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Riverside County, California

The History of the "Racing Stripe" Emblem and Brand
Part I: The United States Coast Guard

by William H. Thiesen, PhD

In the modern history of the United States Coast Guard, there has been a rapid shift from mistaken identity and anonymity to a recognizable brand identity. One anecdote provides a perfect example of this mistaken identity. On ocean station in October 1956, the cutter *Pontchartrain* held responsibility for coming to the aid of a downed transoceanic passenger aircraft. On the 19th, the Pan American clipper *Sovereign of the Skies* lost two of its engines en route from Hawaii to California. After the aircraft radioed the cutter and ditched nearby, the *Pontchartrain* sent out its small boats and gathered up all thirty-one passengers and crew. No sooner had one survivor gained the safety of the cutter's deck, than he gratefully exclaimed, "Thank goodness for the Navy!" This case was one of dozens in which the Coast Guard seemed unrecognizable to the public it served.

USCG Cutter Pontchartrain, *1959*

John F. Kennedy was acutely aware of the importance of imagery, having relied heavily on image-building in his successful 1960 presidential campaign. When they moved into the White House in 1961, the president and the first lady began an effort to remake the image of the presidency, starting with Jacqueline Kennedy's redecoration of the White House interior and redesign of Lafayette Square, a park located next to the White House.

Kennedy next undertook a redesign of the jet designated as Air Force One. He felt an initial design and paint scheme provided by the Air Force was too regal looking, so on the advice of the First Lady he turned to French-born industrial designer Raymond Loewy, whose work had been recognized the world over during the post-war period. Loewy's Air Force One design won immediate praise from Kennedy and the press, and the aircraft became an important symbol of the president and the United States in official visits across the country and overseas.

Delighted by the look of Air Force One, Kennedy granted Loewy's request for a meeting on 13 May 1963. During that meeting and another the subsequent day, the men discussed improving the visual image of the federal government, and Kennedy suggested the Coast Guard as an appropriate agency to start with. Shortly after the meetings, the design firm of Raymond Loewy/William Snaith, Inc., received a contract for a ninety-day feasibility study and, in January 1964, the firm presented its findings to Coast Guard leadership.

With its experience in designing industry trademarks, Loewy/Snaith recommended that the Coast Guard adopt an identification device similar to a commercial trademark. The firm believed the symbol should be easily identifiable from a distance, easily differentiated from other government or commercial emblems or logos, and easily adapted to a wide variety of air and sea assets.

The Coast Guard established an ad hoc committee to work with Loewy/Snaith on the project, and on 19 June 1964 the Coast Guard signed a contract with the firm to "accomplish studies, prepare design efforts and make a presentation of a comprehensive and integrated identification plan for the US Coast Guard." On 21 March 1965, during an all-day session at Coast Guard headquarters, representatives from Loewy/Snaith presented their findings to the service, and on the same day the Coast

Guard chief of staff, RADM Paul Trimble, agreed to proceed with the Integrated Visual Identification Program. During the prototyping process, Loewy/Snaith selected a wide red bar to the upper right of a narrow blue bar canted at sixty-four degrees and running from lower left to upper right. The Loewy/Snaith team used its own stylized version of the traditional Coast Guard emblem for placement on the center of the red bar. The overall design came to be known as the "Racing Stripe," or "Slash," emblem.

The Racing Stripe design was tested on cutters and facilities in the Coast Guard's Seventh District in the Florida area due to the greater variety of sea assets stationed there. The prototype slash was affixed to the cutters *Diligence* and *Androscoggin* as well as a buoy tender, vehicles, and buildings at Base Miami. At North Carolina's Air Station Elizabeth City, the slash was affixed to an HH-52 helicopter, a Grumman HU-16 "Albatross" amphibian, and an HC-130 "Hercules" fixed-wing aircraft.

On 4 May 1966, the service's ad hoc committee for testing the Visual Identification System sent to the commandant a favorable report regarding servicewide use of the Racing Stripe. During the prototyping process, the Coast Guard's selection committee decided against the Loewy stylized shield and opted for the service's traditional shield emblem instead. While the plan received the stamp of approval, details

Identity for World Sea Services and Coast Guards

remained to be ironed out over the next several months. By early spring of 1967, most outstanding issues had been resolved, including the type-font for lettering and exact paint color specifications. On 6 April 1967, Commandant Edwin Roland issued Instruction 5030.5, which ordered servicewide implementation of the Integrated Visual Identification System and ended four years of study and experimentation.

The adoption of the Racing Stripe initially met with resistance from the Coast Guard's service culture. Nonetheless, over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the symbol spread to every maritime and aviation asset in the service. By 1975, the Coast Guard's sail training ship, *Eagle,* remained the last service asset not sporting the emblem. Traditionalists had long held that the Racing Stripe would destroy her classic lines and traditional look, and strongly opposed application of the emblem to the barque. As 1976 was approaching and the nation was making preparations for bicentennial celebrations, *Eagle* was to serve as the host ship of OpSail '76. Here, the Coast Guard leadership saw an opportunity to present the service's brand identity to the world by distinguishing *Eagle* from the other tall ships in attendance, which included some of her sister ships. In 1976, the *Eagle* became the service's last cutter to adopt the Racing Stripe, and the ship's new look received a very public stamp of approval when CBS news anchor, experienced sailor, and OpSail TV commentator Walter Cronkite singled out *Eagle* and her Racing Stripe logo with approving remarks.

Since the 1970s, the Coast Guard Racing Stripe and color scheme has been applied even to assets not commonly associated with the service. With alterations in coloration and angle, the Racing Stripe has become a symbol for sea service vessels at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels throughout the US and for scores of foreign sea services.

The Eagle *debuted her new racing stripe during OpSail '76.*

Today, the service and its missions have been associated with the Racing Stripe symbol and its unique color scheme for more than forty years. During this time, the Coast Guard has served throughout the world and collaborated on a variety of levels with foreign coast guards and sea services. These activities include training, international patrols, and advising foreign sea services. In recent deployments, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom and the recent deployment of USCGC *Dallas* during the war between Russia and Georgia, the presence of USCG cutters with the instantly recognizable Racing Stripe has proved a de-escalating influence in high-tension maritime missions. This international engagement has spread the service's reputation and brand identity throughout the world.

The Integrated Visual Identification Program stands as the most successful branding program of any federal military agency and possibly of any agency in the US government. Future service assets will continue to feature the coloring and emblem developed over forty years ago to identify the Coast Guard and distinguish it from other federal sea services.

Where many could not identify the Coast Guard's assets before it adopted a brand identity, most individuals connected with the water do now. Some of this trend must be credited to the missions carried out by the Coast Guard around the clock and the sort of operations in which it serves; however, much of that recognition should also be credited to the Coast Guard's adoption of the Racing Stripe symbol. Thanks to a visionary president, talented industrial designers, and a strong Coast Guard leader who saw the importance of a brand identity for the service, the assets of the Coast Guard are now easily identified by most Americans and foreigners connected to the sea.
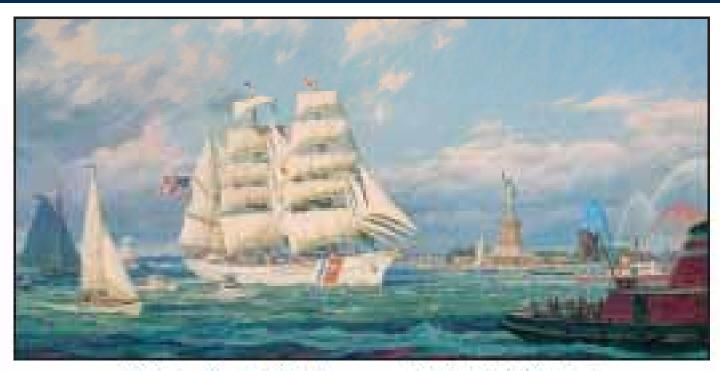
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(left) USCGC Cypress, *a 225-foot buoy tender, out of Mobile, Alabama, in 2009; (right) USCGC* Healy *breaks ice around the Russian-flagged tanker* Renda, *250 miles south of Nome, Alaska, in January 2012.*

Part II: The Rest of the World by Christian Ostersehlte, PhD

Abroad, others followed the United States Coast Guard's example. The introduction of the 200-nautical-mile economic zone in the 1970s, ecological concerns regarding oil spills and similar challenges, and the prevalence of drug trafficking by sea have led to the establishment of numerous coast guards or like services around the globe.

When US Coast Guard vessels and aircraft were, one by one, painted with the Racing Stripe and the public began to recognize the marked vessels as part of the Coast Guard, only a few nations followed the Americans' example at first. By 2000, however, many coast guard services—especially in Latin America, the European Union, Eastern Europe, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Japan, South Korea, South East Asia, and the Pacific island states—had introduced the slash to their vessels, while Australia and New Zealand, Africa, and the Middle East have not followed suit. Looking through the 2009/2010 edition of the world-renowned *Jane´s Fighting Ships*, one can count sixty-one nations that have introduced slash symbols to law-enforcement ships.

Just to the north, the Canadian coast guard (CCG) introduced a white slash to its polar icebreakers, the *Pierre Radisson* and *Franklin*, in 1978. The Canadian coast guard works in close cooperation with its counterpart in the United States but is quite different in its structure and mission. This organization originated in the service fleet of the Department of Transport at Ottawa, which was formed in its present state in the 1960s. The women and men of this

Sweden's Coast Guard

service wear uniforms, but they operate on merchant marine standards.

The Swedish coast guard adopted the US-style racing stripe early on. Originally a modest beach patrol established in 1638, after World War II it began operating a fleet of customs patrol vessels under the supervision of the Financial Ministry at Stockholm. In 1976, the service was transferred to the Ministry of Commerce and was already displaying the slash on its vessels, whose hulls were painted light grey and marked with a dark blue double slash. In 1988, the Swedish coast guard was reorganized. Today, it is overseen by the Ministry of Defense and maintains a distinctive police profile. The livery was also changed. The slash remained, but now in Swedish national colors: yellow with a brighter blue background

The German word "Küstenwache," or "coast guard," is inscribed on a number of types of government vessels, but the German coast guard is not a single authority like the US Coast Guard, but rather a loosely knit marine patrol network established in

1994. These vessels all display a slash in German national colors—black, red and gold—with different hull colors, depending on the agency in which the individual vessel serves.

The marine branch of the Federal Police (Bundespolizei), a service of the Ministry of the Interior in Berlin, was founded as a border patrol service in 1951 modeled after the military, but, today, after many evolutions, it now operates more like the state police. Its vessels have a light-blue hull.

The marine branch of the Federal Customs Service (Wasserzoll), an agency of the Ministry of Finance, has a large fleet of green-hulled vessels that operate both in coastal and inland waters. The German seagoing customs service has a history dating back to the nineteenth century. Customs functions were executed by the individual states until the government in Berlin took over in 1919.

The Water and Shipping Administration is a civilian authority of the Ministry

Canadian Coast Guard offshore patrol vessel Leonard J. Cowley

Germany's Küstenwache is made up of multiple government agencies. Vessels with black hulls are part of the Federal Waterways and Shipping Administration.

Germany's Federal Police, or Bundespolizei, uses the national colors in its stripe against a light blue hull (above). The Search and Rescue (SAR) unit is considered part of the Küstenwache but is primarily a non-profit organization. Its vessels are clearly marked in red against white (right). Not shown are the green-hulled vessels of the customs service.

of Transportation; its history can be traced back to 1921 when the Transportation Ministry was established. This agency is responsible for maintaining inland and coastal waterways, including aids to navigation and icebreaking. This service most closely resembles the old US Lighthouse Service in structure and mission. A selection of its seagoing fleet operates under German coast guard control and displays the "Küstenwache" livery. The Water and Shipping Administration had begun to paint the slash on the hulls of their seagoing vessels as early as in 1986.

The German marine search and rescue—using the international standard abbreviation "SAR"—is operated only partly by the state in Germany. The navy fulfills some coordinated tasks and operates the SAR Sea King helicopters, but the primary sea rescue agency is a donation-funded charity organization. This model is not unusual in Europe. Following the standards of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) in the UK, the German Life-Boat Institution (GLI) was founded in 1865. It is headquartered in Bremen and is funded by donations. After

the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue was convened in Hamburg in 1979, part of the agreement that was ratified in 1985 included an obligation to provide a more distinctive marking

of SAR craft. In 1987, the GLI vessels received their slash symbol together with the characters SAR painted on the hull.

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, many countries there began to establish coast guard services. Rising individualism and tourism, together with slowly but gradually growing wealth, resulted in increased recreational boat traffic in their offshore waters. The coast guards of the former communist nations were either set up as new institutions—Albania or the Baltic states were examples—or they were derived from the former communist-era border guards, such as in Poland and Russia. The latter inherited from their Soviet past the former maritime border guard, having operated under the NKVD and later KGB. At that time, this fleet consisted of a large number of grey-hulled warships only to be distinguished from the regular navy by another service flag, guarding the long sea border of the USSR and served primarily to prevent refugees and other opponents of the system from leaving the Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian government under President Yeltsin tried to form a more modern coast guard from the remains of the former KGB maritime border guard. The service moved to the Ministry of the Interior, but President Putin, in power since 2000, placed it again under the control of the secret service (FSB), and it has acquired combat capability. Nevertheless, attempts at modernization continue, including the adoption of an identifying slash paint scheme on Russian coast guard vessels.

Russian Coast Guard

Finally, the Argentinean coast guard, the Prefetura Naval, has a long history dating back to a captain-of-the-port organization in the nineteenth century. Since the Falklands War (1982) and the fall of a military dictatorship, the Argentinean coast guard has introduced a slash symbol on its vessels, painted in national colors to readily identify its ships with the service.

The slash/stripe as a maritime identification symbol for coast guards and related sea services around the world is a part of maritime cultural history, much like figureheads, funnel colors, house flags, uniforms—all of which have been subjects of serious specialized study. Beyond the cultural management strategies that can be addressed, the racing stripe as a logo or paint scheme underlies corporate and executive identity of the coast guards to the surrounding maritime community and the general public. ⚓

Argentinian coast guard (Prefetura Naval) vessel GC-24 PNA Doctor Manuel Mantilla.

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