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Alex R. Larzelere, *The Coast Guard in World War I: An Untold Story*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003. xxi, 326pp. Chronology, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95.

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The U.S. Coast Guard and one of its predecessors, the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, have always participated in the naval wars of the United States. It is an unfortunate fact that the literature on the service's role in combat is very limited. Alex R. Larzelere has added to the literature. Larzelere is a retired U.S. Coast Guard captain and a combat veteran of the Vietnam War, whose career included service in seven cutters, five of which he commanded. He is no stranger to writing about combat. Larzelere's last book, *The Coast Guard at War: Vietnam, 1965-1975*. (Naval Institute Press, 1997), covered the U.S. Coast Guard's role in that long and divisive war.

Formed in 1915 with the merger of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service and U.S. Life-Saving Service, the new U.S. Coast Guard received orders to transfer to the U.S. Navy on 6 April 1917. The service was small at the beginning of the Great War; at the time of transfer it numbered less than 5,200 officers and men, which increased to only 6,500 by war's end (xii). Despite these small numbers, U.S. Coast Guardsmen served in a variety of cutters, ships and shore stations, both overseas and in the United States. The service's largest single loss in the war zone happened in 1918 when a German submarine sunk the cutter *Tampa* with all hands while returning from convoy duty.

As he did with his earlier work on the Vietnam War, Larzelere divides the narrative by subject, rather than following a chronological order. The chapters cover the

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transfer, cutters to the war zone, convoy escort duty, home waters, aboard navy ships in the war zone, aviation, coastal stations, port security, seized German ships and troop transports, duty on shore, and after the armistice. What may jar many readers is how Larzelere approaches each chapter. Usually, the chapter begins with an exciting event that does not necessarily follow in chronological order within the chapter. For example, Chapter 2 dealing with cutters to the war zone, almost half of the opening of the chapter encompasses the exciting story of the crew of the cutter *Seneca's* attempt to rescue crewmen from the British collier *Wellington*, struck by a torpedo on 16 September 1918. After this description, Larzelere then begins the chronological discussion of cutters transferred to the navy.

Aviation in the U.S. Coast Guard, as in the other armed forces, was in its infancy during World War I. Larzelere discusses the role of those in early aviation during the war, including brief histories of the air stations where U.S. Coast Guard aviation personnel served.

Larzelere is best at describing operational events, such as *Seneca's* efforts to save *Wellington*. One of the great values of this book is that many brave U.S. Coast Guardsmen who undertook heroic, and sometimes seemingly impossible deeds, will no longer remain little known. For example, on October 1918 dangerous fires and explosions swept the ammunition plant of T.A. Gillespie and Company, Morgan City, New Jersey. First Lieutenant Joseph E. Stika, U.S. Coast Guard, led the response into the inferno. At one time Stika and others repaired a damaged rail line and then leaped aboard a train containing nine cars loaded with high explosives and moved them to safety. For his work, Stika and eleven other U.S. Coast Guardsmen received the Navy Cross. Yet another account concerns Warrant Officer John Midgett, commanding officer of Station Chicamicomico, along North Carolina's Outer Banks. When the British tanker *Mirlo* exploded from a torpedo fired from a German U-boat, Midgett and his crew of six took

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their motor surfboat into a sea covered with blazing gasoline to rescue the surviving seamen. Larzelere's style gives readers an understanding of the great danger these U.S. Coast Guardsmen faced. Larzelere, however, left out one crewman in his account of the rescue of *Mirlo*, Franklin O'Neal. O'Neal is shown on the service's web site listing the recipients of the Gold Life Saving Medals and in Edwin C. Bearss' excellent 1968 study of the incident in *The North Carolina Historical Review*. (Bearss' article is also not listed in the bibliography.)

Appendixes give information on various aspects of U.S. Coast Guard service during World War I, such as officers serving on navy ships and cutters transferred to the navy. Appendix F lists the recipients of major medals awarded to U.S. Coast Guardsmen during the war. Readers will learn the amazing fact that forty-nine U.S. Coast Guardsmen received Navy Crosses. Again, Franklin O'Neal is not in the listing in Appendix F.

As in most histories of the U.S. Coast Guard, the enlisted force receives little mention. Larzelere recognizes this and notes there was little "information about enlisted men during the period." (xiii) The contribution of the service's enlisted force has yet to be written.

The few demurs above should not detract from the value of this book by a sea service officer writing on the service that he loves. Alex Larzelere's *The Coast Guard in World War I* is a book for anyone interested in naval history, the U.S. Coast Guard, and naval actions in World War I.