



Sand pounders: An interpretation of the history of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, based on its Annual reports for the years 1870 through 1914

Robert F Bennett

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In January 1915 two Treasury Department agencies merged to form the United States Coast Guard. One of these agencies, the United States Life-Saving Service (USLSS) had been created in August 1848 for the purpose of recuing people who were ship-wrecked on the coast of New Jersey. That federal organization, manned primarily by volunteers, was reorganized in 1870 to included paid surfmen who patrolled our coastline during stormy seasons. Eventually the scope of the USLSS included the nation's Atlantic, Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific, and Alaskan coats. For 44 years, the surfmen of the USLSS dutifully pounded their feet along mostly sandy pathways in all kinds of weather, occasionally discovering a vessel in distress and, then, acting to initiate the recuse operations that would demand their fullest participation. And, sometimes, even their sacrifice. These surfmen have been called "sandpounders." It was a title that they could wear proudly. This is the story of that heroic organization as gleaned from the official Annual Reports of the USLSS and the correspondence files of the National Archives.

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