



Coast Guard Heritage Museum

at the U.S. Custom House in Barnstable Village, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Summer 2020 Newsletter

The Great New England Hurricane

The Services' last battle before the war

William H. Thiesen, Historian
Coast Guard Atlantic Area

Hitting the East Coast over 80 years ago, the Great New England Hurricane was one of the most destructive storms to strike anywhere in the United States up to that time. Also known as the "Yankee Clipper" and "Long Island Express," the 1938 hurricane caused over \$41 billion in property damage and the death of approximately 700 men, women and children.

During the storm response, the Coast Guard assisted over 500 vessels and rescued over 1,000 persons. However, the storm damaged or destroyed 30 Coast Guard boat stations, several of them never rebuilt. It damaged four U.S. Lighthouse Service depots and 25 lighthouses, completely destroying one of them. Moreover, the Service lost three Coast Guardsmen washed overboard from a cutter and another seven Lighthouse Service persons perished in the storm.

In September 1938, a year before World War II started in Europe, a tropical depression emerged off the coast of Saharan Africa. By mid-September, the weather pattern had developed into a full-blown hurricane. Floridians feared the worst having endured violent hurricanes twice in the 1920s and just a few years earlier in 1935. However, by September 20, the hurricane had skipped Florida and swirled north. It blew North Carolina's Diamond Shoals Lightship off station and grew in strength to a dangerous Category 5 storm. Rolling past New Jersey at over 50 miles per hour, the hurricane heavily damaged the Coast Guard station at Sandy Hook.

By September 21, the storm barreled north toward the heart of New England. Long Island absorbed the initial impact of the hurricane, hence the storm's nickname of "Long Island Express." The hurricane came

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Track of hurricane from the Atlantic up to Canada (NOAA)

Continuing to chronicle the history of Air Station Cape Cod . . .

The Move to Salem

With little room to expand on Gloucester's Ten Pound Island and an ever-increasing workload, the Coast Guard built a larger more modern facility on Winter Island at the extension of Salem Neck which juts out into Salem Harbor. Commissioned on 15 February 1935, Coast Guard Air Station Salem would cost \$290,000 to construct with money from the Public Works Fund in Washington, D.C. The aviation facilities consisted of one hanger, 35 men, and two airplanes. Missions by this time included anti-smuggling, iceberg tracking, search and rescue and more. During its first year, it recorded 26 medical evacuation cases although many other missions were accomplished. Rumrunning was no longer a mission since Prohibition ended in 1933.

Six years after operations commenced, the flyers based at Salem were well-prepared for the US entry into World War II and on 7 December 1944, their instant service to the country was available. The station had grown to 15 aircraft, making it the second largest station on the East Coast. Air Station Salem did coastal patrols armed with depth charges to fight enemy submarines. The Vought OS2U Kingfisher stood out among the many variety of planes used at Salem. It had the capability to drop depth charges should the pilots encounter enemy submarines along the Massachusetts coast during WW II.



Vought OS2U Kingfisher had the flight capability of 6 hours per mission.
Photo: cgaviationhistory.org

Salem Harbor was large enough that it could accommodate three sea lanes, allowing planes to take off in any direction regardless of the wind direction. Even so night operations in Salem Harbor became hazardous and necessitated the establishment of Coast Guard Air Detachment Quonset Point, Rhode Island as a sub unit of Air Station Salem. One Albatross amphibian, four pilots and eight crewmen were responsible for supplementing Salem planes during rescue operations and for fix-wing flying when Salem couldn't provide it. The Quonset crews stood a demanding port-and-starboard duty schedule of three days on watch and three days off.

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The Move to Salem (cont'd from pg. 1)



Albatross UF-1G Grumman Model G-64 (later known as the HU-16E) was the largest of a series of amphibians designed and manufactured by the Grumman Aircraft Corporation for the military. It was stationed at Air Station Salem beginning in 1951. Photo: US Coast Guard Aviation History project

In addition to its flying duties, Winter Island undertook propeller maintenance. Balancing a prop (making sure that weight was properly distributed evenly between, in this case, the three blades) was absolutely crucial to safe flight. Air-to-base communications was another area where the Coast Guard was constantly trying to improve range and effectiveness. For a time, homing pigeons were used, but found not to be as effective as radios. But radio range grew at a slower pace than the range an aircraft could fly, meaning the pilot had to relay messages through the nearest airfields to his home base. Another important area of work was the parachute loft at Salem where riggers dried, serviced and repacked about 110 parachutes every 30 days.

Flying by instruments, without the use of visible navigation aids was crucial for pilots flying at night or in storms. Air Station Salem maintained a Link Trainer, pioneered by its developer Edward Link, to simulate various flight conditions, including altitude and air-speed, without ever leaving the ground. Another crucial area of the station was the storage room, stocked with life rafts to be deployed in case of emergency. The planes flying out of the station were designed for water landings, but should anything catastrophic happen and the plane become uninhabitable or even lost, the life raft would be a last option. The rafts were outfitted with Gibson Girl kites, bright yellow box kites equipped with radios, antennae and even balloons for windless days. Additionally, the store room was stocked with float flares, oxygen, extra batteries for flashlights, emergency rations and more. All in all, Air Station Salem was pretty well self-sustaining given the operations it was assigned.

In the 1950s, Salem Harbor became crowded with pleasure boat traffic in the summer, and the seaplane pilots had to take extra effort to avoid watercraft during takeoffs and landings. Winter operations meant ice formed on the UFs during water taxi. When spray hit the cold aluminum, it froze threatening to disturb the smooth airflow and lift. The ramping up of Air Station Salem coincided with the rise of the helicopter. While early debaters argued if coastal patrols were better suited to seaplanes or blimps, the helicopter eventually ended all discussion.

In 1955, the Sikorsky HO-4S was assigned to the Air Station at Salem. According to a 1952 Coast Guard press

release, it “was equipped for instrument and night flying, and the helicopter included such equipment as a hydraulic hoist to pick up personnel or equipment up to 400 lbs. in weight.” In 1963, the Sikorsky HH-52A was added to the base complement. It was the first helicopter designed specifically for the mission of the US Coast Guard and was transferred to Cape Cod when Salem was decommissioned.



The Sikorsky HO-4S, stationed at Air Station Salem, was to have been part of the Open House hoist demonstration scheduled for Armed Forces Day in May of 1957. With the crash of the UF-1G Grumman fixed wing amphibian, the demo was cancelled. Photo: cgaviationhistory.org

May 18, 1957 was a dark day in the history of Air Station Salem. As part of an Armed Forces Day Open House for the town citizens, one of Salem’s UF-1G amphibians was scheduled to perform a water take-off along with a water hoist demonstration by one of the station’s new Sikorsky HO-4S helicopters. The previous week, a practice for the amphibian fixed-wing UF-1G (#1278) takeoff was scheduled and went off without a hitch. On the day of the Open House, the crew was performing the water Jet Assisted Takeoff (JATO) demonstration when the aircraft, unable to achieve sufficient speed, shuddered, rotated during the takeoff, stalled and crashed. The pilot LCDR Albert P. Hartt, Jr. and Aviation Ordnanceman William J. Tarker, Jr. were killed, still strapped in their seats. Co-pilot LT Robert Carlston and Aviation Radioman Henry Hargermeister were seriously injured. Two other crewmen received only minor injuries. The day of promised celebration turned to tragedy in a matter of seconds.

While seaplanes had ushered in a new dimension to sea rescue, helicopters, with their ability to hover over a disabled vessel and lift-off vertically from just about anywhere, marked the beginning of a whole new era of Coast Guard history. As the Coast Guard moved away from floatplanes, ironically, it meant that the service could move away from the coast. With the development of the HH-52A, an amphibious helicopter, the need for a fixed-wing watercraft was ending. Air stations having only water capabilities, such as Salem, were becoming obsolete, and in 1970, Air Station Salem, the air station without any runways, was decommissioned and operations were moved to the new Coast Guard Air Station at Cape Cod.



Sikorsky HH-52A Seaguard was an amphibious single turbine engine helicopter attached to Air Station Salem and later moved to Cape Cod. This helicopter made rotary-wing aviation the backbone of Coast Guard search and rescue.

Photo: en.wikipedia.org

The Legend of the Hero's Mother

Editor's Note: On September 27, 1999, Admiral Paul Blayney, Commander of the 13th Coast Guard District spoke at the Douglas Munro Memorial and Flag Pole Dedication conducted at the Munro gravesite in Cle Elum, Washington. The following is an excerpted portion of his remarks.

All members of the Coast Guard have heard the story of the heroism of Douglas Munro during the invasion of Guadalcanal. His final sacrifice, while saving the lives of 600 Marines, earned him the Medal of Honor, the first and only Coast Guard member to be awarded that highest of honors. His name and legend reach far beyond Cle Elum where he is buried.

His story is taught to every Coast Guard recruit within hours of their swearing-in. Douglas Munro's is the only statue in Coast Guard Headquarters, although similar works are located at the Coast Guard Academy, Cape May and on the Seattle waterfront. Douglas Munro stands for all that we are in the Coast Guard. He represents our core values of honor, respect and especially devotion to duty. The Douglas Munro legacy is an enormous part of our spirit and tradition, but it's not the whole story. His mother, Edith Munro, carried on the family service to the Coast Guard for another lifetime.

Mrs. Munro will always be remembered for raising one of the Coast Guard and Marine Corps' greatest heroes . . . but few know that Mrs. Munro was also LT Edith Munro of the U.S. Coast Guard Women's Corps – also known as the SPARs.

Shortly after her only son's death, Mrs. Munro decided that she would do what she could to carry on his life of service that had been cut short. Within weeks, Mrs. Munro signed up, and was sent to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT for officer training school. She was one of the first SPARs to show up, and she was also the oldest. Most new SPARs were in their late teens and early twenties . . . Edith Munro was in her mid-forties.



SPAR training was not very well thought out in those days and the curriculum was also disjointed. While SPARs were intended to fill in administrative positions so the men could go to sea, there was no training for that. Instead, for lack of a better plan, they were instructed in knot tying, military drill, seamanship and small boat operations. Edith Munro's daughter, Pat Sheehan, recalled her mother's first letter. It simply stated, "Pat, this would kill you, and it might kill me."

Because of, or maybe in spite of, that six-week training period at the Coast Guard Academy, Mrs. Munro was commissioned as a LTJG in the Coast Guard SPARs. In actuality she had been commissioned before the program started, but wouldn't accept any special recognition or favors.

She insisted on going through the entire training program like all of the other recruits. By all accounts, she didn't need any special considerations . . . she led the way.

In 1943, the Commandant assigned her to the 13th District, as Commanding Officer of the Base Seattle Barracks. There she really made her mark. Referred to as "The Old Lady," she was much more than just the CO . . . she was a teacher, mentor, and mother to a gaggle of wartime recruits. LT Munro's new job was not nearly as visible or glamorous as public relations, but it was exactly what Edith was looking for.

LT Munro established a name for herself almost immediately. She separated male and female accommodations in the barracks and established new regulations to smooth the transition of women into the Coast Guard ranks. She streamlined administrative processes, adjusted galley menus for better nutrition, and made appropriate uniform changes to better compliment a diverse workforce. LT Munro was the first woman to ever attend 13th District staff meetings as a member of the staff. Old misplaced feelings of gender superiority flew out the door, as she became a valued and trusted advisor to Rear Admiral Frederick Zeusler.

Because she was such an involved and caring leader, she really got to the pulse of the Thirteenth District workforce – men and women alike. She gave the Admiral a new perspective and greatly increased his knowledge, awareness and appreciation for diversity. LT Munro was one of the Coast Guard's first gender policy advisors. Edith Munro was way ahead of her time, and Admiral Zeusler knew and respected that. At the conclusion of World War II when sailors returned, and SPARs moved back home, LT Munro received a commendation medal. As those of you familiar with that era know, individual medals for non-combat service were exceedingly rare. LT Edith Munro had truly done something special.



Edith Munro's dedication to the Coast Guard, and to America continued for the next 50 years . . . long after her days with the SPARs were over. She attended literally thousands of events and ceremonies, and was an active Coast Guard supporter to the end. In fact, she was the honored guest at the 50-year commemoration of Guadalcanal – just a year before her death.

Like her son, Edith Munro embodied the Coast Guard's core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty, long before we ever put those words to paper. She did what needed to be done. Mrs. Edith Munro lived a life of service and sacrifice.



The Great New England Hurricane (continued from page 1)

by William H. Thiesen,

ashore with winds well over 100 miles per hour and a storm surge over 10 feet. Between Long Island's Fire Island Inlet and Southampton, the barrier islands submerged under heavy seas. The deadly combination of gale force winds, storm surge and breaking waves obliterated shorefront property, coastal towns and the numerous Coast Guard boat stations dotting the Long Island shoreline. Of the 30 Coast Guard stations damaged or destroyed by the hurricane, 22 of them were laid waste in New York – a number of them never re-opened.



Boat Station Moriches as it looked before the 1938 hurricane struck. (U.S. Lifesaving Service Heritage Association)



The remains of Station Moriches after the storm—just a foundation and sand. (U.S. Lifesaving Service Heritage Association)



Crew vehicles at Moriches after the storm. (U.S. Lifesaving Service Heritage Association)

With gale force winds of 120 miles per hour driving the storm surge before the hurricane battered Rhode Island.

The state suffered the worst damage with over half the hurricane's fatalities. Coves, bays and inlets that cut into the state's coastline served as funnels multiplying the 15-foot storm surge already riding a spring tide a foot higher than the normal high tide. Smaller oceanside towns were wiped out and flooding of downtown Providence reached depths between 10 and 20 feet. Coast Guard boat stations in Rhode Island felt the full brunt of the storm with stations at Brenton Point, Point Judith, Quonochontaug and Watch Hill heavily damaged. It took years to re-build these bases and one had to be re-located to a safer location.



Storm damage to Boat Station Brenton Point due to the Great New England Hurricane. (U.S. Lifesaving Service Heritage Association)

In Rhode Island, the U.S. Lighthouse Service also suffered its greatest loss of lighthouses and service members. In Narragansett Bay, tidal waves struck the Prudence Island Light, Beavertail Light, Bullock's Point Light and Whale Rock Light. Beavertail was severely damaged while the keeper's wife and son drowned at Prudence Island. Tidal waves stripped the sides off of Bullock's Point Light, which was later decommissioned and replaced with a skeleton tower lighthouse. Whale Rock Lighthouse was destroyed by a tidal wave, the body of its assistant keeper was never found and the lighthouse was never rebuilt.



Whale Rock Lighthouse before hurricane destroyed it. (NARA)



The remains of the lighthouse after the storm. After the storm's tidal waves struck the light, only the foundation remained. (U.S. Coast Guard)

In Connecticut, the storm cost hundreds of lives and tremendous property damage. The western shoreline of the state sustained storm surges of up to 20 feet. At New London's large Coast Guard station, numerous boats were lost or damaged beyond repair. The Coast Guard Academy also lost some of its watercraft. Even more amazing was the sight of the 200-foot lighthouse tender *Tulip* washed-up on the railroad tracks in New London. The tender had burst its moorings and the surge carried it up on shore. Surprisingly, *Tulip* was later removed and re-floated, and remained in commission until 1945 having served in both world wars.

As the eye of the storm traveled north into the heart of New England, the right side of it hit the coast of Massachusetts from the Rhode Island border to the tip of Cape Cod and up to Boston. Storm surges in the area measured between 18 and 25 feet and the hurricane's greatest

wave height of 50 feet was recorded at Gloucester. The storm devastated Massachusetts' Coast Guard stations and lighthouses along the coast, including boat stations at Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard, and Cuttyhunk. Massachusetts's lighthouses also suffered heavy damage. In New Bedford, the keeper's wife at the flooded Palmer Island Lighthouse drowned in the storm and, except for the original stone tower, lighthouse structures on Bird Island were swept away. Fortunately, the light was not manned at the time.

As the hurricane made its way northwest toward Canada, it cut a swath of destruction. The storm toppled two billion trees and destroyed approximately 20,000 homes, buildings and structures. On eastern Lake Ontario, at the Galloo Island Boat Station, NY, the crew readied their motor lifeboat (MLB) to rescue the one-man crew of a foundering dredge. On board the MLB, Surfman #8 Gerrett Gregory had trouble breathing the water-infused air as rain poured down and the wind swept water into the air from Lake Ontario. Before motoring into the maelstrom, officer-in-charge Warrant Boatswain Alston Wilson told his crew *"I know what you're thinking. The three of us will probably die trying to save one guy who will die also. Get in the boat – we have a job to do."*

Fighting 100 mile per hour winds and heavy seas breaking over the MLB's stern, Boatswain Wilson maneuvered the MLB beside the dredge and saved the man on board. The dredge later washed up on the rocks, but the MLB rescue mission had been accomplished without loss of life.



U.S. Lighthouse Service tender *Tulip* washed up on shore in New London. The tender blocked local train traffic in the aftermath of the hurricane. (Groton-ct.gov)

The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 was the most destructive storm to hit New England devastating the Coast Guard's boat stations and Lighthouse Service's lighthouses. In New England, the two services barely survived this battle with one of the worst storms in American history. As one survivor remarked, *"I sometimes feel that we have had a preview of the end of the world."* In less than a year, the U.S. Lighthouse Service would merge with the Coast Guard to fight the most formidable human enemy the Service would face in its history.

Today, the Service excels at storm response missions. In these missions, the men and women of the United States Coast Guard go in harm's way every day to complete rescue and humanitarian duties as members of the long blue line.

President's Report

We have been working hard to get the museum ready for the 2020 season as specified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We have taken many steps to protect both visitors and volunteer docents to ensure that we have a safe environment and that we fully comply with all state and CDC requirements. The Museum is now open on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 10 am to 3 pm until the end of October. (check our website for updates)

Several of our planned 2020 events have either been downsized or cancelled as a precaution in response to the COVID-19 threat. Sadly, these include many of the activities that we had planned to mark the 50th anniversary of the move of the Coast Guard Air Station to Cape Cod from Salem.

There is much to celebrate this summer. In addition to the AirSta's 50th, there is the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims'

landing in Plymouth just 25 miles north of us here in Barnstable Village and the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. The photo below shows Coast Guard cooks underway in the Pacific in August 1945, celebrating Victory over Japan.

Greg Ketchen

Chief Barton and some of his cooks onboard the Coast Guard-crewed LST 795 in the western Pacific Ocean with a cake to celebrate Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, August 1945. photo by USCG CM3 DiRosario



Museum Acquires Newly Donated Portrait of Alexander Hamilton

Through the generosity of Robert Thorne, CAPT USCG (Ret) and his wife Barbara of East Lyme, CT, the Museum has received a beautiful 20"x24" rendering of Alexander Hamilton, Father of the Coast Guard. CAPT Thorne, (USCGA Class of 1969) was instrumental in commissioning the original portrait by East Lyme, CT artist Christopher Zhang (website: chriszhangstudio.com) as part of the Class Gift from the class of 1969. The 30 X 36 original was presented at the Class's 50th reunion ceremonies in October 2019 and now hangs in Hamilton Hall at the Academy. The Coast Guard Heritage Museum is very pleased Capt. Thorne considered us for his gift, and it hangs in a place of honor for all visitors to appreciate. Stop by and see it in person.





Coast Guard Heritage Museum

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Would you like to publish an article in our newsletter? Contact us at 508-362-8521.

Newsletter graphic design by West Barnstable Press



2020 Museum Exhibit features Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod's 50th Anniversary

To Keep You Informed

Our nation expects the most from the Coast Guard and relies on its leadership, training, bravery, innovation, and experience. Since its inception in 1790, the Coast Guard and its predecessor services have tirelessly answered the call to duty, saving lives, enforcing maritime law, combating terrorism, facilitating commerce and protecting the environment.

Yet, unlike all other armed services, there is no place for the Coast Guard to share with the public its history and tangible artifacts. The National Coast Guard Museum Association is committed to building a world-class museum that will not only honor the heritage of the U.S. Coast Guard, but also provide to the public a gateway to discover Coast Guard life.

Construction is expected to take just under four years to complete, in three phases: site preparation and bulkhead and fill; a pedestrian access project; and erecting the Museum and outfitting it with the exhibits and furnishings. The proposed site will be located on the New London, CT waterfront, to include an 80,000 square foot facility as well as the homeport showcase for the USCG Barque *Eagle*. This new facility will not replace our Coast Guard Heritage Museum, but we will welcome it as another way to tell the story of the Coast Guard.

For more information on the progress of this endeavor, go to www.CoastGuardMuseum.org/learnmore

Become a Coast Guard Heritage Museum Member!

- Individual** - \$25 Single membership: attending annual meeting with no voting privilege, individual admission to the museum, and a 10% gift shop discount.
- Family** - \$40 Same as Individual, but with additional admissions to the museum for immediate family. One person may attend annual meeting with no voting privilege.
- Supporting Member** - \$100 Unlimited museum admission & 10% discount.
- Sustaining Member** - \$250 Unlimited admission and 10% discount apply.
- Guardian** - Receive all benefits of membership plus individual recognition at museum.
- Captain's Circle** - \$500+; **Admiral's Circle** - \$1,000+; **Commandant's Circle** - \$2,500+

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