

A Brief History of the U.S. Coast Guard

The United States Coast Guard has been around since 1790, it is the oldest continuous seagoing service, having been in service since its first year without any interruption. It was established as the Revenue Marine Service to prevent illegal smuggling and control access to the shores of the United States. Many people do not know that the United States Navy actually disbanded for a short time in the late 1700s so that is why the Coast Guard has the longest seagoing record. The Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, who decided that the United States needed its own-armed force to deal with smuggling and enforce tariffs and other laws, established the Revenue Marine Service. He approached Congress and on August 4th, 1790 the Revenue Marine Service was created.

Between 1790 and 1798 the Revenue Marine was the only seagoing service that the United States had. It began with ten cutters, each with unique orders from the Customs Service officer in the port in which it served. The Revenue Marine Service helped in fighting the French from 1798 to 1801, and helped to capture 20 French ships. The Revenue Marine Cutter Pickering captured ten of these. From 1798 until 1862, the Revenue Marine Service worked to enforce tariffs, and fight against smugglers. It participated in the War of 1812 as part of the Navy. Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLain expanded the service in 1832 to patrol in the wintertime. It was out of this set of orders that the current practice of assisting and giving aid to mariners was created and codified.

In 1862 the Revenue Marine was renamed as the Revenue Cutter Service, and served proudly in enforcing all tariffs in effect, and worked to patrol and defend the shores of the United States, gradually assuming more responsibility in defending and protecting the shoreline of the continental United States. President Woodrow Wilson acted in 1915 to combine the Lifesaving Service of the United States with the Revenue Cutter Service, creating what is now known as the United States Coast Guard. It continued to patrol and defend the United States shoreline, and absorbed additional duties in 1939 when it merged with the US Lighthouse Service. It merged again in 1942 with the Steamboat and Navigation Inspection Service, assuming all of its duties.

The modern United States Coast Guard is a member of the Department of Homeland Defense. It operates as an armed service, but is in effect a police service that protects and defends the shore of the United States. It was a member of the Department of Transportation until after 9/11, and was transferred to the new Homeland Department; The Coast Guard can board vessels and conduct inspections without it being considered an act of war, because they are not a Department of Defense member. It is considered a police Action and serves the United States in helping to prevent illegal shipping, smuggling and other illegal drug and criminal activity.

The missions of the United States Coast Guard in modern times are varied. They are the primary search and rescue service to give aid to mariners, and those on the waterways in the United States. They perform Aids to Navigation, maintaining channel markers, lights and other waterway navigation aids. They are directly responsible for drug and smuggling interdiction, and work to protect our shores both in Wartime and peacetime. They also work to inspect and provide port security to maintain safety and adherence to shipping laws and regulations for all ports in the United States. They inspect all vessels entering the waterways of the United States and work with other United States Government Services to prevent and discourage terrorist activity.