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Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1867-1915

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The First World War was a huge and complex event. Keegan's talent lies in setting it in order, laying out the great themes, tucking in the outlying events, and serving a rich menu of detail at the right points—the life of soldiers in the trenches, the nobility of King Albert, the numbers of generals killed in battle, and the air and naval wars, to mention a few.

This is a very good book about a very bad war.

FRANK C. MAHNCKE
Washington, D.C.

Strobridge, Truman R., and Dennis L. Noble. *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1867-1915*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 223pp. \$34.95

Heretofore, little has been written about the activity of the United States in governing the new Alaska territory soon after its acquisition. Furthermore, there is scant material on the governmental thread that kept this vast territory bound together and intact through the second half of the eighteen hundreds. Archives hold much of this history, and that is where the two authors of this book went to compile their intriguing tale of a little-known service executing an enormous responsibility, most often as the sole representative of any branch of the U.S. government.

The U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (USRCS) arrived in the Bering Sea soon after the purchase of Alaska in 1867. For the next forty-eight years, until the service was incorporated into the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915, this small group of men in wooden ships (sail and steam powered) became the foundation for the Alaskan government. This unique maritime agency established the sovereignty that ultimately produced the state that exists today.

The cuttermen explored vast unknown areas in their multimission role. They provided humanitarian relief following natural disasters, brought medical care to isolated areas, fed starving North American natives, rescued shipwrecked sailors, protected wildlife, charted territories that led to discovering isolated tribes in the wilderness, and brought law to hostile surroundings. By their presence these small crews created a veneer of civilization in the rough frontier and the isolated settlements. So sensible were some of their actions that many of their solutions to problems became the laws of the new state a hundred years later.

Maritime historians Truman Strobridge and Dennis Noble chronicle events from widely scattered records in the service's colorful history. Their story, filled with episodes of high drama as well as events of historical significance,

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includes a number of notable figures. One is Captain Michael A. "Hell-Roaring Mike" Healy, a black revenue-cutter captain who became a legend of the Alaskan frontier, memorialized in James Michener's novel *Alaska*. The Coast Guard's most recent icebreaker is named for Healy.

The authors note that "the early cuttermen have never received the credit due them for their efforts as seagoing policemen who served the indigenous people of an isolated region." Readers will come to understand why the USRCS became so admired throughout the new territory, and they will appreciate the effect the service had on the political, economic, and social life of the North Pacific region.

Each chapter could be made into a full-length book. Most notable among its biographies are two of the service's officers, the above-mentioned Healy and Lieutenant John C. Cantwell. Cantwell, in addition to his shipboard duties, explored, mapped, and recorded unknown native settlements. He traveled via small boats where rivers allowed and trudged overland as the first explorer of the remote interior of northwest Alaska.

This book is a must read for students of Alaska history. It is also a uniquely valuable volume for maritime historians, with its coverage of a phase of the history of the

mostly unrecorded U.S. Revenue Cutter Service.

The book contains endnotes referencing rare and widely scattered original sources. The bibliography is extensive, and the book is indexed. *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service* is an excellent first choice for researchers and historians on Alaska and U.S. maritime history.

Truman R. Strobridge was an archivist and historian for the federal government for more than thirty years, including work as the Coast Guard's historian and a college teacher in Alaska. He is also the author of two books and nearly a hundred articles.

Dennis L. Noble retired from the Coast Guard as a senior chief marine science technician. He had made six Arctic voyages and two to the Antarctic. Following his retirement, he earned a Ph.D. in U.S. history. Noble is the author of nine books, seven of which are about U.S. Coast Guard history.

TOM BEARD
Commander, U.S. Navy

Symonds, Craig L. *Confederate Admiral: The Life and Wars of Franklin Buchanan*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 274pp. \$32.95
This stirring biography of a crusty old Navy commander and southern hero is the first in seventy years, and it fills a large gap in Civil