

How the Coast Guard Auxiliary was Conceived



Auxiliarist CDR John M. Richmond, USCGR (Ret.) shares stories about the founding of the Coast Guard Auxiliary told by his Dad, a father of the Auxiliary.

Admiral Alfred C. Richmond had a distinguished 40 year service career climaxed as Commandant of the Coast Guard. He retired on June 1, 1962, receiving a Gold Star in lieu of a second Distinguished Service Medal for "exceptionally meritorious service performed as Commandant from 1 June, 1954 to May 31, 1962. During his years in the Coast Guard he was responsible for many milestones and achievements, including drafting the regulations for the revised "Reserve Act" (passed in February 1941) that established the Coast Guard Reserve and officially renamed the Auxiliary.

ADM Richmond said that "writing the regulations (that created the Auxiliary in 1939) was probably one of the weirdest jobs I ever had in the Coast Guard because, when we stopped to analyze it, what we were creating was a cross between a reserve organization, a Trinity House of England, a lodge, and a religious organization. There were no guidelines."

In early 1939 the Commandant, RADM Russell Waesche, assigned LCDR Richmond along with LCDR Merlin O'Neill and a civilian from the Lifesaving Service to write regulations for the Coast Guard Reserve, i.e.; Auxiliary. LCDR Merlin O'Neill subsequently became the first Chief Director of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

ADM Richmond noted that, "Admiral Waesche had gotten the idea that motorboats and things like that need to be controlled - we were beginning to have increasing problems, cabin cruisers were coming to a point where you didn't have to be a millionaire like J.P. Morgan to own one. Also, the Power Squadron was moving in to get quasi governmental status like the Boy Scouts. Admiral Waesche recognized that if anybody organized the boatmen in a quasi governmental status, the Coast Guard ought to do it. So they put through a bill that created the Coast Guard Reserve so that yachtsmen could put their boats at the disposal of the Coast Guard."

"By that time the TVA had come in and other dams and we were getting problems in the interior. The minute you create a body of water, somebody puts a boat on it, and the minute you put a boat out a storm comes along and somebody drowns. We recognized that outside the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River and the Missouri River where we did for many years and still do, in the case of a flood, send surf boats out for rescue purposes, we had little or no experi-



Admiral Richmond and Ensign Richmond.

ence and we had no equipment. On Lake Tahoe and places like that boating was gradually beginning to build up, nothing like it became after the war but certainly at that time we were beginning to get problems. It was pretty obvious we'd never have the equipment to cover all these places."

"So, as I say, this idea of the Auxiliary was conceived -



or the reserve, as it was then called - to create groups of yachtsmen who could serve as the volunteer component of the Coast Guard."

Following America's entry into the World War II in December of 1941, recruits flooded into Auxiliary flotillas in a burst of patriotic fervor. In June 1942 legislation per-

mitted Auxiliarists to enroll in the Coast Guard Reserve on a part-time temporary basis. Throughout the war, 50,000 Auxiliarists constituted the core of the temporary Reserve membership. These reservists, along with newly enrolled civilians, performed coastal defense and search and rescue duties. They patrolled bridges, factories, docks, and beaches. They fought fires, made arrests, guided naval vessels, and conducted anti-submarine warfare. As their ranks grew, thousands of active duty Coast Guard personnel were freed up for service overseas.

By 1950 the four traditional Auxiliary cornerstone missions of public education, operations, vessel examination, and fellowship had been established. Under legislation passed in 1996, the Auxiliary's role was expanded to allow members to assist in any Coast Guard mission, except direct law enforcement and military operations, as authorized by the Commandant. Thus, Auxiliarists can be found examining commercial fishing vessels, flying in C-130 aircraft, working in Coast Guard offices, and crewing with regulars. The three components of the service—the active duty Coastguardsmen, the Reservists, and Auxiliarists—truly constitute TEAM COAST GUARD.

Over the years, Auxiliary programs also have kept pace with boating trends. Members helped implement the provisions of the 1958 Federal Boating Act. In the 1970s, they formed flotillas in sole-state waters to meet local demands for water safety. They introduced new courses such as those for sailors and personal water craft (PWC) operators as their numbers increased.

The U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is the largest volunteer marine safety organization in the world and has fostered similar ones in foreign countries. During its sixty years, it has lived up to its motto of— "A Proud Tradition, A Worthy Mission."

Of all his accomplishments, Admiral Richmond was most proud of the contribution he made to establishing and supporting the Coast Guard Auxiliary which continues serving as a valuable and viable 'force multiplier' for the U.S. Coast Guard.

Post Script:

John Richmond's love of aviation prompted him to attend Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech) where he was in the Corps of Cadets and enrolled in Air Force ROTC. Intent on receiving his 2nd Lieutenant's commission upon graduation in June, 1958, along with a B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering, a flight physical in the spring of his senior year revealed a slight astigmatism in his right eye. He decided to decline an Air Force commission. He enrolled in the Officer Candidate School at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT.

Commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve in 1958, John served on active duty as a drilling reservist assigned to an Organized Reserve Training Unit Port Security (ORTUPS) in Long Beach, CA. He retired in 1980 as a Commander.

In 2006 an Auxiliarist friend invited John to speak to his flotilla and at a Division Captain's meeting to tell a little of his father's history relative to the Auxiliary. John was so impressed with the professionalism, devotion and dedication to the Coast Guard of the Auxiliarists he joined the Auxiliary. Although his flotilla in Los Angeles County is inland and without an Operational Vessel Facility, he serves in the VE program, instructing PE classes and in public affairs. ☺