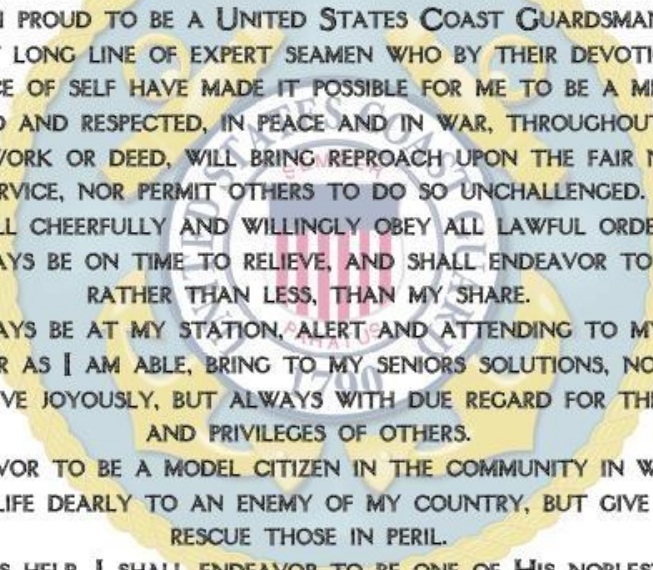


Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman



I AM PROUD TO BE A UNITED STATES COAST GUARDSMAN.
I REVERE THAT LONG LINE OF EXPERT SEAMEN WHO BY THEIR DEVOTION TO DUTY AND SACRIFICE OF SELF HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE A MEMBER OF A SERVICE HONORED AND RESPECTED, IN PEACE AND IN WAR, THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.
I NEVER, BY WORK OR DEED, WILL BRING REPROACH UPON THE FAIR NAME OF MY SERVICE, NOR PERMIT OTHERS TO DO SO UNCHALLENGED.
I WILL CHEERFULLY AND WILLINGLY OBEY ALL LAWFUL ORDERS.
I WILL ALWAYS BE ON TIME TO RELIEVE, AND SHALL ENDEAVOR TO DO MORE, RATHER THAN LESS, THAN MY SHARE.
I WILL ALWAYS BE AT MY STATION, ALERT AND ATTENDING TO MY DUTIES.
I SHALL, SO FAR AS I AM ABLE, BRING TO MY SENIORS SOLUTIONS, NOT PROBLEMS.
I SHALL LIVE JOYOUSLY, BUT ALWAYS WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF OTHERS.
I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO BE A MODEL CITIZEN IN THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH I LIVE.
I SHALL SELL LIFE DEARLY TO AN ENEMY OF MY COUNTRY, BUT GIVE IT FREELY TO RESCUE THOSE IN PERIL.
WITH GOD'S HELP, I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO BE ONE OF HIS NOBLEST WORKS -
A UNITED STATES COAST GUARDSMAN.

The Man Who Wrote the *Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman* by Captain Bob Desh, USCG (Retired) – Foundation for Coast Guard History

When I attended basic training (“bootcamp”) at U.S. Coast Guard Training and Support Center Alameda, California, in 1971, I and my mates were provided a very finite number of instructional materials to guide our transition from “mushy-headed civilian” to proud, high-performing Coast Guardsman. The primary text for the intense education that we would endure over the next couple of months was *The Coast Guardsman’s Manual, Fifth Edition*, published by the U.S. Naval Institute in 1967. It was quite literally our “bible” for all things Coast Guard. In addition to this all-important publication, we were provided a few pages of “supplemental information” that would also be key to our success. It included a chain of command that started with the President of the United States and ended with the leadership cadre of the recruit training center. For my recruit company, this limited supplemental information also included the words of the *Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman*.

As my career progressed, I learned that not everyone was introduced to this inspirational guiding doctrine in the formative years of their Coast Guard experience, if ever. Thanks to my recruit company commander, I count myself blessed to be among those who were. The *Creed* would become a touchstone for the rest of my life.

At bootcamp, we were instructed that the chain of command, the *Creed*, and the “Eleven General Orders” for a sentry on watch were to be memorized and that we must be able to recite them verbatim whenever called on to do so. Failure immediately resulted in motivational reinforcement, typically in the form of a prescribed number of “cranks,” more commonly known as push-ups. The command “DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY-FIVE!” still rings in my ears.

The chain of command would fade from my memory relatively quickly after departing basic training for my first operational unit. Most of the details of the Eleven General Orders stayed with me for many years. I can still stumble through some of them these many decades later. However, it is the words of the *Creed* that would never be lost. While I could no longer recite them all verbatim, they were referenced often and would motivate and inspire me throughout a Coast Guard career spanning more than three and half decades. They continue to guide today.

Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman

I am proud to be a United States Coast Guardsman.

I revere that long line of expert seamen who by their devotion to duty and sacrifice of self have made it possible for me to be a member of a service honored and respected, in peace and in war, throughout the world.

I never, by word or deed, will bring reproach upon the fair name of my service, nor permit others to do so unchallenged.

I will cheerfully and willingly obey all lawful orders.

I will always be on time to relieve, and shall endeavor to do more, rather than less, than my share.

I will always be at my station, alert and attending to my duties.

I shall, so far as I am able, bring to my seniors solutions, not problems.

I shall live joyously, but always with due regard for the rights and privileges of others.

I shall endeavor to be a model citizen in the community in which I live.

I shall sell life dearly to an enemy of my country, but give it freely to rescue those in peril.

With God’s help, I shall endeavor to be one of His noblest Works—

A UNITED STATES COAST GUARDSMAN.

The words of the *Creed* are simple and straight forward. Some might say unsophisticated. For me that is their true beauty. As my career progressed from Seaman Recruit to Captain, the *Creed* remained poignant and applicable at every rate and rank along the way. It was my rock. I have always been both astounded and extremely disappointed that the Coast Guard's emphasis on the *Creed* has not been more continuously aggressive and overt.

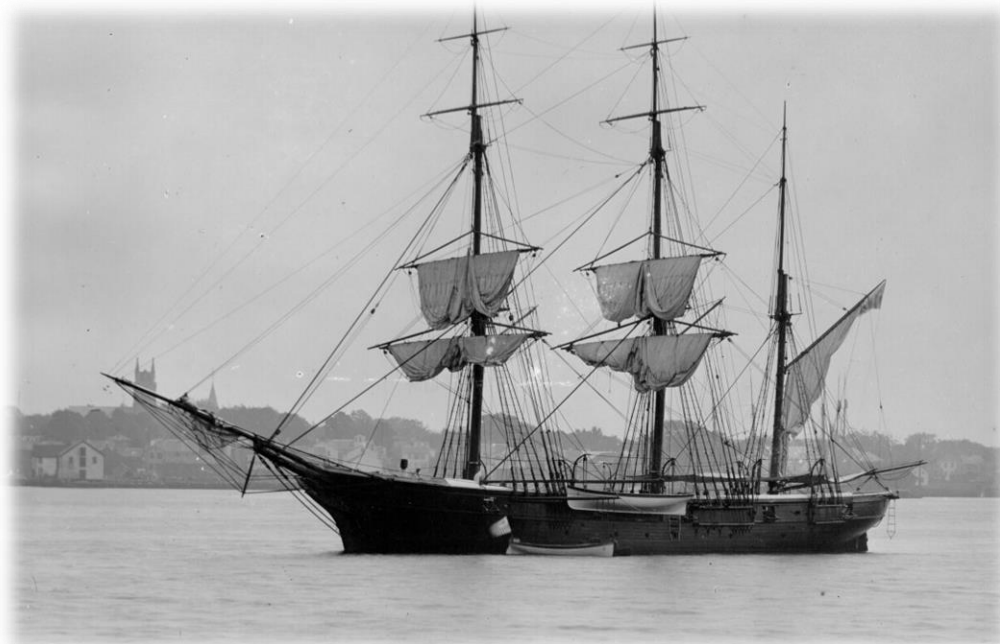
I must confess that despite its personal importance, I knew little about the origins of the *Creed* other than that it had been authored by Vice Admiral Harry G. Hamlet, USCG (Retired) in 1938. I was thrilled to see the history of the *Creed* included in C. Douglas Kroll's excellent book; *A Coast Guardsman's History of the U.S. Coast Guard* (ISBN 978-1-59114-433-5) published in 2010. Doug's words inspired me to learn more about Admiral Hamlet and the seminal work that had so inspired and guided me over the years.



Rear Admiral Harry G. Hamlet (Coast Guard photo)

Like many of his time, Harry Gabriel Hamlet led an interesting life and had a complex, fascinating military career. He saw the Revenue Cutter Service and Life-Saving Service combined to become the U.S. Coast Guard. He became a highly decorated WWI veteran and renowned cutterman. He would hold two of the most prestigious and influential positions in the Service – Superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy and Commandant of the United States Coast Guard. His career would span more forty years and include both great triumphs and perceived failures.

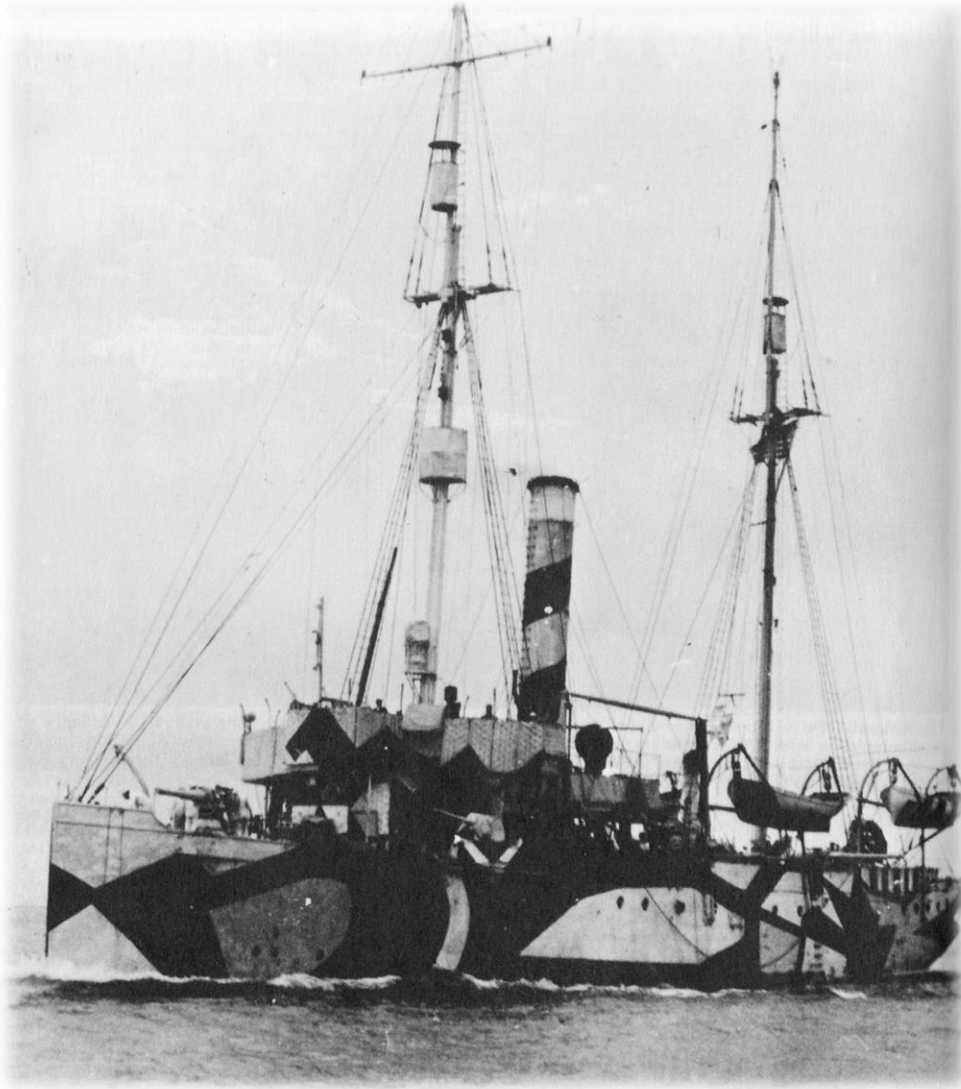
The son of Captain Oscar C. Hamlet of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, Harry was born on August 27, 1874 in Eastport, Maine. He graduated from Dorchester (Massachusetts) High School, attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was appointed a cadet in the Revenue Cutter Service on April 12, 1894. Harry's formative instruction and training would occur aboard the famous training barque *Salmon P. Chase*.



U.S. Revenue Cutter *Salmon P. Chase*, training ship for the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction (CG photo)

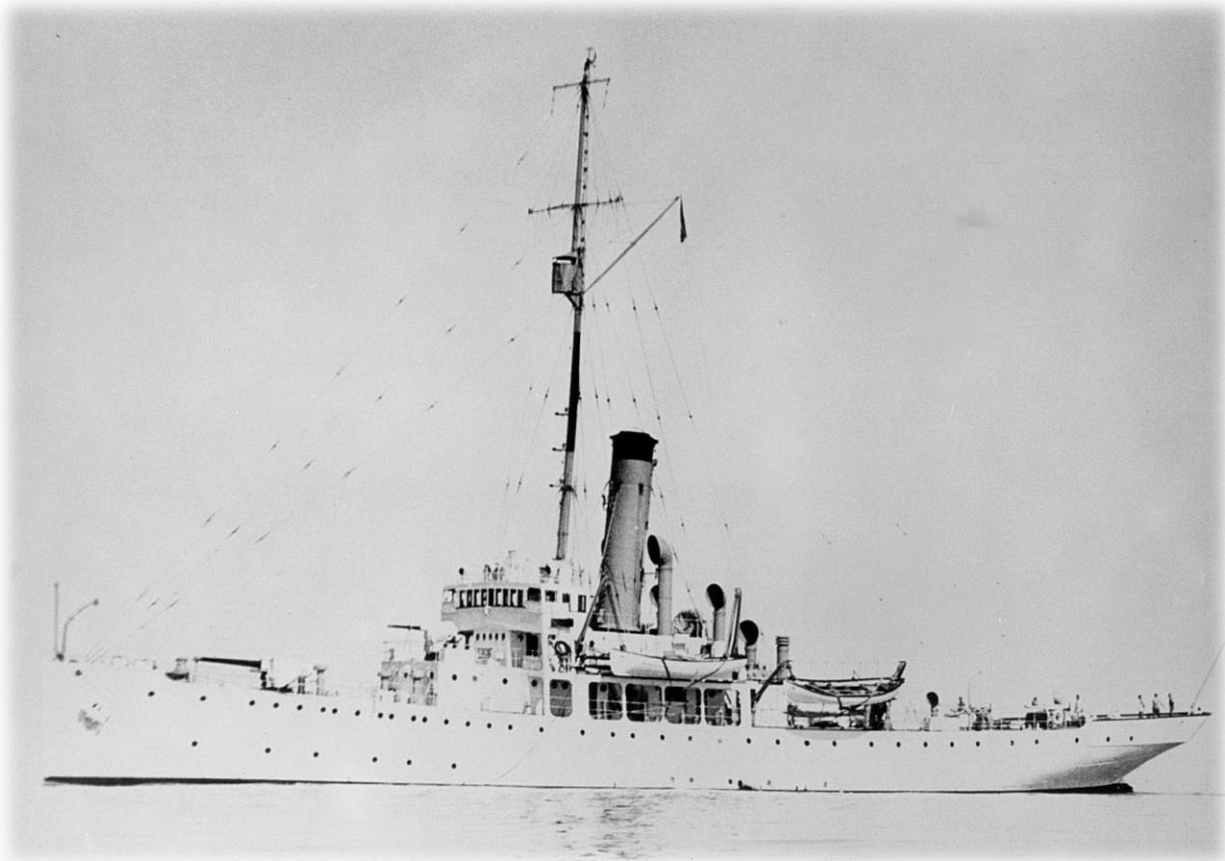
Cadet Hamlet graduated high in his class from the School of Instruction and was commissioned on April 27, 1896. His first assignment was on board the historic Cutter *Bear*. He was attached to *Bear* when his shipmates First Lieutenant David Jarvis, Second Lieutenant Ellsworth Bertholf, and Ship's Surgeon Samuel Call successfully completed the famous Overland Relief Expedition in 1898.

In 1900, Hamlet was one of the first Revenue Cutter Service officers to attend the prestigious Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. After graduation, he returned to Cutter *Bear*. Over the next few years, he served on units on both the East and West Coasts, as well as in Alaskan and Arctic waters.



USS *Marietta* (PG-15), (Nav Source photo)

When the United States entered WWI and the Coast Guard functioned as a specialized service in the Navy for the first time, Hamlet served in the Third Naval District, organizing various activities at Naval Section Bases Six and Nine. He subsequently joined the United States Naval Forces at Brest, France, assuming command of the USS *Marietta* (PG-15) in October 1918. On April 23, 1919, he and his crew rescued two officers and 45 men from USS *James* (SP-249), which was sinking in a heavy gale off the coast of France. With high seas threatening to crash the two vessels together, he skillfully and courageously maneuvered his ship alongside *James* and was instrumental in saving all on board. In recognition of his gallant conduct, the Secretary of the Treasury awarded him the Congressional Gold Lifesaving Medal. He also received a Special Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy entitling him to wear the Silver Star upon his service ribbon.



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Mohave* (WPG-47) (Nav Source photo)

In September 1919 Hamlet reported to Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and was assigned as Personnel Officer. He was also placed in charge of ship operations and served in this capacity until his detachment in May 1922. He then assumed command of Cutter *Mojave* (WPG-47) at Honolulu and took that vessel on her cruise to the Far East.

The Rum War at Sea

When Congress made provision for the acquisition of additional vessels for the Coast Guard in 1924 to meet the elevated demands of enforcing the Volstead Act during Prohibition, he was ordered to the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Appointed superintendent for the reconditioning, outfitting, and commissioning of 20 former-Navy destroyers turned over to the Coast Guard, he managed the expenditure of over \$2,400,000 in repair funds and trained the crews for these vessels.

The Commandant commended him for his exceptionally meritorious and efficient service in discharging these duties. In July 1925, after the commissioning of the reconditioned destroyers, Hamlet became the commander of the newly organized Coast Guard Destroyer Force during the dramatic “rum war at sea.”



USCGC *Tucker* (CG-23), one of the Navy destroyers loaned to the Coast Guard during Prohibition (CG photo)

In October 1926 he was promoted to the rank of Captain. In May 1928, Hamlet was appointed Superintendent of the United States Coast Guard Academy at New London, Connecticut. For most of his tenure as Superintendent, the Coast Guard Academy was located on the grounds of historic Fort Trumbull.



Vintage post card showing the Coast Guard Academy facilities at Fort Trumbull

In January 1931, his daughter, Jean Hamlet, broke ground during a ceremony launching the construction of new Coast Guard Academy facilities at its present location to the north of Fort Trumbull on the banks of the Thames River. In May of that year, Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew W. Mellon, laid the cornerstone for the new Academy's main building, Hamilton Hall.



Laying of cornerstone for Hamilton Hall, United States Coast Guard Academy (CG photo)



Hamilton Hall, United States Coast Guard Academy (CG photo)

After exemplary service as the Superintendent of the Academy, President Herbert Hoover promoted Hamlet to Rear Admiral and appointed him to the office of Commandant of the United States Coast Guard on June 14, 1932.

Hamlet's tenure as Commandant would not be a popular one. His greatest challenge was Coast Guard appropriations, or more precisely, lack thereof. With the Great Depression affecting the entire nation, Coast Guard budgets were dramatically small. After the rapid growth during Prohibition, the Service faced the need for draconian cuts. In 1933 the Service implemented cost cutting plans that resulted in the decommissioning of vessels, closing of stations, and the reduction of manpower. In total, Hamlet cut Coast Guard expenditure by 25 percent. This, unfortunately, led to reconsideration of making the Coast Guard a part of the Navy. Through his efforts, Hamlet was able to forestall this recommended reorganization by President Franklin Roosevelt. He successfully made the argument that the overall mission of the Coast Guard was distinct from that of the Navy. If the services were combined, the Coast Guard's traditional missions would be overwhelmed by the need to meet the demands of naval missions. Such a result would not be in the interest of the Nation. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William V. Pratt, concurred with Hamlet in opposing the plan. Strong support for the Coast Guard in Congress eventually prevented the transfer and the Coast Guard maintained its separate service identity within the Treasury Department. And as they say, the rest is history.

Upon completion of his term, he was succeeded as Commandant by Russel R. Waesche and reverted in rank to Captain on January 1, 1936, a process not unusual for the time. He was retained on special duty in the office of the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau Jr.



Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. and President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR Library Collection)

During this time, he performed additional duty as Chairman, Personnel Advisory Committee, Committee on Commerce, United States Senate. This position involved the study of maritime problems and recommending legislation to improve the American Merchant Marine.

Vice Admiral Hamlet retired on September 1, 1938 after reaching mandatory retirement age of 64. Because he had served as Commandant, his retired rank normally would have been Rear Admiral, Upper Half. However, this was raised one grade to Vice Admiral by virtue of his having served more than 40 years in the United States Coast Guard.

Vice Admiral Hamlet died on January 24, 1954 at the age of 79. He is interred at Arlington National Cemetery.



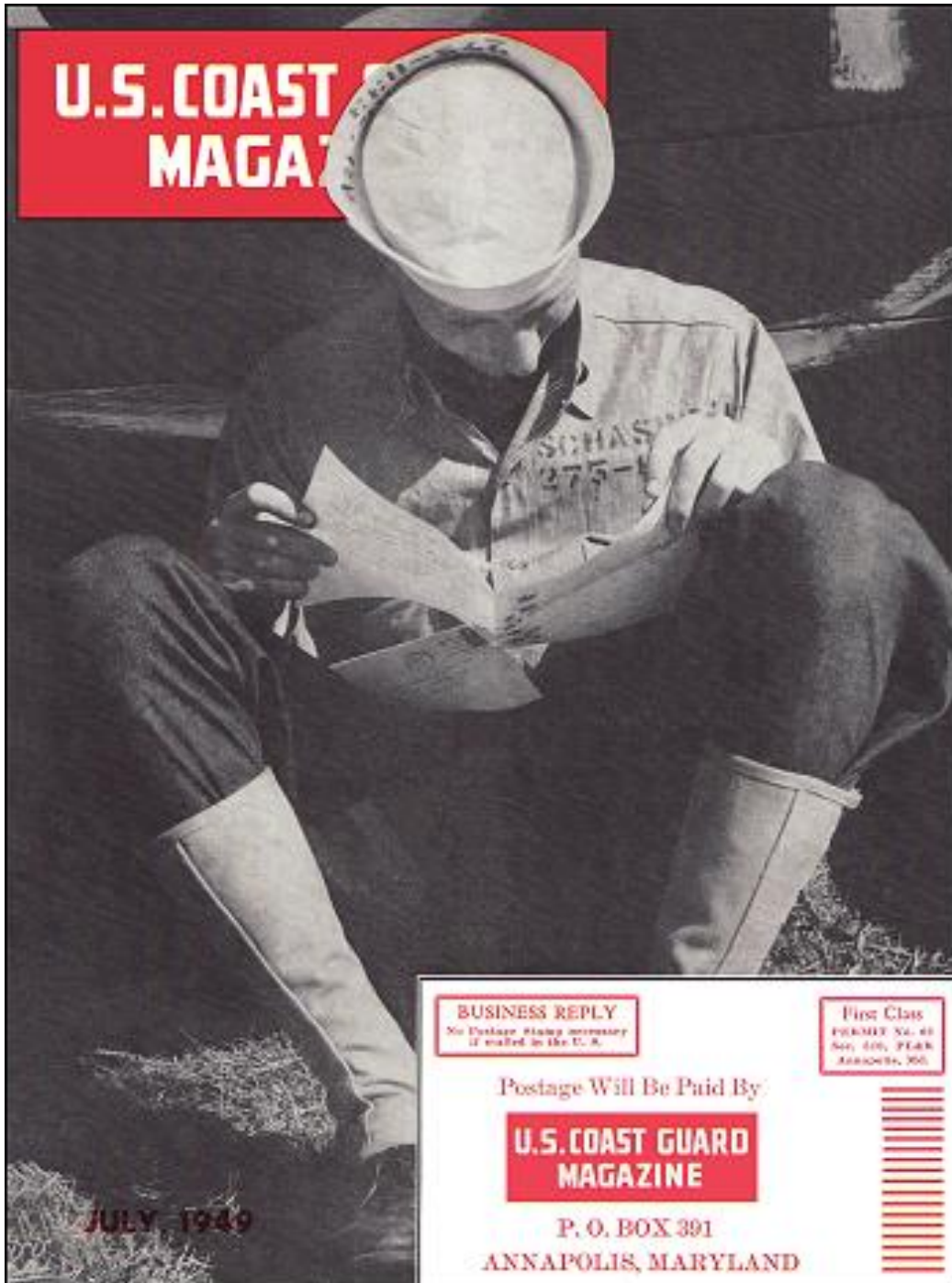
Vice Admiral Hamlet's gravestone, Arlington National Cemetery

The Creed

As one can tell from this brief synopsis of Admiral Hamlet's career, he was incredibly qualified to craft the *Creed*. He had a ringside seat in 1915 when the combining of the Revenue Cutter Service and the Life-Saving Service gave birth to the United States Coast Guard. Over the course of his four decades in uniform, he saw the Service go through incredible changes. He experienced duty on the historic Bering Sea Patrol. He was there for the onset of World War I and commanded a naval vessel in combat. He helped oversee the Coast Guard's rapid expansion during Prohibition. Most importantly, he successfully battled to save the Coast Guard when the demise of the Service was a real possibility. His experiences and intellect grant him extraordinary credibility in understanding the essence of a Coast Guardsman essential to articulating a creed for those who proudly serve.

So, what is a creed? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is a "set of fundamental beliefs: also, a guiding principle." Admiral Hamlet's *Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman* certainly meets that definition.

So how did the *Creed* come to be? An article in the January 1946 issue of *Coast Guard* magazine lamented that there was no such thing as ‘The Creed of a United States Coast Guardsman.’ The authors argued that high-performing organizations have a creed to strengthen, guide and inspire. The magazine invited “every writer who sees these words to set himself to the serious and worthy task of creating ‘The Creed of a United States Coast Guardsman.’”



Cover of Coast Guard Magazine, July 1949 (alexhaley.com photo)

A three-person board was established to study all entries, and the best offering would be prominently published in the magazine. The editors reminded its readership that the Service's official song, "Semper Paratus" was first published in the pages of *Coast Guard*. The winning author would be privileged to the same honor and prestige when their creed was published. Unfortunately, it appears that the response was paltry. Over the next few years, only a very brief creed authored by Edith F. Munro, mother of Medal of Honor winner Douglas Munro, appeared in the magazine.

Vice Admiral Hamlet, now retired, took up the cause. He submitted the *Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman* that we know today. The *Creed* was first published in 1950 in the April issue of the *Coast Guard Bulletin*.



U.S. Revenue Cutter Tahoma off the coast of Alaska (Worth Point post card photo)

Hamlet later wrote that the inspiration for the creed actually came to him years earlier while serving on board the Revenue Cutter *Tahoma* on Bering Sea Patrol. As many cuttermen have experienced, *Tahoma* was headed home at patrol's end when she got orders to return the Bering Sea for additional duties. At that point, Hamlet thought that a creed might serve as an anchor to energize the disheartened crew and buoy morale. Unfortunately, he was unable to find the opportunity to put his thoughts into writing until shortly after his retirement in 1938. The call for a creed by *Coast Guard* magazine would eventually provide a forum to bring his inspiring words to the printed page as a guide for generations of Coast Guardsmen to follow.

The words of the *Creed* are definitely straightforward and timeless. Each and every line in the *Creed* guided the specifics of my behavior at one time or another during my Coast Guard career. Several of the lines are particularly poignant to me personally:

“I am proud to be a United States Coast Guardsman” – This opening sentence sums up the essence of most of my adult life. While now retired from active service, I still see a Coast Guardsman every time I look in the mirror.

“I revere that long line of expert seamen who by their devotion to duty and sacrifice of self have made it possible for me to be a member of a service honored and respected, in peace and in war, throughout the world” – This, the longest and I believe foundational sentence, is at the core of my fascination with Coast Guard history. It also inspired me throughout my career to know my craft, to be the best that I could be.

“I never, by word or deed, will bring reproach upon the fair name of my service, nor permit others to do so unchallenged.” – This lofty goal is no easy thing. It caused me to pause and reflect many times before taking action or doing all manner of things. In my days as a young non-rate, adherence to this principle undoubtedly kept me out of trouble or from doing something that most certainly could have brought *“reproach upon the fair name of my service.”* As I advanced to more senior positions in the Coast Guard, it also shaped the standards and behavior I demanded of my subordinates. I must confess that the last few words, *“...nor permit others to do so unchallenged,”* may have from time to time led to a few educational discussions with members of other branches of the armed forces.

“I shall live joyously, but always with due regard for the rights and privileges of others” and ***“I shall endeavor to be a model citizen in the community in which I live”*** – These two lines shaped how I lived my life each day. They continue to do so. As we face the myriad challenges that are the reality of day-to-day life in our nation today, who can possibly argue with the benefits and simple logic of *“living life joyously, but always with due regard for the rights and privileges of others.”* How much better would the world be if everyone lived by this simple creed?

The *Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman* is only 11 lines in length and contains a mere 208 words. It is concise and powerful.

As I lamented earlier, I have always been disappointed that the Coast Guard’s emphasis on the *Creed* has waxed and waned over the years. Any Coast Guard woman or man who follows its tenets is destined to have a successful service career, no matter the duration. In addition to its profound guiding principles, it provides an important, essential link to Coast Guard history. I will forever remain its steadfast champion!



Creed of the United States Coast Guardsman at center of antique ship's wheel (author photo)

A plaque containing the words of the *Creed* hangs at the center of an antique ship's wheel prominently displayed in my library. It looms over my left shoulder as I draft this shabby bit of prose. I read its words often. To this day, no matter the task, I do my very best to ***“always be at my station, alert and attending to my duties.”*** Semper Paratus!

Sources:

1. C. Douglas Kroll, *A Coast Guardsman's History of the U.S. Coast Guard* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010)
2. Coast Guard Headquarters, *Biographical Sketch of Rear Admiral H.G. Hamlet, USCG* (Washington DC: Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, 1934)
3. United States Coast Guard Historian's Office, *Notable People, Rear Admiral Harry G. Hamlet*. Retrieved from <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/Notable-People/All/Article/1762602/rear-admiral-harry-g-hamlet/>