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Guarding the Nation's Coasts **The US Coast Guard Beach Patrol in World War II**





Just over six months after the United States entered World War II, the chance discovery of a Nazi sabotage mission led to an ambitious program to patrol the entire US coastline for the first time. The discovery of German saboteurs on American soil was made by US Coast Guard Seaman Second Class John C. Cullen shortly after midnight on June 13, 1942. That night, while on a beach patrol near Amagansett, Long Island, New York, Seaman Cullen encountered a group of four men speaking German to each other. Cullen's initial suspicion turned to alarm when one of the men first threatened him, then offered him a considerable bribe to forget that he had seen anything and walk away. Feigning agreement, Seaman Cullen accepted the cash and then hurried back to his base to raise the alarm.

Thanks to Seaman Cullen's warning, the German infiltrators were captured within two weeks. The group's leader gave the FBI information about the sabotage mission in exchange for a milder sentence, and from his confession, authorities learned that German submarines had transported eight men and a substantial quantity of cash and explosives across the Atlantic and landed them on the US coast in two groups—one on Long Island and the other, four days later, on a beach near Jacksonville, Florida. Their mission was to sabotage industrial plants, power generation facilities, and other important infrastructure throughout the United States. Although this threat was stopped, the Germans' success at using submarines to land the two teams demonstrated that America's vast coastline was vulnerable to infiltration and that greater vigilance



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Nation's Coasts

The US Coast Guard Beach Patrol in World War II

TOM
SCUDDER



This mounted US Coast Guard patrolman was photographed in 1943 while taking part in the US Coast Guard Beach Patrol. The patrol employed twenty-four thousand sailors, more than three thousand horses, and more than two thousand dogs to closely monitor 3,700 miles of US coastline from late 1942 until 1944.

was required to defend it. Fortunately, the US Coast Guard stood ready to step up and closely patrol that coastline.

The Establishment of the Beach Patrol

The US Coast Guard responded to the German submarine infiltration by rapidly and ambitiously scaling up its patrol operations, which had previously monitored the beaches within a few miles of every major US port. On July 25, 1942—a little more than a month after the first of the saboteurs was identified—US Coast Guard Headquarters authorized each of its local commands to organize a system of regular, well-equipped beach patrols to guard the coasts of the continental United States. Because the US Coast Guard had been placed under the authority of the US Navy at the beginning of World War II, such an

ambitious operation needed additional approval, which was given by the US Navy vice chief of operations five days later. The new beach patrols were organized in ten naval districts—three on the Pacific coast of the United States and seven on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. To oversee these patrols, a new US Coast Guard Beach Patrol Division was created and placed under the command of Captain Raymond J. Mauerman.

Over the following few months, a total of twenty-four thousand officers and enlisted personnel were recruited to carry out this new plan. To serve as bases for the new patrols, 192 new US Coast Guard stations were established, most of them in already-existing structures. In many areas, new communication equipment had to be installed; where it was feasible to do so, telephone wire was



The first commander of the US Coast Guard Beach Patrol, Captain Raymond J. Mauerman, is pictured inspecting one of the patrol's trained dogs. The dog is wearing protective boots, which were often used to protect dogs' paws from sharp rocks along some parts of the coast.

laid, and telephone boxes, which consisted of jacks into which portable handsets could be plugged, were placed at intervals of one-quarter mile.

The purpose of the patrols was not so much military defense as information gathering. The goal was to ensure that the US military and law enforcement would be aware of anyone attempting to enter the country via the coastline and would be able to react accordingly. Criminal matters could be referred to the FBI and local law enforcement, and in the unlikely event of an invasion in force, the US Army stood ready to repel the invaders.

A typical patrol under the US Coast Guard Beach Patrol system consisted of two men walking two miles over a period of two to four hours. The patrolmen were armed with rifles or pistols and carried flashlights and flare guns. In areas where telephone boxes had been installed, the patrolmen were also equipped with telephone handsets that could be plugged into the boxes and used to call in their regular reports. In most parts of the country, patrols took place at night or during the day on days when visibility was limited, but some particularly sensitive locations were patrolled twenty-four hours a day. The standard procedure if an unauthorized person was discovered was for one man to detain the suspect while the other man reported the contact and summoned assistance.

But not all shorelines were the same, requiring that adjustments be made to standard operating procedures. In many areas of the country, the terrain was such that mounting regular foot patrols was very difficult, if not



Four US Coast Guard patrolmen are pictured with trained dogs. Dogs were used to augment US Coast Guard Beach Patrol operations beginning in August 1942.



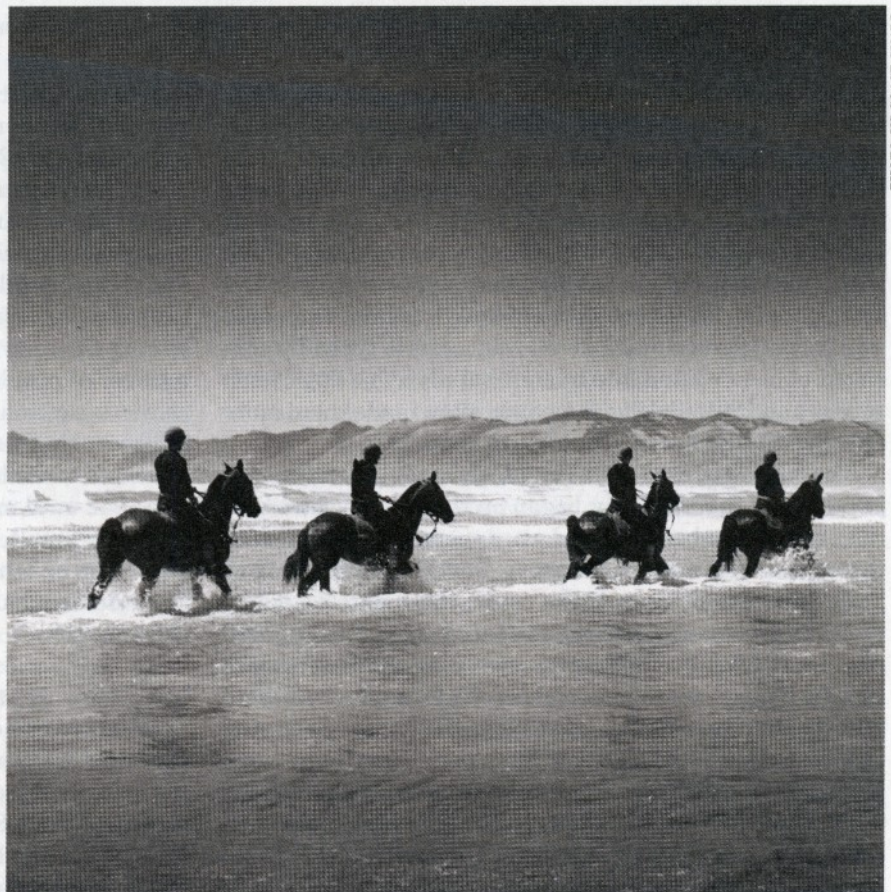
Beach patrol members are pictured grooming their horses outside a US Coast Guard Beach Patrol stable sometime in 1943.

completely impractical, and in some of these areas, the installation of telephone check-in stations was not an option. In parts of Washington state, for example, new trails had to be cut through heavily forested areas to allow foot patrols to reach cliffs overlooking the shore, and in Louisiana and Maine, the difficult terrain specific to each region led to patrols on foot being supplemented and sometimes replaced by waterborne patrols using small boats.

Animal Assistance

Although the initial beach patrols were carried out solely by humans, by the end of 1942, patrols that made use of dogs or horses, or both, were taking place. Dogs were sometimes used to replace patrolmen, and horses provided patrolmen with greater mobility than they could achieve on foot. Training facilities for dogs, horses, and their handlers were established in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and Hilton Head, South Carolina. By the middle of 1943, about two thousand dogs and some 3,222 horses were assisting the patrols.

The first dog-assisted patrols took place near Brigantine, New Jersey,



Horse-mounted patrolmen were first used in US Coast Guard Beach Patrol operations in November 1942 and came to be employed along the entire coast except the coastlines of New England and New York.



A large unit of patrolmen, horses, and dogs of the US Coast Guard Beach Patrol are pictured here sometime in 1943. The photo probably shows a training exercise, because patrols typically consisted of only two sailors or one sailor and one dog.

where thirty dogs were deployed in late August 1942. Dogs were selected for the program based on their size, strength, intelligence, and adaptability. Airedales and Doberman Pinschers were among the favored breeds, but German Shepherds proved to be the most popular additions to the beach patrol. Dogs were trained for three weeks to closely follow their handlers, detain suspects, and attack or stop attacking on command. A trained dog could replace one person on a patrol—dog patrols typically consisted of one dog and one human handler. The dogs' keen senses and intimidating demeanor often made them more effective than a human could have been.

The first mounted patrols, which made use of horses provided by the US Army, began on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts in November 1942 and were eventually put in place throughout the country except in New England and New York. In isolated areas of the coast, these patrols, which typically consisted of two riders spaced about one hundred feet apart from each other, proved to be the best way to cover ground. A patrolman on horseback could travel more quickly than one on foot, could effectively pursue fleeing suspects, and could carry a forty-pound portable radio transmitter, which was helpful in areas where telephone wires could not be installed. Horse-mounted patrolmen could also travel over terrain that motor vehicles could not manage. The horses themselves were active partners in the patrol—the animals, sensitive to the presence of strangers, were often able to detect unauthorized people

well before their riders could. In some areas, both horses and dogs were employed.

By early 1943, a fully functioning beach patrol system featuring human patrols, mounted patrols, and dog-assisted patrols was in place along 3,700 miles of coastline. In numerous surprise tests of the system, the patrols quickly found the intruders and responded appropriately. The patrols also detected many instances of suspicious behavior. During the time that the beach patrols were active, a large number of people who were found near the coastline and raised suspicion were intercepted, questioned, and then released. Neither Germany nor Japan made any recorded attempts to land saboteurs or spies during the period from late 1942 until mid-1944 when the beach patrol was active, and as a result, the patrol did not intercept any foreign saboteurs or other infiltrators. Whether the patrol's vigilance deterred any attempts from being made is a matter of conjecture.

Rescuing Distressed Sailors and Airmen

Whether or not the beach patrols deterred enemy sabotage teams from trying to infiltrate the United States, the patrols were a measurable success when it came to assisting the US Coast Guard in some of its traditional missions, namely rescuing distressed vessels and their crews. Beach patrolmen were often the first to discover evidence of shipwrecks or downed airplanes offshore or find survivors who had reached safety, and their constant



presence helped rescue many shipwrecked sailors and downed airmen.

In one notable instance, beach patrol personnel based at La Push, Washington, were able to save fifty-four crew members and passengers of the *Lamut*, a Russian freighter that ran aground just off Washington's rocky shore. The freighter's predicament was discovered when a patrol found a body and the wreckage of a lifeboat washed up on the beach. A US Coast Guard vessel was able to find the *Lamut*, which had tipped over on its side on a rocky outcropping just offshore, but it was too dangerous to approach by sea. Instead, a group of patrolmen reached a cliff overlooking the ship, lowered a line to the distressed crew, and hauled them to safety.

Perhaps the unit best known for the assistance it rendered to wrecked mariners and downed airmen was a group of patrolmen assigned to Grand Chenier, Louisiana—a tiny ridge in a swampy region near the border with Texas. The patrolmen hailed from the region and were intimately familiar with the swamp and its hazards. Over the course of two years, they were able to save the lives of at least thirty-five people, including the entire crew of a B-26 bomber that crashed offshore.

End of the Beach Patrol

By the autumn of 1943, German and Japanese naval capabilities had been degraded, and German submarines were no longer a major threat off the Atlantic and Gulf

coasts. At the same time, the US armed forces needed additional manpower in both the European and Pacific theaters of operation. Responding to these two factors, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations issued an order on November 27, 1943, that the beach patrol be drawn down and its personnel reassigned to other missions. By July 1944, the Coast Guard's patrol coverage had been reduced to the prewar status quo, covering only a few miles near major ports, and in October of that year, the US Coast Guard Beach Patrol Division was dissolved.

Although the beach patrol had ended and the war was drawing toward its close, the threat of infiltration had not completely passed. On November 29, 1944, a German submarine landed two spies in a remote area on the coast of Maine, and they made their way to New York City with the intention of learning important military secrets. In the end, the two spies were unable to fulfill their mission, which ended in late December when one of them turned himself and his partner in to the FBI.

The US Coast Guard Beach Patrol was a remarkable feat of organization and coordinated effort put together in a short period of time under considerable stress. Its leaders managed to recruit, train, and deploy tens of thousands of men and thousands of animals to regularly patrol nearly four thousand miles of shoreline. This constant vigilance helped rescue hundreds of sailors and airmen and brought a sense of security to a country that had been shaken by the sudden onset of war. ■