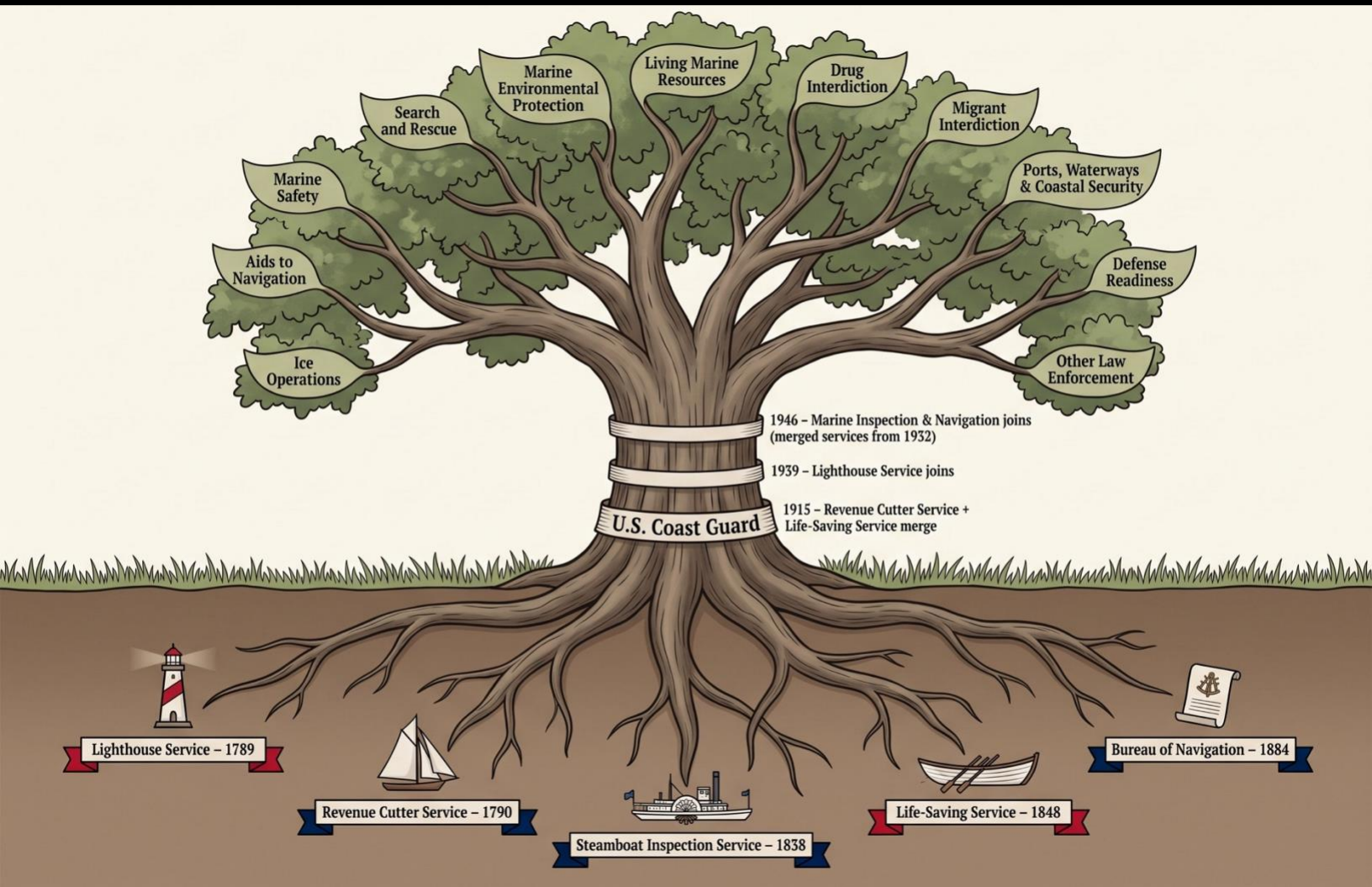




ALERT 11

Volume LXIII Issue 3 • Fall 2026



COAST GUARD ROOTS

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Cover: Five roots, one Coast Guard. See the feature inside. U.S. Coast Guard image.

Commander's Comments



Ahoy Shipmates,

As I sit here and read the newsletter, I feel honored to volunteer alongside a group of people who are committed to professionalism, knowledge and action.

Though small, our flotilla accomplished a lot. This last year, we had about 30 members who covered an area from Bellingham to Anacortes to the farthest islands in the San Juans. We have had members qualify as Vessel Examiners, Program Visitors and Boat Crew members. This year we have had 122 program visits, 97 vessel exams, 58.2 hours of instruction and 70 hours of underway time. Those hours of instruction included not only our adult boater education classes but also a life jacket class for kids and radio training for teenage instructors. We have completed inspections of our five bridges and are working on the rest of our private aids to navigation. The discrepancies reported have either been fixed or listed in the Local Notice to Mariners.

We said goodbye to members who have retired or decided to pursue other interests. We have also welcomed new members who are looking to contribute to our boating community. All of this was done because of the members who have taken the time to share their knowledge with both the community and other members of the flotilla.

Though the summer boating season is over, now is the time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the next. The mayday calls I heard on the radio during the summer months have left me thinking. While some emergencies were preventable, others were not.

I think about the standard questions asked by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Canadian Coast Guard. What is your location? What is the nature of your emergency? How many people are on board? Do you have life jackets on? I start to analyze what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it.

Our organization and flotilla members come to mind. I think about the boater education brochure you placed outside the harbor office. You verified the position of an aid to navigation, and the discrepancy has been fixed. I see the number of vessels you checked for proper equipment. One of our vessel examiners this summer found that a brand-new inflatable life jacket didn't have its CO2 cartridge in it. All these things affect the safety of boaters on the water, directly or indirectly.

Then there are situations that can't be prevented. The film about cold water survival, the whistle handed to a kayaker, or knowing where to find your GPS coordinates on a chartplotter are some of the tools that help.

This next year, I have decided to work toward becoming an instructor and to maintain my boat crew currency. What are your Auxiliary goals this year? Are there qualifications or areas you are interested in?

Semper Paratus.

Leslie Parks, Flotilla Commander

October

- 15 F11 meeting — guest speaker (PPE check before)
- 22 Division 1 meeting (Zoom)

November

- 5 F11 staff meeting
- 6–7 Northern Area Regional Training, CG Base Seattle
- 19 F11 meeting — Elections
- 26 Coast Guard Station Thanksgiving

December

- 3 F11 planning meeting
- Division 1 Change of Watch (in-person)

Please note that some dates are tentative. Please double check closer to the time of the event to confirm

ACRONYMS	
B'ham	Bellingham
CoC	Change of command event
CoW	Change of watch
DTRAIN	Districtwide training event
FL11	Flotilla 11
?	Placeholder when the exact date is not yet known
PPE	Personal protective equipment
QE	Qualification exam
RSSO	Rescue and survival systems officer
TBD	To be determined
VSC	Vessel safety check

Northern Area Regional Training, November 6–7

Two days at Base Seattle on how we can serve the Coast Guard in Puget Sound

All members of the Northwest District's Northern Area, Divisions 1 through 4, are invited to the 2026 Northern Area Regional Training, hosted by Division 2 on Friday and Saturday, November 6 and 7, at Coast Guard Base Seattle (Rainier Room, Building 4). This year's theme is how the Auxiliary can be of service to the active-duty Coast Guard in the Puget Sound area, with a focus on five areas: public affairs, incident command, pollution response and prevention, culinary assistance, and search and rescue.

Day 1 brings presentations from our outgoing and incoming District leadership and from Northern Area leadership. Capt. Michael Hunt, commander of Sector Puget Sound, and several of his department heads will discuss their priorities for 2027 and how the Auxiliary can help. Members will also meet our new Director of Auxiliary and talk with the District's Operations Training Officer and Order Issuing Authority, the active-duty officers who oversee Auxiliary operations. District Public Affairs will close the day with a session on working with the public at boat shows, regattas and other events.

Source: Bill Cotter, Vice Division Commander, Division 2.

Day 2 introduces three advanced courses that are normally multi-day certification classes for active duty: Incident Command System courses ICS-300 and ICS-400, and Search Coordination and Execution. The overviews are meant to encourage members to sign up for the full courses when they are offered. The day ends with an overview of the Marine Safety Pollution Investigator qualification and a session on the 2027 annual Team Coordination Training and Risk Management requirement for surface operations.

Friday evening, from 6 to 8 p.m., there will be a dinner at the Base Seattle galley, prepared by the Auxiliary's culinary assistance members. A \$10 contribution is suggested to cover the meal; anything left over goes to Northern Area operations.

There will be a virtual option, but the organizers strongly encourage attending in person for the fellowship and networking. Seating is limited to 100, so sign up early: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0A4BAFAF28A7F4CE9-66371220-northern>

New National Leadership Elected for 2026–2028

The Coast Guard Auxiliary has chosen its national leadership for the next two years. On August 21, at the Auxiliary National Training Event in Orlando, Fla., the National Bridge elected:

- ✳ National Commodore (NACO): COMO Patrick Feighery
- ✳ Vice National Commodore (VNACO): COMO John Krogmann
- ✳ Deputy National Commodore, Atlantic Area East and Operations: COMO Michael Klacik
- ✳ Deputy National Commodore, Atlantic Area West and Mission Support: COMO Mark Villeneuve
- ✳ Deputy National Commodore, Pacific Area and Recreational Boating Safety: COMO Curtis Han

The Deputy National Commodore for Information Technology and Planning has not yet been named.

Source: "National Elections Held at NTE 2026," 5nr.org.

New Ways to Serve: Paddles and Drones

Two Auxiliary programs our district is developing

At recent flotilla meetings, flotilla leaders shared updates on two programs the Northwest District is developing: one that puts Auxiliarists in kayaks, and one that puts them behind the controls of a drone. Both are established national Auxiliary programs. Here is what they are and what it takes to take part.

AuxPad: Meeting Paddlers Where They Are

Paddlers are now a large share of the boaters who get into serious trouble. In Washington, paddlesports accounted for 61% of reportable boating deaths in 2023 and 2024, and most of those who died were not wearing a life jacket. Many paddlers never visit a marina, take a boating class or ask for a Vessel Safety Check, so the Auxiliary's usual outreach often misses them.

The Auxiliary Paddlecraft program, AuxPad, was created to close that gap. Its handbook describes it as safety outreach aimed specifically at paddlers, showing them through instruction ashore and example on the water how to recognize, avoid and handle dangerous situations. The program promotes life jacket wear and the Coast Guard's required safety equipment, and it was built in partnership with the American Canoe Association.

The new team takes office on November 1, 2026, succeeding National Commodore Mary Kirkwood and her bridge.

For Flotilla 11, the Pacific Area seat is the one to watch. COMO Han will represent the Pacific Area, which includes our Northwest District, and will also oversee the national Recreational Boating Safety program. That's the program behind our vessel safety checks, program visits and public education classes.

Please join us in thanking Commodore Kirkwood and her team for their service, and in welcoming the new national bridge.

AuxPad has two parts:

- ✳ **AuxPad Ashore** is the foundation of the program: vessel safety checks of paddle craft, public education classes such as *A Paddler's Guide to Safety*, program visits, and informal talks at launch ramps, docks, shops and events. Members who are already instructors or vessel examiners can do this work with the qualifications they have, and any member with an interest in paddling can help.
- ✳ **AuxPad Afloat** puts qualified AuxPad Operators in kayaks, on the water, alongside the paddlers they are trying to reach. To qualify, a member must be basically qualified and demonstrate a set of paddling and rescue skills, including a five-mile paddle, deep-water capsize recovery and towing another boat, assessed by an AuxPad Qualifier. Operators also pass the Navigation Rules exam, complete the radio tasks from boat crew training and the annual Surface Operations and Team Coordination Training refreshers, and requalify every three years. Sit-on-top, pedal-drive and decked sea kayaks can be accepted as facilities; canoes, paddleboards and inflatables cannot.

Afloat patrols are run as carefully as any boat patrol. AuxPad Operators always paddle with a second vessel in sight, normally stay within half a mile of shore, keep a

radio guard with 30-minute checks, and go out only in daylight with winds under 15 knots and seas under a foot. In waters as cold as ours, they also dress for immersion: a dry suit or wetsuit whenever the water is 65°F or colder, and a dry suit, hood and gloves at 50°F or below.

The safety message is simple and familiar: wear a life jacket, carry the right equipment, and know your limits and conditions. September's Parker Reef rescue shows why it matters.

Drones: Eyes in the Sky for Coast Guard Units

The Coast Guard has been adding small drones to its units since 2023, and its own short-range drone program has qualified nearly 500 pilots. The Auxiliary began bringing drones into its air program the same year, mainly to support search and rescue over the water.

Under the Auxiliary Short-Range Unmanned Aircraft System Remote Pilot program, qualified Auxiliarists can be designated to fly drones in support of Coast Guard units. To qualify, a member must:

- ✱ hold an FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate

Sources: Auxiliary Paddlecraft (AuxPad) Safety Program Handbook 16794.11A, January 2023; Auxiliary Response Directorate and HSToday (drone program); Washington State Parks, April 2025.

Geospatial Damage Assessments

By Kat Scanlon

When a large-scale disaster strikes, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) needs a picture of the damage, and it needs it fast. Since at least the 2017 hurricane season, when Harvey, Irma and Maria hit, FEMA analysts have assessed damage remotely from satellite and aerial imagery, with the goal of understanding the full extent of a disaster within 72 hours. That work is called geospatial damage assessment, or GDA.

Speed matters because of how federal aid works. Before federal help can flow, a state's governor must request a major disaster declaration. That request rests on a damage assessment showing the disaster is more than state and local governments can handle. Traditionally that meant teams on the ground going house to house, which can take days or weeks.

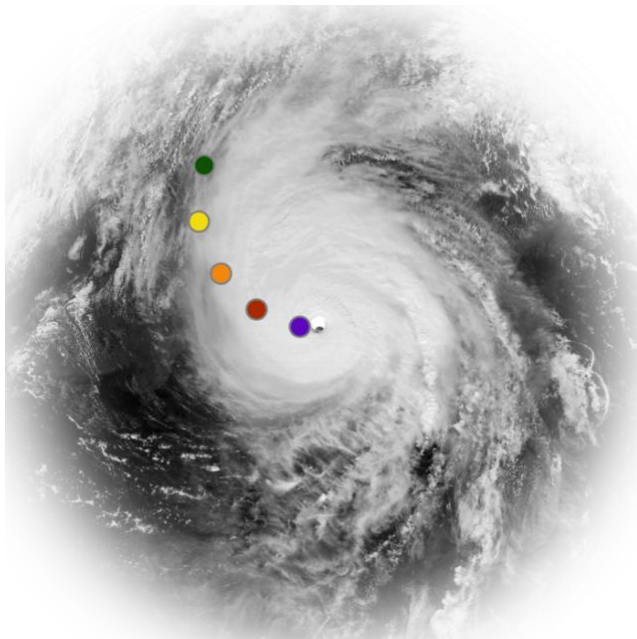
- ✱ complete Incident Command System courses ICS-100, ICS-200, ICS-210 (or ICS-300) and ICS-800, and be current in Auxiliary core training
- ✱ pass a security background investigation
- ✱ be current in risk management training

Auxiliarists in several other districts already fly in support of their local Coast Guard units, and the program is now taking shape in Puget Sound. Sector Puget Sound has assigned an officer to work with the Auxiliary on setting it up, and Auxiliary leads have been named for the Northern Area and for Division 1. Here at Flotilla 11, Manny Eusebio has offered to lead the program's administration.

The Auxiliary also has a letter of intent with the Civil Air Patrol, which runs one of the largest volunteer drone programs in the country. One early idea is joint training in which a Civil Air Patrol crew brings and flies one of its drones from an Auxiliary boat.

Interested? Both programs are still taking shape in our district, and details will follow as they firm up. If either one interests you, now is a good time to start. A Part 107 certificate or the AuxPad skills qualification takes some preparation. For either program, talk to Manny Eusebio, FSO-OP.

What's new is who helps. When a large disaster outstrips FEMA's own analysts, FEMA can now draw on vetted outside volunteers, and since January 2025 the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary has been one source. The GDA Project is an official U.S. Coast Guard program, a partnership among FEMA, the Coast Guard Office of Emergency Management and the Auxiliary. It is administered by the Auxiliary's Emergency Management and Disaster Response Directorate, known as the Q-Directorate. Members serve as Auxiliarists under Coast Guard orders, while FEMA directs the day-to-day work. Working from home on FEMA's damage assessment platform, the GDA team builds a structure-by-structure map of the damage that local, state and federal emergency managers use to understand the scope and scale of an event.



Satellite imagery is the starting point for most damage assessments.

The Project So Far

Since it began, the GDA Project has responded to typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes and floods in the United States and its territories, and its work has supported several federal disaster declarations.

In June 2026, the team took part in a three-day, full-scale joint training exercise with FEMA and the Civil Air Patrol to sharpen its skills and show that the volunteer organizations can work together. Team members practiced assessments using open-source research plus satellite and aerial imagery. July was a particularly busy month, as the team responded to tornadoes and floods in four states in quick succession.

The Work

The heart of the work is comparing satellite images from before and after an event to determine its impact, but sometimes the mission is a bit different.

Aerial imagery. FEMA may receive photos from the Civil Air Patrol taken at an angle from a moving aircraft, known as oblique imagery. The team must match each photo to its location on the map and, where there is damage, mark it on the map with a damage assessment point. Most points mark damaged structures, but the team also marks hazards such as downed trees and debris piles. Pinning down where an angled photo was taken can take some work.

Open-source assessments. Cloud cover can keep new satellite images from being taken, but the internet often

holds valuable information posted by local news, residents or law enforcement showing water levels, downed trees or damaged buildings. Then the job is puzzle solving: matching a video with no location information to an address, using clues such as a distinctive roofline or a gas station's name.



An example of open-source imagery: a social media video of flooding in Sumas, Wash., December 2025. After Dark News video still.

What a Deployment Looks Like

Assignments usually come with about 24 hours' notice, sometimes less. When called up, team members are expected to work at least a two- to three-hour shift on each day of the call-up. A day's work can run from a few hours to a full day ending at 5 p.m. Eastern (2 p.m. in Bellingham), and a call-up may last one day or several.

Each day includes a mandatory Zoom call, used for the daily briefing, mission updates and help with tricky assessments. If you share your space with anyone, you'll want headphones, because the conversation is fairly continuous.

The work also comes with firm ground rules. Volunteers may not do GDA work in public places such as coffee shops or parks, may not use public Wi-Fi, and may not post photos or descriptions of their GDA work on social media. Any public mention of GDA involvement must be approved in advance under Coast Guard social media rules.

How to Join

To be accepted for training, you must be an Auxiliary member in good standing with Core Training, the Auxiliary's required basic training, complete. Joining the team takes five steps:

- ✱ Fill out an application.

- * Watch an orientation video.
- * Complete about three hours of training.
- * Pass an exam, which takes about an hour.
- * Receive your team lead's recommendation for deployment.

The training teaches you to apply defined criteria to assess damage, and the self-paced exam is given in the practice environment. Once certified, you take a recertification exam each year, and you must log on to the assessment platform at least once a month or your login is deactivated.

Is GDA for Me?

- * Do you enjoy learning new software?

- * Does your computer have enough power to handle heavy graphics and web applications?
- * Do you have private high-speed internet access?
- * Can you adapt to changing circumstances?
- * Can you deploy from home on 24 hours' notice, sometimes less, during regular Eastern time zone business hours?
- * Can you apply defined criteria over and over without letting your attention to detail slip?

If you answered yes, you can apply on the Q-Directorate's GDA Project page on the Auxiliary members' website (login required): <https://www.uscgaux.info/content.php?unit=Q-DEPT&category=gda-project>

Service Records: Steve Bell and Hoyt Hatfield

A closer look at the careers of two shipmates who retired this summer

In our Summer edition we said fair winds to Steve Bell and Hoyt Hatfield, who retired this year after nearly half a century of combined service. Here is a fuller picture of what that service looked like.

Steve Bell: 24 Years

Steve joined the Auxiliary in 2002 in a flotilla on the south side of Tampa Bay, Fla. He moved to Bellingham and joined Flotilla 11 in 2013. Over his career he qualified as boat crew and coxswain, vessel examiner and aid verifier, and in Florida he also served as a program visitor and instructor. His own boat was an Auxiliary facility for much of that time.

Steve served as flotilla commander, vice flotilla commander and immediate past flotilla commander in both Florida and Bellingham, and here he was also an assistant district staff officer for vessel examination. His flotilla staff offices included Vessel Examination and Human Resources in both places, and Operations, Member Training and Program Visitation in Florida.

Steve earned 12 ribbons and awards, among them the Auxiliary Achievement Medal, an Auxiliary Commandant Letter of Commendation, ten Auxiliary Sustained Service Awards, eight Auxiliary Operations Service Awards, six Coast Guard Unit Commendations, three Coast Guard Meritorious Team Commendations and the Transportation 9-11 Ribbon. We wish Steve and Jolie a pleasant retirement.

Hoyt Hatfield: 25 Years

Hoyt joined the Auxiliary in Flotilla 19 on June 25, 2001, joined Flotilla 11 in October 2021, and retired on June 26, 2026. He qualified as boat crew and coxswain, vessel examiner, aid verifier, program visitor, instructor and fingerprint technician, and he offered his skills as a first aid and CPR provider. His boat, too, was an Auxiliary facility for much of his career.

Hoyt's leadership reached well beyond the flotilla. He served as District Captain North, District Directorate Chief for Prevention, District Staff Officer for Program Visitation, Division 1 Commander and Vice Commander, and division staff officer for Publications and for Human Resources. At the flotilla level he was flotilla commander and immediate past flotilla commander, and he held staff offices in Aids to Navigation, Vessel Examination, Operations, Program Visitation, Finance, Human Resources, Public Education, Communications, Communication Services and Materials.

Hoyt earned 14 ribbons and awards and three insignia: the Auxiliary Coxswain, Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) and Past Officer devices. His awards include the Auxiliary Achievement Medal (2012), the Operations, Examiner and Instructor Program Medals, fifteen Vessel Examination and RBS Visitation Program Service Performance Awards, eleven Auxiliary Sustained Service Awards, six Coast Guard Unit Commendations and two Coast Guard Meritorious Team Commendations.

Both men's racks also carry the Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the Coast Guard for its Hurricane Katrina response, the Department of Homeland Security

Outstanding Unit Award and the Coast Guard Special Operations Service Ribbon. Fair winds and following seas, shipmates.



Steve Bell's ribbons and awards.



Hoyt Hatfield's ribbons and awards.



Hoyt Hatfield's Auxiliary Coxswain, RBS and Past Officer insignia.



Mayday at Parker Reef

Dry suits, life jackets and a VHF radio save a capsized kayaker in the San Juans

On the morning of Friday, September 25, two kayakers were paddling near Parker Reef, between Orcas and Sucia islands, when a wave capsized one of them, a 45-year-old man, and put him in 54-degree water.

At 8:09 a.m. he called a mayday on VHF channel 16 with his handheld radio. Watchstanders at the Coast Guard Northwest District command center launched a 45-foot Response Boat–Medium crew from Station Bellingham and an MH-65 Dolphin aircrew from Air Station Port Angeles.

The Station Bellingham boat crew arrived on scene at 9:12 a.m., pulled the man from the water and recovered his kayak. They brought him to Brandt's Landing Marina in Eastsound on Orcas Island, where emergency medical services were waiting. His paddling partner stayed upright and paddled safely to shore on his own.

Conditions were not atypical for the Salish Sea: the Coast Guard reported 8 mph winds, 1-foot waves and 60-

degree air. The danger was the water. At 54 degrees, cold water can quickly sap a swimmer's strength and ability to help himself.

Both men had done things right. They wore life jackets and dry suits, and they carried a VHF radio. "In cold water, every single second counts," said Lt. Allison Ruth, command duty officer for Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound. "This successful rescue was possible because the kayakers had dry suits, wore their life jackets and used a VHF radio to call for help."

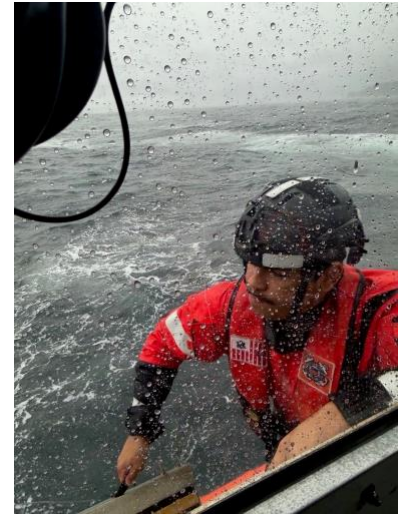
It is the same message our public education classes and Vessel Safety Checks carry every season: dress for the water temperature, not the air; wear a life jacket; and carry a way to get help that works if you are in the water, such as a waterproof handheld VHF radio with digital selective calling (DSC) and built-in GPS, a personal locator beacon (PLB) or a satellite messenger.



Parker Reef, Wash. — A Station Bellingham boat crew rescues a 45-year-old paddler after a wave capsized his kayak, Sept. 25, 2026. U.S. Coast Guard photo.



Parker Reef, Wash. — A Station Bellingham crew member works to reach the capsized paddler. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

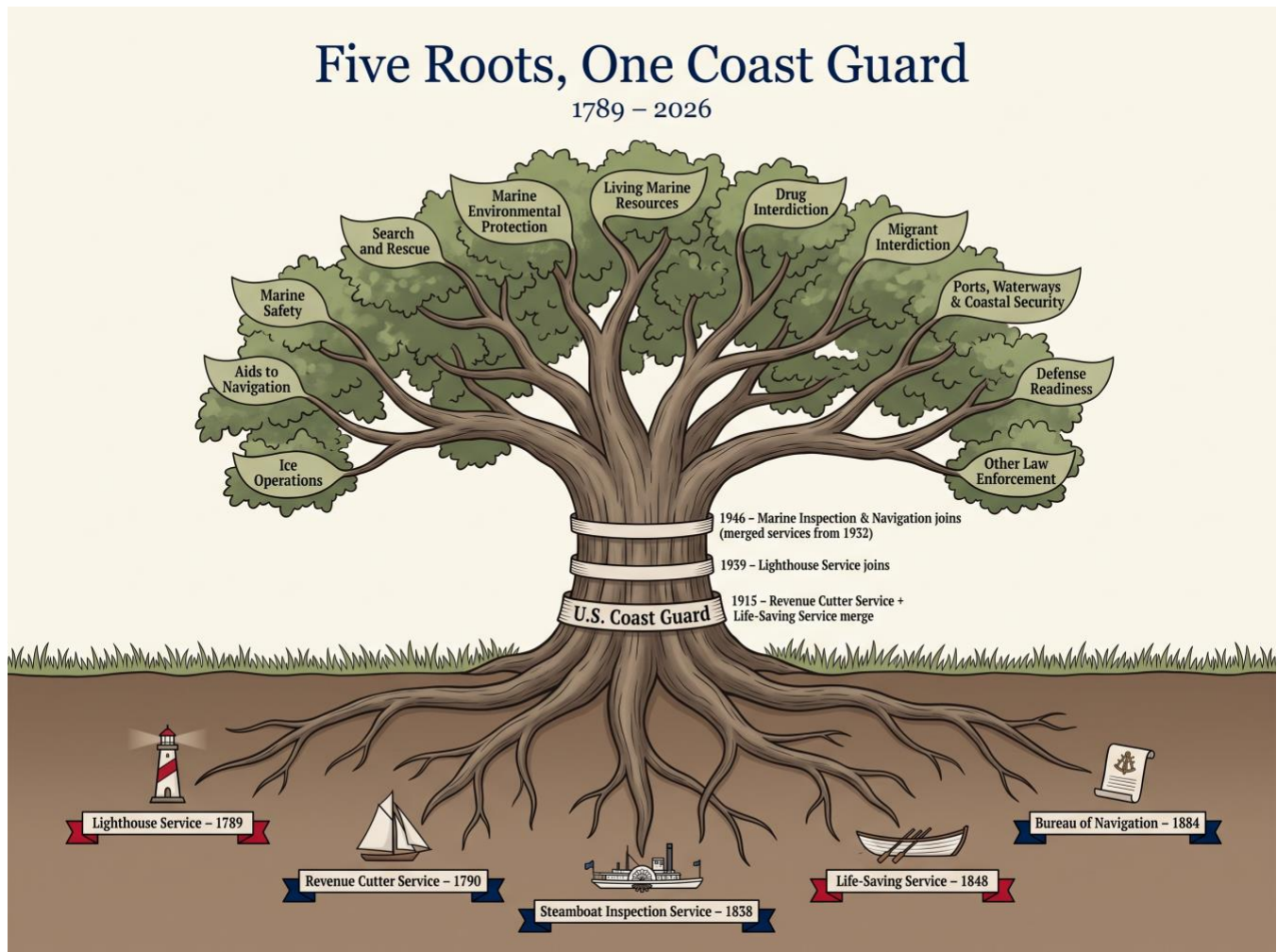


Parker Reef, Wash. — Petty Officer 3rd Class Mikko Smith, a crew member aboard Station Bellingham's 45-foot Response Boat–Medium, works to rescue the paddler. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Sources: U.S. Coast Guard news release, September 26, 2026; Cascadia Daily News; San Juan Islander.

Five Roots, One Coast Guard

The Roots of the U.S. Coast Guard in America's 250th Year



The U.S. Coast Guard grew from five predecessor agencies, merged between 1915 and 1946. Their missions live on in the eleven statutory missions of today's Coast Guard. U.S. Coast Guard image.

As the nation marks its 250th anniversary, it is worth remembering how early the Coast Guard's story begins. Its history starts in the first years of the new federal government. In 1790, only fourteen years after independence, Congress acted on a request from the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, for "a few armed vessels" to protect the nation's revenue. That law, signed on August 4, is the source of the Coast Guard's birthday. This year the service turned 236.

Still, the Coast Guard did not grow from one root. Today's service is the result of mergers among five older federal agencies, each with its own uniforms, traditions, heroes and missions:

- ✱ **Lighthouse Service (1789)**
- ✱ **Revenue Cutter Service (1790)**
- ✱ **Steamboat Inspection Service (1838)**
- ✱ **Life-Saving Service (1848)**
- ✱ **Bureau of Navigation (1884)**

The Revenue Cutter Service is the source of the Coast Guard's birthday, its military status and its cutters. The Lighthouse Service brought aids to navigation. The Life-Saving Service brought the surfboat and the motto that rescuers still live by. The Steamboat Inspection Service and the Bureau of Navigation brought the work of marine safety: licensing mariners, inspecting vessels and investigating casualties. Almost everything the Coast Guard does today, including much of what we do as Auxiliarists, can be traced to one of these five agencies.

Two Centuries of Mergers at a Glance

Year	Event
1789	Ninth act of the First Congress places lighthouses, beacons and buoys under federal care (Aug. 7)
1790	Congress authorizes ten revenue cutters at Hamilton's request (Aug. 4), the Coast Guard's official birthday; the service is part of the Treasury Department
1838	First federal steamboat inspection law (July 7)
1848	Newell Act funds the first federal lifesaving stations on the New Jersey shore (Aug. 14)
1852	Lighthouse Board created; Steamboat Act creates a true federal inspection service
1876	Revenue Cutter School of Instruction founded (July 31), today's Coast Guard Academy
1878	Life-Saving Service becomes a separate agency under Sumner Kimball
1884	Bureau of Navigation created (July 5)
1894	Revenue Marine formally renamed Revenue Cutter Service
1910	Lighthouse Board replaced by the Bureau of Lighthouses
1915	Revenue Cutter Service + Life-Saving Service = U.S. Coast Guard (Jan. 28), still under the Treasury
1917–1919	Coast Guard operates as part of the Navy during World War I (Apr. 6, 1917 – Aug. 28, 1919)
1932	Steamboat Inspection and Navigation bureaus merge
1936	Renamed Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation
1939	Lighthouse Service joins the Coast Guard (July 1); Coast Guard Reserve, today's Auxiliary, created (June 23)
1941–1946	Coast Guard operates as part of the Navy during World War II (Nov. 1, 1941 – Jan. 1, 1946)
1942–1946	Marine inspection functions move to the Coast Guard, temporarily in 1942 and permanently in 1946
1967	Coast Guard moves from the Treasury to the new Department of Transportation (Apr. 1)
2003	Coast Guard moves to the new Department of Homeland Security (Mar. 1)

The Revenue Cutter Service (1790–1915): Hamilton's "System of Cutters"

The young republic was poor. Under the Articles of Confederation the government could not collect taxes, and once the Constitution was ratified it relied almost entirely on tariffs on imported goods. Smuggling was common and widely tolerated, as it had been under British rule. Hamilton saw that the Treasury needed enforcement at sea, and on August 4, 1790, Congress authorized the construction of ten cutters for that work.

These were small, fast sailing vessels, a mix of two-masted schooners and single-masted sloops of 38 to 70 tons, each assigned to a coastal district from New Hampshire to Georgia. On March 21, 1791, President Washington commissioned Hopley Yeaton of New Hampshire as master of the cutter *Scammel*. He was the first seagoing officer commissioned under the new Constitution. Many historians believe Capt. John Foster Williams's *Massachusetts* was the first of the ten cutters to put to sea.

The service went by several names in its early decades: the "system of cutters," the Revenue Service and, most often, the Revenue Marine. Congress made "Revenue Cutter Service" the official name in 1894. Under any name it was for several years the nation's only armed force afloat. The Continental Navy had been disbanded after the Revolution. Congress did not authorize a new

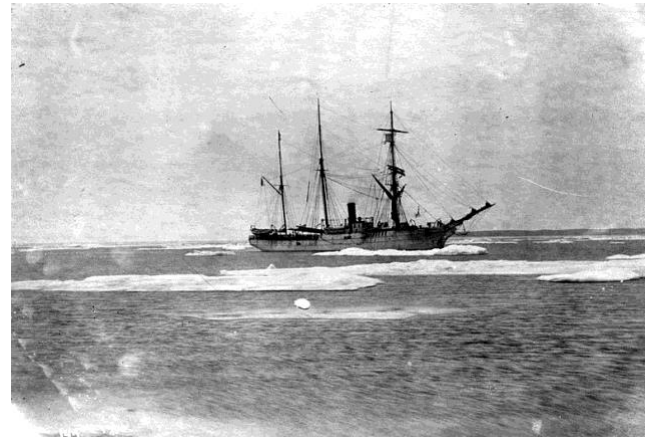
navy until 1794, its first frigates were not at sea until 1797, and the Navy Department was not created until 1798. When the Quasi-War with France began that year, revenue cutters sailed alongside the new Navy and captured or helped capture French privateers. This began a tradition that holds today: in wartime, the Coast Guard serves with the Navy.

Over the next century the cutters acquired almost every maritime mission the government had to give. They enforced the 1808 ban on the importation of enslaved people, fought pirates in the Gulf of Mexico, enforced quarantine, protected timber reserves, patrolled the Bering Sea fur-seal grounds and helped mariners in distress. The cutter *Harriet Lane* is credited with firing the first shot from a vessel in the Civil War, across the bow of a merchant steamer off Fort Sumter in April 1861.

After the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, the Revenue Cutter Service became the federal government's presence in the territory. For decades the cutters carried judges, doctors, teachers and mail to its remote villages. In the winter of 1897–98, eight whaling ships were trapped in the ice near Point Barrow. 1st Lt. David Jarvis, 2nd Lt. Ellsworth Bertholf and Surgeon Samuel Call, all of the cutter *Bear*, traveled more than 1,500 miles overland, driving a herd of reindeer to feed

the stranded crews. All three received Congressional Gold Medals. Bertholf later became the first Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard.

The service also needed trained officers. On July 31, 1876, Congress established the Revenue Cutter School of Instruction, and in May 1877 its first class of nine cadets went to sea aboard the schooner *James C. Dobbin*. That school became the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, which marked its 150th anniversary this summer.



The Far North — The revenue cutter Bear among the ice, 1914. Built as a whaler, the barkentine-rigged Bear served the Revenue Cutter Service in Alaskan waters for decades. Lomen Bros. photo.

The Lighthouse Service (1789–1939): Older Than the Cutters

The revenue cutters are the source of the Coast Guard's birthday, but the lighthouses came under federal care first. The Coast Guard nevertheless counts its age from 1790, because it descends directly from the Revenue Cutter Service; the Lighthouse Service was a separate civilian bureau that did not join until 1939. On August 7, 1789, a year before Hamilton's cutters, the First Congress passed its ninth law, "An Act for the establishment and support of Lighthouses, Beacons, Buoys, and Public Piers." The twelve colonial lighthouses, including Boston Light (first lit in 1716), became federal property under the Secretary of the Treasury. August 7 is still observed as National Lighthouse Day.

For several decades the system was run with an eye to economy, and the quality of the lights suffered. In 1852 Congress replaced that arrangement with a nine-member Lighthouse Board of naval officers, Army engineers and scientists. The Board adopted the French Fresnel lens and expanded the system rapidly. When it took over in 1852 there were 331 lighthouses and 42 lightships. By the end of the century the number of aids to navigation had grown to the thousands.

In 1910 Congress replaced the Board with the Bureau of Lighthouses in the Department of Commerce and Labor (the Department of Commerce after 1913), headed by Commissioner George R. Putnam. During his 25 years in charge, the service added radio beacons, electrified many lights and automated others.

The Lighthouse Service is also part of the history of women in federal service. Long before women could vote, many of them served as lighthouse keepers. Some succeeded husbands or fathers who had died, and others were appointed in their own right. Ida Lewis of Lime Rock, R.I., was credited with saving at least 18 lives and became one of the most famous women in America.

On July 1, 1939, under President Franklin Roosevelt's Reorganization Plan No. II, the Lighthouse Service was consolidated into the Coast Guard. Its keepers could join the Coast Guard or remain civilians, and many of them stayed at their lights for the rest of their careers. The Coast Guard has maintained the nation's aids to navigation ever since, and Auxiliarists help with that work today through the Aids to Navigation and Chart Updating programs.



Patos Island, Wash. — Patos Island Light Station, April 1944, five years after the Lighthouse Service joined the Coast Guard. National Archives photo.

The Life-Saving Service (1848–1915): The Surfmén

Before the Civil War, shipwreck rescue in America was mostly a matter of volunteers. The Massachusetts Humane Society had built huts of refuge on its coast since 1787 and its first lifeboat station in 1807. On August 14, 1848, the Newell Act, championed by New Jersey Rep. William A. Newell, appropriated \$10,000 for lifesaving equipment and unmanned boathouses on the New Jersey shore between Sandy Hook and Little Egg Harbor. More stations followed, but they relied on volunteers and were poorly maintained.

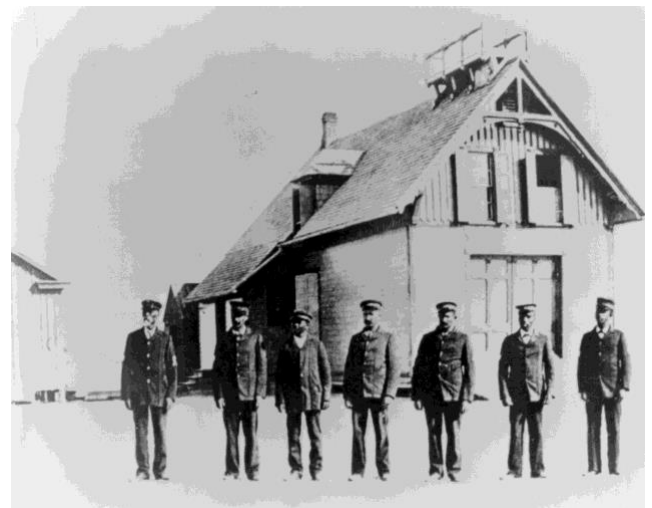
The man who transformed the system was Sumner Increase Kimball. In 1871 he was appointed chief of the Treasury Department's Revenue Marine Division. He went on to hire paid, full-time crews, build new stations, set professional standards, require constant drill and remove political appointees. In 1878 Congress made the Life-Saving Service a separate agency within the Treasury, with Kimball as General Superintendent. He held that post for its entire 37-year existence.

Each station was manned by a keeper and a crew of surfmen. Their duties included beach patrols on foot through the night in every kind of weather, rowing self-bailing surfboats through breaking seas, and firing a Lyle gun to send a line out to a stranded ship so that its crew could be brought ashore one at a time in a breeches buoy. A saying from those years, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back," is still repeated in today's Coast Guard. It is unofficial, but it captures the service's attitude well.

One of the best-known stories of the service comes from Pea Island on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. In 1880

Richard Etheridge, a formerly enslaved man and a Civil War veteran, became the first African American keeper of a lifesaving station. His all-Black crew became known as one of the best-drilled in the service. In October 1896, during a hurricane, they rescued all nine people aboard the schooner *E.S. Newman*. A century later, in 1996, the Coast Guard posthumously awarded Etheridge and his crew the Gold Lifesaving Medal.

By 1915 the Life-Saving Service operated more than 270 stations on the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts and the Great Lakes. On January 28 of that year, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Act to Create the Coast Guard, which combined the Life-Saving Service with the Revenue Cutter Service. Kimball retired and the stations became Coast Guard stations.



Pea Island, N.C. — Keeper Richard Etheridge (far left) and the crew of the Pea Island Life-Saving Station, 1896. In 1996 they were posthumously awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

The Steamboat Inspection Service (1838–1932): Safety from Disaster

Steam power made river and coastal travel fast, but it also made it dangerous. Early boilers often exploded, and steamboat fires and explosions killed hundreds of passengers. On July 7, 1838, Congress passed its first law "to provide for the better security of the lives of passengers on board of vessels propelled in whole or in part by steam." The law required inspections of hulls and boilers, but the inspectors were local appointees paid by the boat owners, and the law had little effect.

After a further series of boiler explosions, Congress passed the Steamboat Act of August 30, 1852. It required hydrostatic testing of boilers and safety valves, required

pilots and engineers to be licensed, and created a corps of supervising and local inspectors under the Treasury. This was the beginning of the Steamboat Inspection Service. It was one of the first federal regulatory agencies of its kind in the United States, and it was created in response to deaths that could have been prevented.

The disasters did not stop entirely. The burning of the excursion steamer *General Slocum* in New York's East River in 1904 killed more than 1,000 people and exposed rotted life preservers and untrained crews. It led to major reforms. The same pattern of disaster followed by

investigation and reform still guides the Coast Guard's approach to marine safety.

The Bureau of Navigation (1884–1932): Documenting the Fleet

The Bureau of Navigation was created by the Act of July 5, 1884, to bring together various Treasury offices concerned with merchant ships. It was responsible for the documentation and admeasurement (official measurement of tonnage) of American merchant vessels, the collection of tonnage taxes, the work of shipping commissioners who oversaw the hiring of

merchant seamen, and the enforcement of navigation laws generally.

The Bureau of Navigation is the least well-known of the five predecessors, but its work continues in the Coast Guard's National Vessel Documentation Center, which still issues certificates of documentation for American vessels.

The Long Road to Consolidation (1932–1946)

In 1932 the Steamboat Inspection Service and the Bureau of Navigation were merged into the Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection. After the 1934 fire aboard the liner *Morro Castle* off the New Jersey coast, which killed more than 130 people, Congress reorganized it again in 1936 as the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation.

World War II brought the final consolidation. In 1942, with American merchant ships under attack from U-

boats along the coast, President Roosevelt temporarily transferred marine inspection and merchant mariner licensing to the Coast Guard, while vessel documentation went temporarily to Customs. In 1946 the bureau was abolished and its marine safety functions were transferred permanently to the Coast Guard.

With that, all five roots of today's Coast Guard had come together.

Roots in Our Own Waters

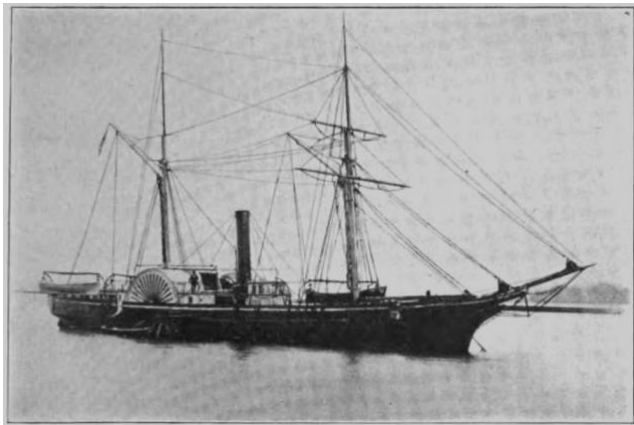
Each of the five predecessor agencies left traces in the waters around Bellingham and the Salish Sea.

The first cutter north of San Francisco. In 1851 Congress created the Puget Sound customs district, and in 1854 the headquarters moved to Port Townsend. On September 28, 1854, the revenue cutter *Jefferson Davis*, a topsail schooner under Capt. William C. Pease, arrived at Port Townsend. It was the first revenue cutter stationed north of San Francisco. It patrolled against smuggling across the new and loosely enforced border with British territory, and it took part in the Puget Sound War of 1855–56.

A tender that served two masters. The *Shubrick* was a sidewheel steamer built at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and sent to the Pacific through the Strait of Magellan, arriving at San Francisco in May 1858. It was the first lighthouse tender on the West Coast, and the first steam-powered lighthouse tender of any kind. During the Civil War it was transferred to the Revenue Cutter Service and was based at Port Townsend from mid-1862. It enforced customs laws in Puget Sound before returning to lighthouse duty.

Lights in the San Juans. The light stations at Patos Island and Turn Point on Stuart Island were both established in 1893. Both still stand watch over Boundary Pass and Haro Strait, waters our flotilla's facilities know well. Patos Island was the setting for *The Light on the Island*, Helene Glidden's memoir of growing up as a keeper's daughter there in the early 1900s.

Makah and Quileute surfmen. A Life-Saving Service station was established at Neah Bay in 1877, on the Makah Reservation at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Under a non-Native keeper, nearly all of its surfmen were members of the Makah and Quileute tribes. This was one of the earliest federal units staffed mainly by Native Americans. The original station closed in 1890; a new station opened on Waaddah Island in 1908 and moved to Baadah Point on the mainland in 1910, where Coast Guard Station Neah Bay stands today.



The sidewheel steamer Shubrick, the first lighthouse tender on the West Coast, served as a revenue cutter out of Port Townsend during the Civil War. Public domain photo.



Neah Bay, Wash. — The surfboat crew of the U.S. Life-Saving Station at Neah Bay, 1910. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

The Sixth Root: Us

The Coast Guard has one more founding date that matters to our members. On June 23, 1939, a week before the Lighthouse Service merger, Congress passed the Coast Guard Reserve Act, which created a civilian, volunteer reserve of boat owners to promote boating safety and support the service. When Congress created a military Reserve in 1941, the civilian organization was renamed the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Our predecessors are easy to recognize. Our vessel examiners do the same kind of work as the steamboat

inspectors. Our aids-to-navigation and chart-updating volunteers are continuing the work of the Lighthouse Service. Our boat crews train for search and rescue, as the surfmen did on their beaches.

As the country marks its 250th year, the Coast Guard can look back on more than two centuries of service through five agencies. Their missions were brought together over a period of 31 years, from 1915 to 1946, into one service whose motto is *Semper Paratus*, Always Ready.

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The Coast Guard in the News

Building Up in the Arctic

The Coast Guard is investing heavily in the bases and ships it needs for a growing presence in the Arctic and the North Pacific. On September 11 it awarded Tutor Perini a \$315 million contract for a new fuel pier at Base Kodiak, Alaska, with berths for two major cutters, to be completed in fall 2030. Days later it awarded The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company \$173.7 million for the next phase of the modernization of Base Seattle, home port of the icebreakers *Polar Star* and *Healy*. That phase includes a new pier at Slip 36B, dredging, and two major-cutter berths able to host the service's future Polar Security Cutters, the first of which is now projected for delivery in March 2033.

The ships those piers will serve are already being built. The Coast Guard has contracts for 11 Arctic Security Cutters, a new class of icebreaker based on a Finnish design, with Bollinger Shipyards in Louisiana, Rauma Marine Constructions in Finland and Davie Defense. Steel was cut for the first one in April, and it is scheduled for delivery in 2028. The first two will be based at Kodiak and a third at Seward.

"Modernizing Base Seattle is critical to ensuring our Coast Guard has the infrastructure required to support the next generation of cutters and the missions they will perform in the Arctic and across the Pacific," said Vice Commandant Adm. Thomas G. Allan Jr.

Operation Pacific Viper

The Coast Guard's surge of cutters, aircraft and tactical teams against drug smuggling in the Eastern Pacific has now seized more than 260,000 pounds of cocaine. In six days in mid-September, the crew of the cutter *Tampa* seized more than 25,000 pounds in three interdictions off Central America and detained 13 suspected smugglers.

New Skipper at Air Station Port Angeles

On July 9, Cmdr. Beau C. Belanger relieved Cmdr. Kelly L. Higgins as commanding officer of Coast Guard Air Station

Sources: gCaptain, September 15 and 23, 2026; Stars and Stripes, July 15, 2026; Department of Homeland Security, September 24, 2026; Peninsula Daily News, July 21, 2026; Bellingham SeaFeast.

Port Angeles, in a ceremony presided over by Capt. William L. Mees, chief of staff of the Coast Guard Northwest District. During Higgins's tenure the air station's crews conducted 225 search-and-rescue cases, saving or assisting 45 lives. She now serves as incident management chief at the Northwest District in Seattle. Belanger previously attended the U.S. Army War College and served as engineering officer at Air Station Borinquen, Puerto Rico.

Commissioned in 1935, Air Station Port Angeles is the Coast Guard's oldest continuously operating air station. Its MH-65 Dolphins are regular partners on cases in our waters, including the Parker Reef rescue this month and the Sucia Island floatplane rescue this summer.

Coast Guard at SeaFeast

The 10th annual Bellingham SeaFeast, the city's celebration of its working waterfront and fishing fleet, filled Zuanich Point Park on September 26 and 27. The active-duty Coast Guard was there with a booth, and the festival's schedule included Coast Guard rescue demonstrations.



Bellingham, Wash. — Coast Guard members staff the service's booth at Bellingham SeaFeast, September 26, 2026. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Member Training

On August 24, Bret Phillips passed his initial boat crew qualification check ride with a Qualification Examiner, and Nico Lacchini passed his three-year recertification check ride. Kat Scanlon completed the Coast Guard's Emergency Management Tasks course, the Introduction to Marine Safety and Environmental Protection (IMSEP)

course and the Administrative Procedures Course. All of the flotilla's scheduled training is complete for the year.

Kat is also now serving as an assistant team lead for the national Auxiliary's Geospatial Damage Assessment Project.

Navigation Systems

So far this year, members have completed verification assignments for all five bridges in our area (one found discrepant) and 26 of our 44 private aids to navigation

(one found discrepant, as reported this summer). Still to do are seven private aids in Island County and 11 in San Juan County.

Communication Services

A New Look Under the Hood for BLIAUX.com

Our flotilla website has been completely rebuilt. It still looks like the site you know, with the same address, the same red and blue menus and the same Bellingham Bay chart in the background, but everything underneath is new. The site now works properly on phones and tablets. For the first time, Alert 11 lives on the site as articles you can read, not just as PDFs to download. Every issue since July 2023 has been posted, more than 100 articles in all. You can browse by issue or by topic: patrols and operations, search and rescue, training, vessel exams, awards, Coast Guard news, and a new History section. The News page always leads with the current issue, with a one-click PDF download and a Subscribe link to get each new issue by email. There's also a Parting Shot gallery

under About Us, collecting the closing photo from every issue, and the photos on the home page now show current members in action.

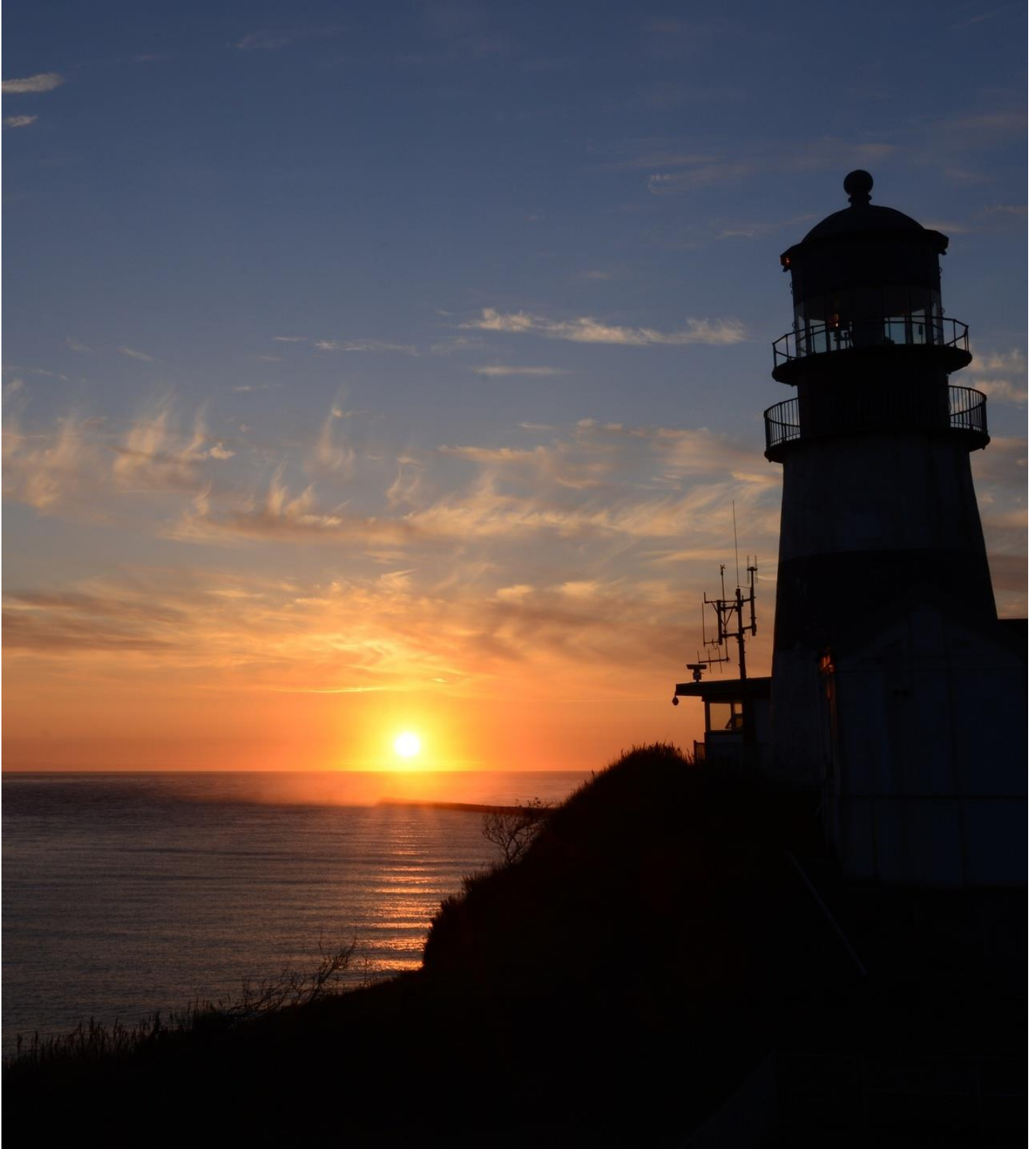
Members can log in with the same Member ID and password they use for AuxDirectory. Logging in opens the Members Only area, including a new Commander's Comments page with every Flotilla Commander's column from Alert 11. Flotilla officers can update the site's pages, officer and contact lists, and articles directly from their browser, and a new issue of Alert 11 can be posted just by uploading its PDF. If you see something out of date, a broken link, or a photo of yourself you'd rather not have online, please let the Communication Services officer (FSO-CS) know.

Flotilla Staff Officers

The following members are your Flotilla Staff Officers. Please contact them if you have any questions or ideas, or wish to get involved in a particular type of activity.

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Parting Shot



Ilwaco, Wash. — The sun sets over the Pacific as the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse stands vigil above the Columbia River Bar, Nov. 7, 2018. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Trevor Lilburn.