

# A HISTORY OF U.S. COAST GUARD AVIATION

ARTHUR PEARCY

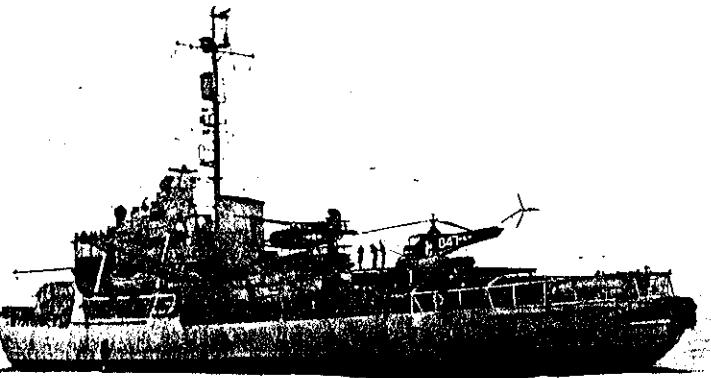


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On 9 April 1941 Greenland was incorporated into a hemispheric defense system. The Coast Guard was the primary military service responsible for these cold-weather operations, which continued throughout World War II. During this conflict Coast Guard personnel manned amphibious ships and craft from the largest troop transports to the smallest attack craft. These landed US Army and Marine Corps forces in every important invasion in North Africa, Italy, France and the Pacific.

During the Korean War 1950-53 the Coast Guard performed a variety of tasks. The service established air detachments throughout the Pacific. These detachments, located at Sangley Point in the Philippines, Guam in the Marianas, Wake Island, Midway in the Hawaiian Islands, Adak in the Aleutian Islands and Barbers Point in the Hawaiian Islands, conducted Search & Rescue to safeguard the tens of thousands of United Nations troops that were being airlifted across the Pacific. In January 1953 a Martin PBM-5 *Mariner* flying from Sangley Point Coast Guard detachment landed in twelve-foot high seas in an attempt to rescue the crew of a US Navy P2V-*Neptune* patrol bomber. After taking the survivors on board it unfortunately crashed on take-off when an engine failed. Five Coast Guard aviators and four US Navy crewmen lost their lives.



The Coast Guard ice-breaker *Northwind* made many visits to both the Arctic and Antarctic, and had the unique capability of carrying a Sikorsky HNS-1 helicopter, a Curtiss SOC-*Seagull*, plus specially designed small boats. The ice-breaker is seen at anchor in the Arctic while crew members explore the surrounding ice. (USCG)

Additional weather station sites were established in the Pacific to help guard and guide the flow of troops and supplies into Korea. A team of about fifty Coast Guardsmen were stationed in Korea to help establish the Korean Coast Guard, which has since evolved into that country's Navy. The Coast Guard also provided communications and meteorological services plus assured port security and numerous other tasks.



Coast Guard HNS-1 piloted by Lieutenant August Kleisch drops gently onto a strip of canvas on Lake Mecatine near a remote weather station. He had on board one of eleven RCAF crash victims rescued from the bleak wilderness of North Labrador. The canvas prevented the floats freezing to the ice. One by one the marooned aircrew were flown from the crash site some thirty-two miles

Aviators were among the 7,000 Coast Guard personnel who served in the Vietnam conflict. In April 1968 three Coast Guard helicopter pilots were assigned to the 37th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Squadron of the USAF based at Da Nang, Vietnam. Pilots were assigned there until November 1972 whilst their USAF counterparts were assigned to stateside Coast Guard air stations. One Coast Guard pilot, Lieutenant Jack Rittichier, died in a rescue attempt. He was attempting to pick up a downed US Marine Corps pilot when his helicopter took heavy enemy ground fire, touched down and burst into flames.



This photo shows the remote island LORAN station 'DUKW', as the Coast Guard flying valet, a PBY-*Catalina*, delivers the vital mail from home, plus cigarettes, fresh fruit, candy, fresh meat and other expendables, including eggs in the form of a crate of chickens. Just one more task for the versatile *Catalina* which served the USCG well over many years. (USCG)

The Coast Guard set up and operated a LORAN system in southeast Asia in order to assist the US Air Force warplanes to achieve precision navigation. It was a difficult task to find transmitting sites, bring in equipment and build the system. The Coast Guard LORAN Construction Detachment began work in January 1966 and on 8 August the navigation network was on the air. LORAN stations were established in Lampang, Sattahip, and Udorn in Thailand and Con Son, Vietnam. Another station was later added in Tan My, Vietnam.

Some 8,000 Coast Guardsmen served in Vietnam. Seven lost their lives and fifty-nine were wounded. There were many awards including thirteen Distinguished Flying Crosses.

The long range aid to navigation chain (LORAN) became a global network installed and maintained by the Coast Guard after a great deal of development. It covered the major shipping areas of both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. Using the system, trained operators can fix their position to within less than a quarter of a mile. Prior to the present LORAN C world-wide network's being set up, there was a LORAN station located in the Outer Hebrides which was administered on behalf of the Coast Guard by the Naval Air Facility based at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk, in the United Kingdom, which flew equipment etc. to the station in Douglas C-117D Super DC-3s and later Convair C-131 *Samaritan* transports. Commander Thomas C Bird, USN Commander of the NAF flew many of the logistic missions to the LORAN station, often in atrocious weather conditions, high winds, and with limited navigation facilities. A further hazard was the sheep which grazed on the airfield area, which had to be 'shepherded' to safety by a US Navy crewman prior to take-off. Other early LORAN stations included such exotic locations as French Frigate Shoals in the