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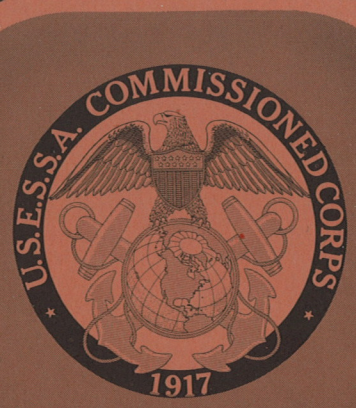

1917 - 1967

50

YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC SERVICE

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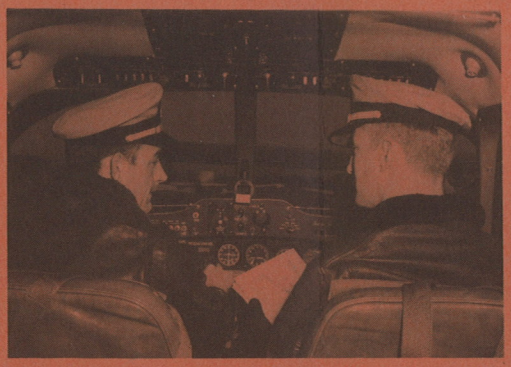
COMMISSIONED CORPS



ESSA/PI 670018

Fifty years of scientific service

The search for new knowledge is necessary and demanding. It requires that scientists and engineers sail and explore the sea, cross the rugged spines of continents and empty deserts, fly into the maw of hurricanes and thunderstorms, train the giant memories of large computers to approximate the sea and atmosphere. It requires that trained observers explore the infinity of relationships between geophysical phenomena, and warn endangered people of the hazards these relationships sometimes produce.

This is the work of ESSA, the Environmental Science Services Administration, and of its Commissioned Corps. This select organization of fewer than 300 men, ranging in grade from ensign to vice-admiral, celebrates its golden anniversary on May 22, 1967.

The Corps was created in the Coast and Geodetic Survey May 22, 1917, by act of Congress. In May 1965, when the Coast Survey became a major element of ESSA, the Corps was transferred to the new agency. The already formidable array of talent, experience, and scientific discipline broadened to cover the entire range of ESSA's programs. Today's USESSA officers participate and guide programs in the Coast and Geodetic Survey, Weather Bureau, National Environmental Satellite Center, Environmental Data Service, Institutes for Environmental Research, and ESSA headquarters in Rockville, Md.

Assignments include such diverse responsibilities as ship command, piloting photogrammetric planes, research and administration. Interdisciplinary participation extends to telecommunication sciences, aeronomy, meteorology, hydrology, oceanography, geodesy, geomagnetics, seismology, satellite technology and cartography.

Officers' duties take them almost anywhere in the world. In a 30-year career, a Corps member will devote approximately half his time to combined sea, mobile and remote-area duty. It is not uncommon for a Corps family's children to attend as many as half a dozen schools in one year when the officer is serving with a mobile field party.

Candidates must have bachelor or higher degrees in civil, electrical or mechanical engineering, mathematics, physics, oceanography or other scientific disciplines useful to the ESSA mission of understanding, describing and predicting the geophysical environment.

Although the Commissioned Corps is not one of the armed services, its officers are subject to wartime transfer by the President to the military services. Its men and the Survey's ships have served with distinction in World Wars I and II.

In World War I, the *Surveyor* disabled the notorious German submarine U-39, which had sunk the *Lusitania*. At the war's end, the Coast Survey's ships and men were transferred back to the Department of Commerce.

In World War II, every phase of the Coast Survey's activities was geared to the needs of the military establishment. Most of its commissioned officers were transferred to the armed forces, serving in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. They mapped isolated regions of Asia, Africa, Alaska and South America, directed fire-control in frontline observation units, engaged in amphibious landing operations, and developed methods and served as instructors in surveying and mapping.

The Coast Survey's vessels were transferred to the Navy, serving a variety of functions. In addition to performing defensive coastal surveys, they surveyed such other areas as Guadalcanal, Okinawa and Tokyo Bay. The *Pathfinder*, veteran of 50 bombing raids, sustained a kamikaze hit at Okinawa and,

although she was frequently reported by Tokyo Rose as having been destroyed, survived the war.

Target charts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of Romania's Ploesti oil fields were compiled and published by the Survey under officer direction during World War II. In 1944 the bureau produced two million copies of target charts. It was the principal source of world aeronautic charts during the war. In 1944 and again in 1945 the Survey produced 13,500,000 U.S. charts, as well as four million copies of foreign charts. Another eight million copies of specialized charts also were produced during each of those years.

Among their other duties, ESSA Commissioned Corps officers today man the Coast Survey's 15 vessels engaged in deep-sea research, hydrographic coastal surveys and the search for underwater hazards. Survey ships include such sophisticated floating laboratories as the *Oceanographer* and *Discoverer*, and such small ships as the wire-drag vessels *Rude* and *Heck*.

The *Oceanographer* is now on a global scientific expedition; her sister ship, *Discoverer*, was commissioned April 29. The *Rude* and *Heck* operate as a team seeking out navigational hazards; to the commanding officer of these ships goes the distinction of being the only captain of two ships in Government service.

The Corps is headed by Rear Admiral Don A. Jones, ESSA Associate Administrator.

When the commissioned service came into being in 1917, 119 men were sworn as officers. Of them, 23 were commissioned ensigns, 53 lieutenants (j.g.), 22 lieutenants, 10 lieutenant-commanders, eight commanders, and three captains. One lieutenant, junior grade, already had served 49 years in the Coast Survey, while a full lieutenant had 53 years of prior service. They were probably the Nation's oldest lieutenants.

Of the original 119 men, 15 died on active duty, 55 retired and 49 resigned. Five of them became Directors or Assistant Directors of the Coast and Geodetic Survey.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Environmental Science Services Administration