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Alex R. Larzelere. *The Coast Guard in World War I: An Untold Story*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003.

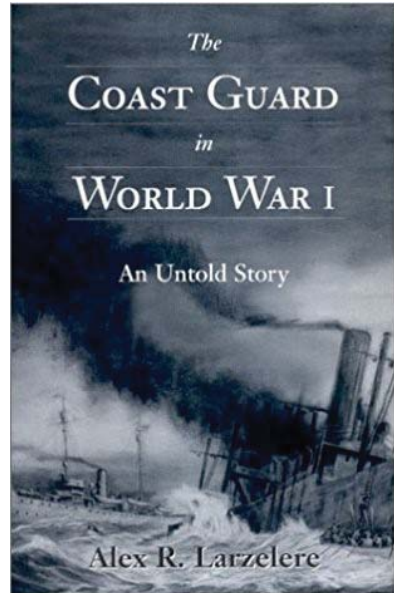
Book Review

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Battle weary soldiers, covered in dirt and shell shocked from the rigors of early twentieth century trench warfare are most likely the first image that comes to mind of the combatants of World War I. This is not an unfair picture to draw, as it is estimated that approximately ten million military combatants were killed during the conflict, the majority of whom died while fighting on land. However, it is definitely unfair to ignore the vast contributions that the Coast Guard made throughout the war. In his book, *The Coast Guard in World War I: An Untold Story*, author Alex Larzelere encapsulated all of the heroic and dangerous missions that the smallest military branch accomplished during the war. Larzelere has



completed a masterful task in his in-depth accounting of all Coast Guard related activities, and this book is a solid starting point for anyone interested in learning more about the actions of the Coast Guard in this conflict.

Larzelere has broken down the Coast Guard's involvement in World War I into descriptions of the missions it completed throughout the conflict. By leaving no detail out, even the smallest actions have been accounted for in this book. Although this does weigh the book down at times, the commitment to giving credit for every event in which a Coast Guard member was involved demonstrates not only the author's vast dedication to research for this project, but also the sheer number of roles in which Coast Guard members acted. For instance, the author states, "at the time of mobilization in 1917, the U.S. Coast Guard had a fleet of twenty-three active cruising cutters and twenty-one harbor cutters" (p. 11). Larzelere goes well beyond this summary statement, as he carefully annotates the actions and missions of each cutter throughout the course of the war.

Cutters were not the only platform that the Coast Guard utilized during World War I, however, and Larzelere includes chapters on the roles that other units played as well. Larzelere spent much time detailing the oftentimes tedious, sometimes lonely, and regularly dangerous life of a surfman at a rescue station. Information is given on all three types of outfits at the time “life-saving stations, lifeboat stations, and houses of refuge” (p. 156), ranging from how the men went about the more difficult tasks of saving lives in peril to the more mundane, such as how the men were instructed to not bring reading material to their lookout watches. Larzelere also went to great effort to ensure that he included the newly minted aviation sector of the Coast Guard in his book. Despite being a brand new addition to the service, aviation was a part of the Coast Guard during WWI. Larzelere incorporated the actions of the first aviators in the Coast Guard, detailing their training, the record setting flight of First Lieutenant Elmer Stone (senior pilot who crossed the Atlantic Ocean on 27 June, 1919), and the anti-submarine missions that they flew off the American and French coastlines.

Most significant are the events or activities that the Coast Guardsmen practiced during World War I that the men and women in the service today still execute. Larzelere writes of the men that “served as vessel inspectors for the Fourth and Seventh Naval Districts” (p. 222), a passage that clearly shows that the marine inspectors in the Coast Guard today are still practicing the same craft a century later. The author also goes into detail on how life was for men on a Coast Guard cutter and troop transports (crewed by Coast Guardsmen). He included a letter from a Coast Guardsman who was underway. It stated, “Fortunately we had no cooties, but cockroaches were a common pet and a popular pastime was racing between these sociable little insects” (p. 68). This illustrates how much the service has improved over the decades. Finally, it is interesting to see how some of the traditions utilized during WWI are still in use today. For example, men that served at surf stations had to pass a rigorous swimming test with elements such as “swim [ing] 50 yards dressed, with shoes, trousers, and coat, and then remove the clothing in the water, without touching bottom” (p. 159)—a test that is still administered to aspiring officers to this date.

In conclusion, Alex Larzelere’s book *The Coast Guard in World War I: An Untold Story* does an admirable job of detailing the brave and patriotic actions that Coast Guardsmen participated in throughout the conflict. Many men gave their lives during this war while serving in the Coast Guard, and the author’s inclusion of how the service had to fight for survival, and not be absorbed by the U.S. Navy serves as a stark reminder of the branch’s uniqueness. Overall, this book is not reserved for historians, but should instead be read by anyone who desires to know

more about the smallest branch of the U.S. military and how it contributed during WWI. The Coast Guard has deserved a book like this for decades, and it is refreshing to see that someone so passionate on the subject has delivered such a fine product.