



THE FOUNDING OF THE AUXILIARY

As we look back at the beginnings of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, we find it strange that the Coast Guard in the 1930's was the only armed service that did not have a Reserve. A letter written in this regard on 23 August 1934 started a chain of events that eventually led to congressional action, the establishment of a Coast Guard Reserve latter renamed the Coast Guard Auxiliary, finally to the Auxiliary of today.

Let's review the circumstances that brought it about.

By the middle of the 1930s, more than three hundred thousand motorboats and four thousand sailing yachts were registered in the United States. Commercial fishing vessels as well as pleasure yachts were prone to break down, as the technology was new and there were many amateur mechanics. New yacht clubs were being rapidly founded and more and more "new" boaters were taking to the water. Due to cuts in funding, equipment, and personnel, the Coast Guard found it impossible to carry out its mission regarding the safe operation of recreational vessels. Their meager efforts were of no avail as the number of collisions, groundings, deaths, and injuries continued to increasingly mount. All of these problems faced Admiral Russell R. Waesche when he took over as Commandant in 1936. He needed more men and more vessels. The one bright hope on the horizon was the enthusiasm yachtsmen had always shown for serving as some type of auxiliary to the naval services. In England, yacht clubs traditionally held maneuvers with the Royal Navy. During the American Civil War, the New York Yacht Club turned over several vessels to the Union Navy. In World War One, security patrols had been conducted by yacht clubs. Thus, during the 1930s, the Coast Guard was being urged to organize recreational boaters in support of boating safety missions.

Born in emergency, nurtured by continual change and need, and matured by professionalism and dedicated volunteer contributions and service to the nation!

Among these advocates was Malcolm Boylan, a well-known Hollywood screenwriter. He was the commodore of one of the prominent boating organizations during the mid-thirties; the Pacific Writers Yacht Club located in Los Angeles. During the summer of 1934, Boylan's club was planning a cruise from Los Angeles to Catalina Island. Boylan was concerned that some of the club's yachts might not be in shape to make such a long cruise without a mishap.

At anchor in Los Angeles with the club's yachts were two Coast Guard cutters, the *Aurora* and the *Hermes*. In order to reduce the chances of a mishap, Boylan decided to ask the Coast Guard to inspect the club's yachts before the cruise. On this note, he visited Lieutenant Commander C. W.

Thomas, commanding officer of the *Hermes* and persuaded him to inspect the club's boats. Boylan also invited Thomas to be a guest on the cruise; however, Thomas was unable to accept the invitation. In his place, LCDR Thomas assigned Lieutenant Francis Pollard, the commanding officer of the *Aurora* to make the trip on board Boylan's yacht.

During the cruise Boylan and Pollard developed a close relationship and had several lengthy conversations, in which Pollard discussed the Coast Guard's history and traditions and, apparently, mentioned the fact that the Coast Guard had no organized reserve.

Malcolm Boylan subsequently addressed a letter to Lieutenant Pollard outlining the gist of their discussions with additional observations of his own. His letter dated 23 August 1934, is known in Auxiliary lore as "The Founder's Letter." It read:

"I have been dwelling on our recent conversations concerning the Coast Guard and your most informative explanation of its origin, traditions and functions. Out of this the thought has come to me that the Coast Guard alone of all the armed services has no organized reserve, whereas the Navy, the most comparable service, has in its reserve sixty-five hundred officers and seventeen thousand enlisted men!"

"Perhaps because I have written and supervised so many motion pictures based on the services, I am interested in all of them and particularly now in the Coast Guard from the glamorous account of its history I have heard from you. This brings me to the suggestion that a Coast Guard Reserve would be an excellent thing to perpetuate these traditions, preserve its entity, and, more practically, to place at the disposal of the Coast Guard officers, auxiliary flotillas of small craft for the frequent emergencies incident to your twenty-two prescribed and countless unexpected duties."

"For instance, there are approximately five hundred pleasure boats in these immediate waters of various sizes and auxiliary power. All of these vessels are owned by men who love and respect the sea and have acquired a sufficient economic standing to possess them. Many of them are manned by professional sailors, the majority of whom have Merchant Marine rating."

"These facts may suggest to you that it might be of benefit to the Service to set in motion the machinery to organize a Coast Guard Reserve."

He went on to write: "I know from our conversations that you will also agree that commissions should be issued only to those of high qualifications; men who have not only seamanship, but - and I hope my use of the term will not be misunderstood - personal standards - calculated to uphold the dignity of the Service."

His letter concluded with: "My thought is that the personnel of the reserve should be privileged to serve for limited periods of active duty without compensation."

Lieutenant Pollard forwarded Boylan's letter through channels to the office of the Commandant of the Coast Guard in Washington where it came to the attention of Commander Russell Waesche, then aide to the Commandant. The exact influence of Boylan's letter is unclear, although he made

several trips to Washington to promote the idea. What is more important is that pleas like Boylan's fell on the receptive ears of Commander Waesche. He recognized the immediate and long-term benefits to the Coast Guard; however, the immediate and serious problems facing the Coast Guard leadership at that time took precedence over any new initiatives.

The idea for a reserve sat at Coast Guard headquarters for the next five years without action; however, Waesche remained convinced of the soundness of its concept. In 1936 as Commandant, Admiral Waesche moved to solve the Coast Guard's problems one by one. In doing so, he turned to the solution of using recreational yachtsmen to assist the Coast Guard in solving the ever-growing recreational boating safety problem.

In 1938 the Coast Guard provided assistance to over 14,000 cases of recreational boaters in distress. The majority of which were caused by the boater's lack of knowledge of boating fundamentals, equipment, and laws. As Commandant, Admiral Waesche pressed the matter with Congress. Finally on 24 April 1939 House Resolution 5966 was introduced "To establish a Coast Guard Reserve to be composed of owners of motor boats and yachts." In testifying before the House, Waesche said that among the privileges afforded, owners "will be given a Coast Guard Reserve flag to fly....The idea being that a motorboat or yacht going down the Potomac River, or the Detroit River, or elsewhere, flying that flag, is serving notice to have been examined and passed on; I know the rules of the road; I know how to operate a motorboat; I have a seaworthy craft, properly equipped, in compliance with the law." The House of Representatives passed HR 5966 on 15 May and the Senate on 13 June. On 23 June, President Roosevelt signed into law the Coast Guard Reserve act of 1939 and thus, what was to be later renamed the Coast Guard Auxiliary was established.

The establishment of the Reserve envisioned enrolling civilian volunteers who owned boats and yachts, who would serve without pay to assist the Coast Guard "To promote efficiency in the operation of motorboats and yachts," "To promote safety of life at sea and to effect rescues on and over the high seas and upon the navigable waters," "To foster a wider knowledge of, and better compliance with the laws, rules, and regulations governing the operation of motorboats and yachts," and "To facilitate other operations of the Coast Guard." The new Reserve would be non-military and with no law enforcement powers. Sound familiar? It should as these words form the core mission of the Auxiliary today.

Unfortunately, as the new Reserve began to form and initiate its first activities, war clouds were ever so surely traveling westward from the battlefields of Europe. It became evident that the Coast Guard would soon need a fully military Reserve. Thus, on 19 February 1941, the original Reserve was renamed as the Coast Guard Auxiliary and a military Coast Guard Reserve was established.

As we look back some 60 years, we can only be impressed with Admiral Waesche's notable foresight. Since the first Coast Guard Reserve legislation was passed in 1939, the purposes have remained essentially constant. – Basically the core missions of today's Coast Guard Auxiliary. Although the 1996 Coast Guard legislation expanded the purpose of the Auxiliary to support any mission authorized by the Commandant, the Auxiliary today as in 1939, remains dedicated to enhancing recreational boating safety and preventing deaths and injuries on the water, as envisioned by Admiral Russell Waesche in the 1930s.

The Auxiliary motto sums up its 60 years of service to the nation and the Coast Guard: “***WORTHY MISSION..... PROUD TRADITIONS***”

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