Welcome to the March session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Roundtable. Until tonight, we have never had a session on the U.S. Coast Guard. Our speaker is Ken Wiley, the author of *D-Days in the Pacific*, and a World War II Coast Guard veteran. He will be joined by other Coast Guard veterans to help explain the role of the Coast Guard in guiding, conducting, and protecting island landings in the Pacific.

Founded in 1790 to enforce tariff and trade laws and prevent smuggling, the Revenue Marine Service commissioned 10 vessels for their new duty. Until the re-establishment of the Navy in 1798, it was the nation’s only maritime force. The Coast Guard received its current designation in 1915, and its mission expanded from enforcing maritime laws, licensing and inspection of merchant vessels, life-saving services and maintaining the nation’s lighthouses, to include protecting marine life, coastlines, and ports. In time of war, the USCG comes under the command of the Chief of Naval Operations as an operational part of the Naval Services. Approximately 173,000 men and women served during the war. 572 Coast Guardsmen were killed in action and 1,345 were wounded.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the USCG began expanded service at home and overseas. Like the other services, in November 1942, the USCG was authorized to recruit women into the USCG Women’s Reserve, known as SPARs. Some 11,000 women served stateside, freeing men for active duty at sea.

In addition to coastal patrol and harbor vessels, Coast Guardsmen mounted on horses patrolled the coastal beaches, watching for enemy landings. S2C John Cullen was the first person to encounter enemy forces in continental America. His report of the landing of German saboteurs in Amagansett, NY, part of Operation Pastorius, led to their capture and earned him a Legion of Merit. Coast Guard aviators flew thousands of anti-submarine search and patrol missions, and spotting and rescuing survivors of sunk ships. An ancillary service warning shipping of hurricanes developed into a hurricane warning service after the war. By late 1944, the submarine menace along the Atlantic Sea Frontier largely disappeared, and USCG aviation transitioned into Air-Sea Rescue Services.

In the Pacific, geography imposed daunting logistical challenges. Men and materiel had to be moved across thousands of miles of ocean in convoys, and then landed on heavily defended island beaches. Coast Guardsmen served Manning LSTs, Higgins boats (LCVPs), cargo and transport vessels, destroyers, and USCG cutters, the Coast Guard saw world-wide service. Deeply involved in the Battle of the Atlantic escorting convoys, USCG vessels sank 13 German submarines and captured two German surface vessels. They were involved in all the amphibious landings in North Africa, Italy, and France. In the Normandy landings, 60 wooden boats patrolled off the coast on search and rescue duty, saving over 400 Allied soldiers.

USCG PBY-5A Catalina Operating out of Greenland

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on navy ships as well as manning their own vessels escorting convoys, carrying troops and supplies.

On Guadalcanal, SM1C Douglas Munro earned the USCG’s only Medal of Honor, posthumously. He was in charge of 10 landing craft that put a detachment of Marines ashore behind Japanese lines, and then had to evacuate them under fire. Placing the boats to cover the last Marines from enemy fire, Munro was fatally wounded while himself manning a machine gun.

USCG vessels participated in all, or nearly all, the landings in the Pacific Theater. Operating in MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific Area and in Nimitz’s Central Pacific Area, on the Western Sea Frontier, and in the Aleutians, Coast Guardsmen filled important roles and performed critical missions. They were Always Ready (Semper Paratus, the USCG motto).

Further Reading:
Ken Wiley, D-Days in the Pacific with the U.S. Coast Guard: The Story of Lucky 13 (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2010)


Malcolm B Willoughby, The Coast Guard in World War II (Annapolis, MD Naval Institute Press, 1957.)


Announcements:
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Feb. 28, 2011 “Key West & Florida in the Civil War” Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400
World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, June, 11-12 2011, Fee charged.

USCG’s only MOH: SM1 Douglas Munro at Guadalcanal

USCG-manned LST 71 - Guam

Coast Guard-manned LST-71, one of 76 LSTs manned by Coast Guard crews.

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