Commandant's Bulletin

Issue 15-83 • Serving the people of the U. S. Coast Guard • July 22, 1983



By SS1 Michael J. Maynard,
USCGR, SADT at STA Pt. Judith

Station Point Judith

Jutting out into Block Island Sound, the strip of land known to mariners as Point Judith points like a finger into the turbulent waters of the North Atlantic.

Waters are so treacherous and storms so sudden that Point Judith was once referred to as the Cape Hatteras of the North by crews of coast-wise sailing craft. Protecting seafarers from the storm-tossed waters, Station Point Judith has kept vigil continuously for more than 108 years.

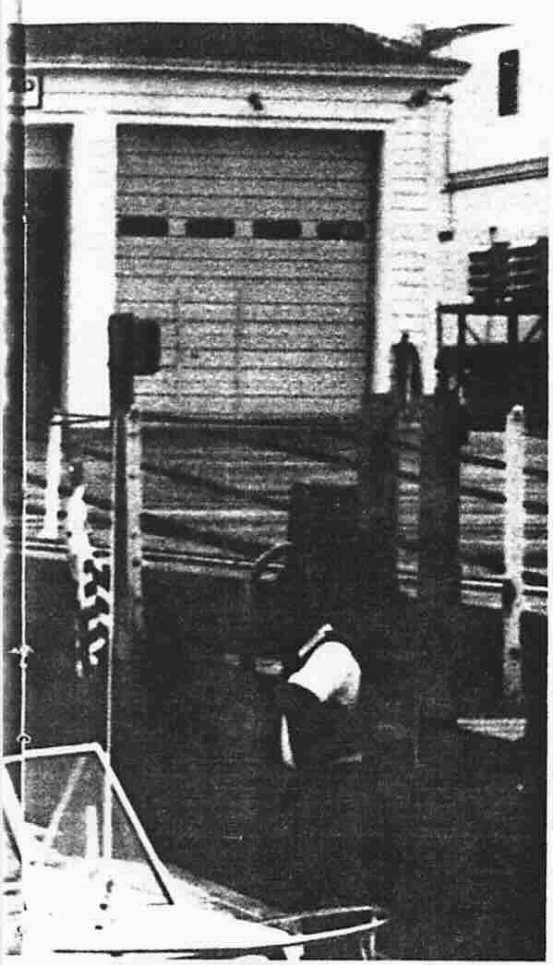
"P.J.", as it is popularly known, started its lifesaving career along with five lifesaving stations in 1875. The annual reports of the Life Saving Service tell thrilling stories of surfmen battling full gale storms and mountainous waves to save crews from ships aground on the point.

On Christmas Day in 1885, Point Judith's crewmen set out to save the passengers of two sinking vessels that collided the previous night. Finding both ships abandoned, the lifesavers



attempted to return to land. But winds gusting 50 knots pushed their frail craft across the churning water to Block Island, some ten miles away. Spectators on the mainland feared the crew lost. Owing to a three-day storm, the townspeople held memorial services for the surfmen, complete with newspaper obituaries. Much to their surprise and delight, the Point Judith surfmen returned to their station as if nothing happened.

In more recent times the crew manning the station withstood the devestating hurricane of 1938.



On May 5, 1945, the wartime crew of the station rescued the 40-man crew of the collier, *Black Point*, the last American ship sunk in coastal waters of the U.S. Later in the day, the crew witnessed the sinking of the U-853, the last German sub sunk by American naval forces in World War II.

Today the lumber schooners and coal barges that were a common sight along these shores have been replaced by fishing draggers. The port of Galileo, which also contains Point Judith's boat house, boasts a fishing fleet of 140 draggers and lobster boats, ranging in size from 30 feet to 95 feet in length. The station logged 240 SAR cases in 1982, according to BMCS Staples, officer in charge.

Outside helping oceangoing draggers, law enforcement figures fit prominently into the station's records. Point Judith's crew assisted in the April 1982 seizure of a boat carrying 210 bales of marijuana, with a street value of $8 million.

The station also maintains Point Judith Lighthouse, first constructed in 1816, when the inspector of customs in Newport purchased the land "for a sum of our dollars to be paid in one lump sum," according to local records. The present building was placed in service in 1934 and houses a crew of 30 persons and one large black Labrador retriever who keeps a constant watch on the station's visitors and has over the years, accompanied many visiting inspectors on their rounds.

Today the crew is preparing the 40-footer for the Newport American Cup Races. Although plans have been drawn up to replace the current structure with a more modern station in Galilee, most of the crew at P.J. agree that a new building will never replace the charm or history that is found on that scenic piece of land known as Point Judith.