

# Wreck & Rescue Journal Book Reviews



Presenting the Latest  
in Coast Guard  
History Publications

The staff and contributors to *Wreck & Rescue Journal* are constantly on the search for new titles to review. We will consider reviewing any book that has to do with the U.S. Life-Saving Service, U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, the United States Coast Guard, similar foreign agencies, shipwrecks, or other themes that affect the lives of search and rescue professionals. To suggest a title, contact the editor at [johnjgalluzzo@hotmail.com](mailto:johnjgalluzzo@hotmail.com).

## *So Others May Live: Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers: Saving Lives, Defying Death*

By Martha J. LaGuardia-Kotite

The Lyons Press, 2006

PO Box 480

Guilford CT 06437

Hardcover, 260 pages, \$22.95

Coast Guard rescue swimmers do what they do for the same reason lifeboat coxswains chose their specialty when entering the service. They're both classified as lifesavers, but when it comes right down to it, there's also a bit of the adrenaline junkie to be found in each 47-foot motor lifeboat driver and wetsuit wearing rescue swimmer.

The idea of entering the water to save lives is, of course, not new. Many seaside towns are famous for their lifeguards or their beach patrols, dating back into the late 1800s. Yet, while those young men (and at that time they were mostly men) worked generally in the summertime and therefore in primarily warm conditions, there still were plenty of instances in the past when a coldwater, near-shore rescue needed to be performed in winter, like when shipwreck victims found themselves drifting toward the shore on a stormy night. On many occasions, the closest rescuers in times of need in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the men of the United States Life-Saving Service.

Conditions were rustic. With ropes tied around their waists, tentatively tethered to dry land by the pulling power of their fellow lifesavers and brave local citizens adding their willpower to the cause, surfmen wandered out into the breakers hoping to somehow grab hold of

those victims washing ashore. In those times, more so than most, they risked their lives so other might live.

That phrase, of course, typifies Coast Guard life. The rescue swimmers performing their duties today can draw inspiration from the men of the USLSS. But they can also proudly admit that they've taken the concept of saving lives at sea, to use the slang of today, "to a whole 'nother level." Whereas the life-lined surfmen of a century ago wandered a few feet into the surf, today's rescue swimmers can find themselves on offshore oil rigs about to explode in the Gulf of Mexico, or dropped into caves with water rushing in and out. They can be on the sides of mountains searching for airplane wreck survivors, or they can be found heading on missions more than 600 miles offshore to save commercial fishermen and recreational boaters alike.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast states like no other disaster in history in September 2005, the United States Coast Guard's helicopter rescue crews have been thrust into the American media spotlight like never before, credited with saving a significant portion of the more than 30,000 people rescued by the service after the storm. Helicopter pilots and copilots found their way to victims, and rescue swimmers met them on the ground – or on the roof, as the case may be.

According to Martha LaGuardia-Kotite's *So Others May Live*, the rescue swimmer's story has its roots in the 1970s. A standardized training program came after a false start or two, but today the service's swimmers are recognized as the best of the best in the world, an elite corps unparalleled. *So Others May Live* recounts the birth of the program and then delves into the individual tales, including many of the scenarios listed

above. One chapter is devoted entirely to Hurricane Katrina and its amazing array of rescue cases.

It'll be easy to get the title of the book confused with others on similar subjects. Dennis L. Noble's excellent work on the history of the USLSS is entitled *That Others Might Live*, and Senior Master Sergeant Jack Brehm's work on the U.S. Air Force's pararescue jumpers (or PJ's) holds the title *That Others May Live*. Be careful when selecting – or just get all three.

### *“Last One Out, Turn Off the Light!”*

Odonnell Entertainment

P.O. Box 771

Bayside, CA 95524

Phone: (707) 442-4117 or (877) SIX-DAYS

Email: billjr@odonnell.ws

Web Site: [www.OdonnellEntertainment.com](http://www.OdonnellEntertainment.com)

Price: VHS: \$14.99, DVD: \$19.99

Time: 31 Minutes, color

Review by Ralph Shanks

Located miles off Crescent City, California, on one of the most isolated and roughest stretches of American coastline, St. George Reef was the most costly and perhaps deadliest lighthouse in U.S. history. Sometimes called by maritime historians “America’s Greatest Lighthouse” and the “King of Pacific Coast Lighthouses,” this huge granite tower was completed in 1892 atop a waveswept rock so treacherous that no landing could ever be built there. Getting on and off was so dangerous that as many as three Coast Guardsmen were lost in a single day trying to get off station.

In the early 1970s St. George Reef Lighthouse along the California-Oregon state line was about to be automated. This video uses footage shot in that era by Humboldt State University (HSU) combined with historic stills and later helicopter shots.

When I first saw the Humboldt State University

footage, it was like seeing a ghost. I was with some of the USCGC *Cape Carter* crew and one of the St. George Reef light keepers featured in the film during a 1970s log run to transfer personnel and bring out cargo bags of fresh supplies to St. George Reef Light. I can vouch for the authenticity and drama of this remarkable video.

You'll see scenes of servicing and manning the lighthouse using the patrol boat *Cape Carter* and the 44-foot motor lifeboat out of Chetco River, Oregon. The film includes scenes on board the *Cape Carter*, of the Chetco River 44-foot motor lifeboat and especially of life inside a rugged, isolated offshore lighthouse. The 1970s Humboldt State University footage shows its age a bit, but overall the quality is still good. This is a remarkable video that will take you on a Coast Guard mission not to be missed by anyone.

Incidentally, today you can visit St. George Reef Lighthouse by helicopter. Check out the non-profit web site: [www.StGeorgeReefLighthouse.us](http://www.StGeorgeReefLighthouse.us).

### *Desperate Hours: The Epic Rescue of the Andrea Doria*

By Richard Goldstein

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001

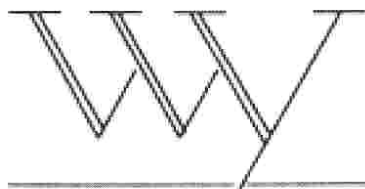
605 Third Avenue

New York NY 10158

Softcover, 294 pages, \$16.95

Imagine an impact between two seagoing vessels so powerful that when all was said and done passengers found themselves thrown through walls into different staterooms. Now imagine one so violent that one person found herself thrown out of her own ship and into the other. Once you can picture that, you can start to understand the *Andrea Doria-Stockholm* collision.

It happened fifty years ago this summer, one ship headed home to Europe, the other headed for America. They approached each other in the fog, a navigational



**Wick York**  
Consultant in the Restoration, Rehabilitation and  
Preservation of Historic and Older Buildings

(860) 535-1409  
[wYork@portone.com](mailto:wYork@portone.com)  
P.O. Box 334, Stonington, CT 06378

*Consulting Services for Research, Restoration Advice,  
National Register Nominations, and Preservation Grant Writing  
for Owners of Life-Saving and Early Coast Guard Stations*

