



Coast Guard Activities San Diego

A look at our history...

Coast Guard Activities San Diego began as a Coast Guard Air Patrol Detachment on May 4, 1934, for the purpose of preventing smuggling across the Mexican border. The primary mission soon expanded to include the saving of life and property, as the Coast Guard increasingly diverted patrolling aircraft for offshore search and rescue missions.

Located across the street from San Diego's Lindbergh Field, negotiations began in 1935 to provide 23 acres of tideland for construction of the Coast Guard Air Station. Local San Diegans and local agencies strongly supported this project, particularly the Harbor Commission and Chamber of Commerce. San Diego deeded the area for the air station to the Coast Guard at no cost, after approval by citizens of San Diego at a municipal election.

Construction began the following year with funds provided by the Federal Public Works Administration. The area needed to be dredged from the bay and filled and brought up to grade level. Long piles were driven in the soil for stabilization. The contract called for one hangar with a mess hall, a barracks, two aprons, a runway to Lindbergh Field, and a wooden seaplane ramp. During and prior to this time the detachment operated on Lindbergh Field in a commercial hangar. Elmer F. Stone, the Coast Guard's first aviator, led this detachment after May 21, 1935.

Coast Guard Air Station San Diego was commissioned in April 1937. The first commanding officer was Lt. S.C. Linholm, who later became commander of the Eleventh Coast Guard District. At the time, the base was the only Coast Guard Air Station in California.

Coast Guard Air Station San Diego saw no radical changes during

World War II. The unit continued to watch and report the activities of fishing craft in the area, to provide assistance in cases of distress, to monitor enemy sea activity, and to provide transportation by air for other government departments. Search and rescue operations became the primary local focus beginning in October 1943. Between January 1 and December 1, 1944, a total of 124 aircraft went down in waters covered by this unit. Of the 201 pilots and crewmen involved, 137 were saved, 59 were killed by mid-air collisions or impact with the water, and five remain lost at sea.

In April of 1949, a Coast Guard H03S-1 helicopter, piloted by then-Lieutenant Steward Graham, completed the longest unescorted helicopter flight in the world to that date. The flight was also the first unescorted transcontinental flight by a Coast Guard helicopter. The trip from Elizabeth City, N.C., to Port Angeles, Wash., by way of Coast Guard Air Station San Diego, a distance of 3,750 miles, took 10 1/2 days to complete and involved a total flight time of 57.6 hours.

Capt. Donald B. MacDiarmid assumed command of the station in 1950 after a distinguished World War II career. While in San Diego, he worked with station personnel to develop open ocean crash techniques that are still in use by commercial airlines today.

Coast Guard Activities San Diego, while beginning life as an air station, today performs multiple roles on both the sea and air. As a vital component of the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard's fundamental responsibilities continue to be performed each day – preparedness, protection, and response.

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Added: December 1999