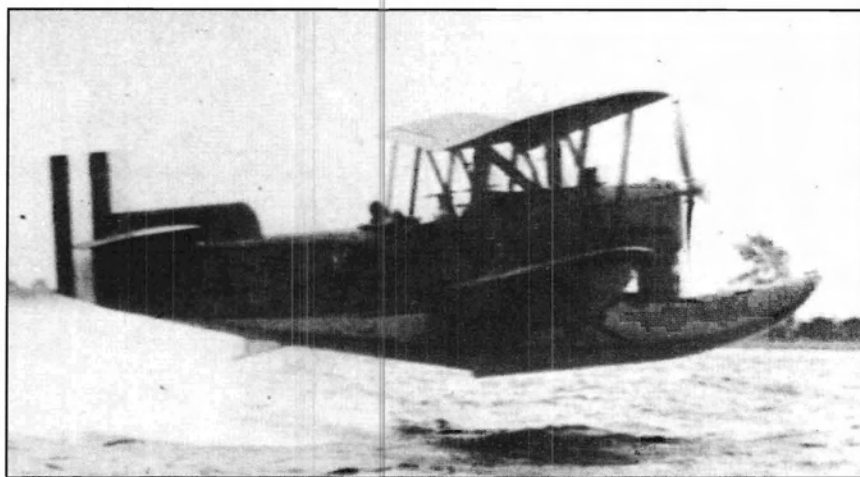
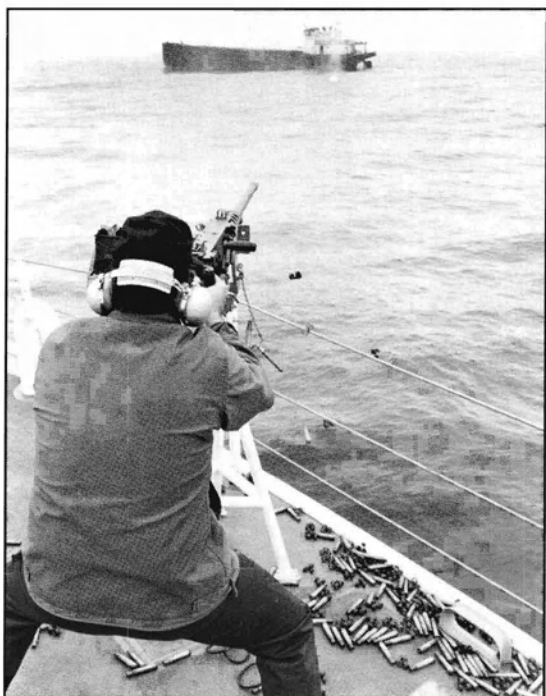
The rum war on the Pacific Coast never reached the intensity that was encountered by Coast Guardsmen on the East Coast, mainly because of the lack of large population centers. The larger areas of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, provided the Coast Guard with enough action, however, to keep them busy. Usually, liquor would be loaded on ships at Vancouver, British Columbia, for the long trip to the Southwestern Region.

Most seizures in the California area were simple affairs of boarding a suspected craft and making an arrest, but there was always the chance of the unforeseen happening. The six bitter,

CG-811, was patrolling near Sunset Beach, in the vicinity of Los Angeles, and, at 1:15 am, sighted a suspicious 38 foot speedboat, the A-2193. The cutter sounded her siren, flashed her spotlight on the boat, and illuminated her Coast Guard ensign. The boat tried to escape. The cuttermen fired warning shots with a rifle, but when the boat still refused to heave to, the skipper of the CG-811 ordered the crew to open fire with the machine gun. The A-2193 immediately headed towards the beach, where her crew went over the side as the boat broke into flames.

The effort to keep America dry was not a popular one and placed the new U.S. Coast Guard in an awkward position. The "drys," those that wanted the prohibition of spirits, were angry that the flow could not be stemmed, while the "wets" were equally angered over the supply of spirits that were interrupted. As one historian





**Left:** A crewman from the *Point Chico* fires on a Honduran drug smuggling vessel, the *Islander*, a sign of the Coast Guard's escalating war on drug smuggling. **Top:** The OL-5 amphibious airplane was the first aircraft built for the Coast Guard. The Rum War struggles reinforced the need for aircraft to spot smugglers. **Right:** Coast Guardsmen standing watch along the Pacific Coast near San Francisco during War War II.

noted, "It was a cross which the Coast Guardsman had to bear, and he bore it well." Out of the long rum war, however, some good did emerge. The U.S. Coast Guard had, in general, been known only locally. But their work during the years of battle gave the Coast Guard national and international notice. Most importantly, the service "remained larger and more important than previously."

The need to locate smugglers far out at sea also brought about a "renaissance" in Coast Guard aviation. The first Coast Guard aviator, Lt. Elmer Stone, had pointed out the need for aircraft as early as 1916, but the air arm had languished. Prohibition proved Stone correct and from 1926, when the Loening OL-5 amphibious plane became the first aircraft built to Coast Guard order, aviation grew in importance.

The first Coast Guard Air Station in California was established at Linberg Field, San Diego, on July 1, 1934, with one plane and a "handful of men" under the command of LT. Luke Christopher. It was moved a "short distance" from this location in 1937. On November 15, 1940, another Air Station was established at San Francisco.

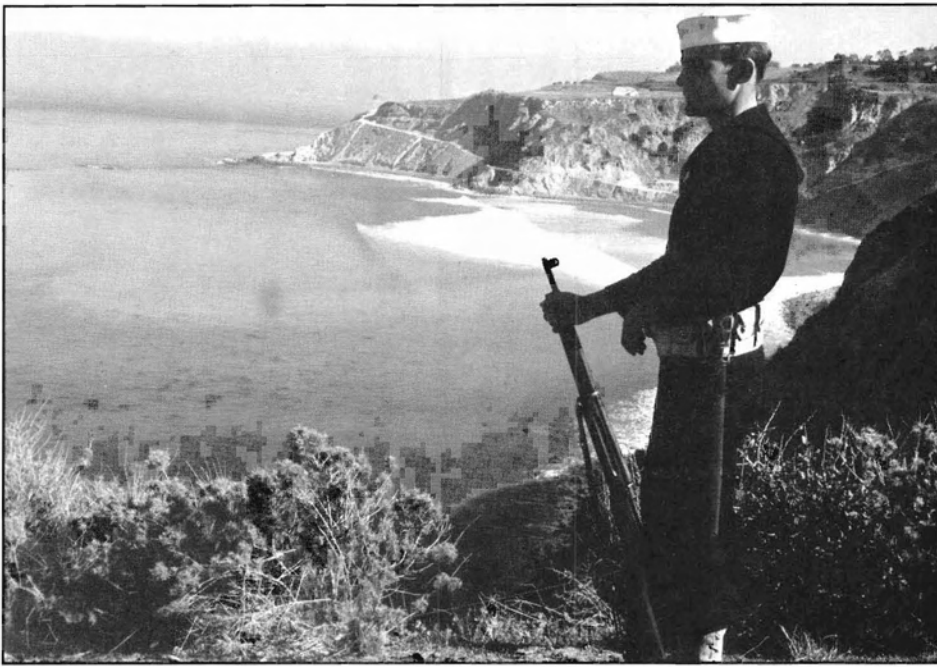
**E**ven during the most pressing days of the rum war, the role of saving lives never changed. In fact, commanding officers of cutters that were actively engaged in stopping rum runners were told that the saving of lives remained their most important mission, even above stopping the flow of liquor. The role of the small boat stations in the Coast Guard differed very little from that of the old Life-Saving Service. To be sure, there were improvements, such as motorized lifeboats. One of the best examples of how little things had changed is at the Humboldt Bay Station.

On June 23, 1939, Surfman Karl L. Carios (the title of surfman had remained into the early Coast Guard years) on lookout duty spotted the *Rena* near the Humboldt bar and saw she was in difficulty. He immediately alerted the officer in charge, Chief Boatswain's mate Gardner J. Churchill. Churchill, with a crew of four, headed the 36 foot lifeboat toward the yacht, which by 7:20 pm was swamped. As Chief Churchill brought his boat through the pounding surf, the lifeboat completely vanished beneath the breaking seas. The closer Churchill approached the *Rena*, the more he was hampered by the debris breaking off the vessel and by the fact that he had to reduce his

speed below steerage. In a feat of great seamanship, the Chief and his crew managed to safely remove the four people from the *Rena*. Churchill was offered the Gold Life Saving Medal and his crew the Silver, but the Chief refused to accept any higher medal than his crew received and thus all received the Silver Medal, the second highest award for lifesaving.

**B**y the late thirties, as war clouds thickened, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made another major change to the U.S. Coast Guard. On July 7, 1939, again in the interest of streamlining the federal government, the Lighthouse Service was transferred to the Coast Guard. Shortly thereafter, the service itself became part of the U.S. Navy as the nation entered World War II. Later, as a wartime measure, the Steamboat Inspection Service, now called the Bureau of Marine Navigation, was temporarily transferred into the Coast Guard in 1942. The move was made permanent in 1946.

At the beginning of hostilities residents of California's coastal areas were extremely fearful of an imminent Japanese invasion. Thirteen days after the attack on Pearl Harbor an incident occurred near Humboldt Bay that fueled these fears. The tanker *Emidio*



radioed she had just been hit by a torpedo near the Blunt's Reef Lightship and was sinking. Fifty-two men were in the water, with one man killed and one badly wounded. The cutter *Shawnee*, at Humboldt Bay, was ordered to get underway, but heavy seas were running at the bar and all aids to navigation were darkened due to the invasion fears. The senior Navy officer in the area, who was in charge of a nearby radio station, felt the risk to the cutter was too great and ordered the *Shawnee* to remain in port. Gardner J. Churchill, now a Warrant Boatswain, wanted to take the Coast Guard Station's 36 foot lifeboat to assist. The Navy officer again refused. Churchill, however, elected to disregard his orders and proceeded to the scene, south of the station near the Eel River.

Two hours after getting underway, the lifeboat was traveling slowly through the dark in heavy seas when suddenly the lookout noticed a low, dark shape in the distance. Churchill flashed a signal, but received no reply. The officer began to become a little uneasy about the mysterious shape and then noticed that whatever was out there had begun to close on the lifeboat. Churchill then turned and set a course away from the area, only to be followed by what the Coast Guardsmen now felt was a Japanese submarine. The craft started to over-

take the small boat. The dark shape's bow came near the boat's stern at the crest of a wave, while the lifeboat was in the trough. The Boatswain put the boat's wheel over hard and advanced the throttle to full speed. The combination of following the seas' motion, rudder action, and speed, caused the small boat to whip completely around, and as the craft slid by, the Coast

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*Fearing a Japanese invasion, California's Coast Guard Beach Patrol maintained vigilant watches for enemy landings of troops or saboteurs.*

Guardsmen identified their pursuer as, indeed, a submarine.

Undeterred, Churchill continued his search for the tanker's crew. At 8:30 in the morning, the Coast Guardsmen gave up the search and started the long, rough trip back to Humboldt Bay. Nearing their station, the crew spotted a periscope heading towards them. Churchill began to take evasive

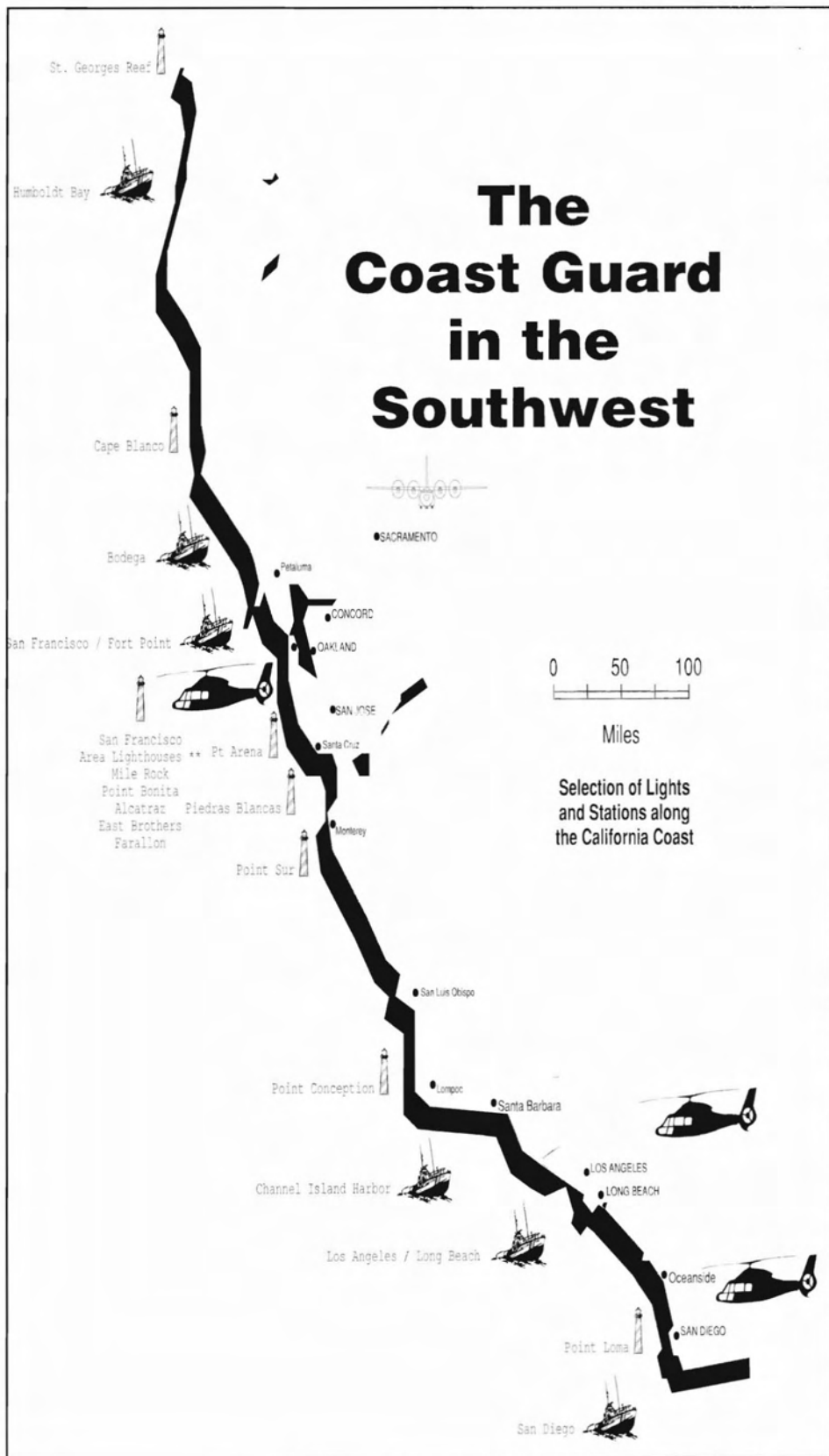
maneuvers and the periscope vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. Fifteen minutes later it was spotted again, still tracking the boat. Then, for some unknown reason, the scope disappeared and the boat proceeded unharmed into Humboldt Bay.

The fear of an invasion led the Coast Guard to strengthen its beach patrol force, a traditional duty of the old Life-Saving Service. In 1942, for example, eighty men were assigned to the Humboldt Bay area for patrol duties. The Coast Guardsmen traveled by horseback, jeep, and on foot with dogs to detect enemy landings.

**T**he U. S. Coast Guard that emerged from World War II is basically the service that still operates its multifaceted missions today. There have, of course, been changes. Technology has played a large role in bringing about a new look to the Coast Guard. When the Service obtained the Lighthouse Service, in 1939, it immediately began to seek ways to automate many of the isolated stations. Large navigation buoys, solar power, and better navigational equipment have all spelled the end of the wickies. The Lighthouse Service, during its heyday in the Southwest had thirty-eight lighthouses and two lightships. By 1988 there were no Coast Guard manned lighthouses or lightships within the waters of the State of California. It is estimated that by the year of the Coast Guard's bicentennial, in 1990, the Service will have automated all of its lights, thus ending an era in our maritime history.

Technology has also caused changes in the small boat stations within the Southwest. New high powered lifeboats are incredibly fast and have longer ranges. The greatest change in search and rescue work was the development of the helicopter. Prior to World War II, most small boat rescue stations were grouped in the area from San Francisco northward. In 1929, for example, there were eight stations scattered along this stretch of the Northern California coast. Fifty-eight years later, in 1987, there were ten stations spread from San Diego, in

# The Coast Guard in the Southwest



the south, to Humboldt Bay, in the north. Even though the stations now cover a larger area, the combination of better boats and helicopters allows rescues to be accomplished much faster than in the early days of shore based rescue operations.

The U.S. Coast Guard continues to perform some amazing rescue feats within the Southwest. During the Northern California floods of 1955, for example, Coast Guard airmen undertook work that the Commandant of the Coast Guard noted was truly an "outstanding performance," even for a service noted for rescues.

An H04S helicopter piloted by LT Henry J. Pfeiffer, with Petty Officer Joseph Accamo, as hoist operator, flew for nearly twelve hours, beginning at 4:35 in the morning. Pfeiffer and Accamo were relieved alternately by LCDR George F. Thometz, Jr., and Petty Officer Victor Rouland. An unbelievable 138 people were rescued by the Coast Guardsmen. The first fifty-five were picked up in darkness, with the "chopper" hovering above "trees, chimneys, and television antennae, the only illumination being provided by an Aldis lamp held by the hoist operator." At one time three women and eleven children were somehow squeezed into the helicopter, which one historian noted must "be a record for an H04S." Another helicopter rescue, on December 4, 1985, took place about twelve miles northwest of the Golden Gate bridge. An HH-3F from San Francisco Air Station, piloted by LT Don Rigney, hoisted three Vietnamese immigrants from a fishing boat that had gone aground on a reef. The rescue was completed despite rough seas, darkness, and a language barrier.

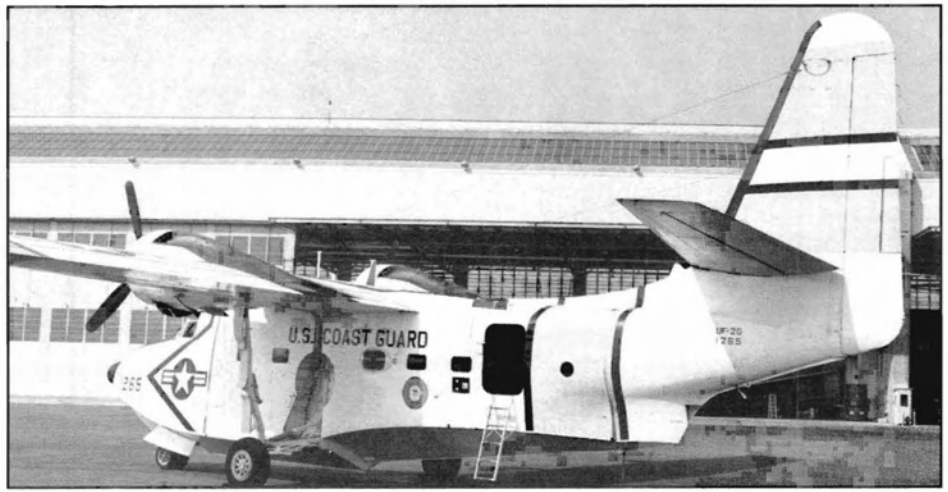
The traditional duties of law enforcement have changed very little for the Service in the Southwest. Some fifty-five years after Coast Guardsmen finished the Rum War, the



men and women of the Service found themselves once again engaged in a war against smugglers, this time the contraband is drugs. On May 23, 1988, the cutter *Cape Romain*, an 82 foot patrol boat, and two 41 foot boats from Station San Francisco, intercepted a tug and barge near the Golden Gate bridge. A search revealed approximately 37.5 tons of hashish and 13.5 tons of Asian marijuana. After the seizure, it took "almost 12 hours" to unload the contraband. It was the largest seizure of hashish in U.S. history.

Two administrative changes took place for the Service in the Southwest Region in 1967 and 1988. The Coast Guard, in 1967, was transferred from its traditional home in the Treasury Department to the Department of Transportation. In 1988, the Eleventh Coast Guard District and the Twelfth Coast Guard District were combined to form the Eleventh Coast Guard District, which now covers the States of California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona.

In 1990, the U. S. Coast Guard will mark two hundred years of service to the nation. Since the 1840s, the Service has provided assistance to the maritime community, and others, in the Southwest. Even though technology has caused the establishment of new stations, the shifting of others, and the decommissioning of still others, this small Service continues to enforce federal maritime laws and provide a rescue organization for those in distress. In fact, with the increase in recreational boating, the Coast Guard now handles more rescues than ever before. The men and women of today's U.S. Coast Guard, who responded to emergencies along the West Coast, are carrying on, and surpassing the strong foundations of service to others established by the deeds of their reknown predecessors.



Coast Guard vessels and aircraft, past and present, at work in the Southwest.



