

Ship Report Transcript

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By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout.

Today we'll hear the final segment of a lengthy interview I did with author John Kopp. Former U.S. Coast Guard surgeon about a book he wrote called CG41332, which is the name of a U.S. Coast Guard utility boat that was involved in a terrible tragedy on the Columbia River Bar in 1977. U.S. Coast Guard trainees were working aboard the CG 41332 during a routine practice run out on the river on the bar. Things went terribly wrong, and the accident that ensued cost three young crewmen their lives. It was a little known incident until Kopp wrote his book. But what investigators learned from it changed the Coast Guard forever. The book came out in 2023. Today is part eight of that interview.

JR: Well, I think for people I mean, one of the things that I talk about occasionally on the ship report is that every time a Coast Guard crew goes out to rescue, say, you put yourself in the position of being a person in a boat who needs help, that they're people, too. They're human beings, too. They've had a tremendous amount of training and situational awareness and have a lot of skills. And certainly probably have a lot more innate courage than a lot of us. And they know how not to panic. But that situation must have been just way, way over the top for anybody to keep their wits about them. I don't know how they did it. I mean, it was just so demanding that I can't imagine that anyone should really expect to have expected anything other than just trying to live through it, you know?

JK: Well, that's that's a great point. And and some of the survivors who did successfully make it out still had like an extreme panic. I mean, it's in the accident report just in which was done several days after this happened. It's not that their memories have faded or change with time. I mean, it was it was remembered immediately after how terrifying that was. And so the fact that more of the crew of ten one was two were kind of ejected as the boat rolled. But the eight that were stuck inside that more of them didn't have that experience is kind of unbelievable. And to flash forward to a change in the Coast Guard, it's not exactly directly linked, but since 2012, the Coast Guard has had a trainer where they put you in a mockup of a small boat in a pool and you're strapped in and then it inverts and then you have to escape. And they do this sort of crawl, walk, run training to prepare you for, you know, the basic principles of egress and whatnot. But that type of training didn't exist at that time. And yet, you know, all the branches of the service who have implemented this type of escape training, they've looked at the survivability. You know, when crews are trained this way and it's a huge it's a huge benefit, it shows people how to be calm under stress. It shows and technically what they need to do. And so today that exists as well and not not directly linked to this accident. But I do think the consciousness of the Coast Guard was sort of warming to that idea in the ensuing decades. And and now we have it. Well, don't they also do that with it when they're training the helicopter crews, they flipbook a mock mockup of a helicopter inside of a helicopter upside down in the pool. And you have to get out. Well, if you if you swim at the Astoria pool or any of these communities where there's a Coast Guard air station, you know once a month or whatever it is, the aviators come in periodically, have to do their they call them wet drills and they will, you know, get in the pool and flip the thing and get out. And, yeah, they take it seriously.

JR: That would be the end of me. I'd be like, Well, guess I'm going to go work in the office. Works for me. I mean, but so I just am so impressed. Overall with, you know, since this is all about tragedy, I just want to say some good, really good things about how, how incredibly - the presence of mind - I

remember interviewing a rescue swimmer who and then I interviewed the person who he rescued. And so this guy is in the middle of the North Pacific. He had to jump off his sailboat, is flailing around in 30 foot seas. A rescue swimmer just dropped into the middle of this mess and swims up to him and says, hi, my name's Tom. What's your name? I mean, because he wanted to assess the guy's mental state. But still in the middle of all that, like swimming in a washing machine, he went up to that guy like he was his neighbor or something, you know, say, Hi, my name's Tom. What's yours? And I thought, wow. I mean, so I have so much respect for the Coast Guard. I mean, tragedies do happen, you know, And this is certainly just your book to explain so clearly the harrowing nature of it and the good that came out of it. And I think that's that's a really good thing. But but the Coast Guard, you know, in my book, they're absolutely amazing. I mean, and we're so lucky to have them.

JK: Just to mention maybe two more things if anybody's interested. There may be more book events and things in the future, and there's some content I posted or whatever. The books, Facebook page is just facebook.com slash CG41332. So if you're, if you forget what the date was that this is going to happen, it'll be on there.

And the second thing, just if anyone's interested in checking the book out, there's a bunch of local vendors that have been really good supporters of my work in the Columbia Pacific region, as well as other parts of Washington, Oregon, and the Great Lakes and the East Coast, too. But I just want to mention them. If you want to support them, go ahead. And there's some libraries that also have it, too. So if you're in Ilwaco, you can get the book at Time Enough Books. The Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum, the North Head Lighthouse, and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center Gift Shops, and the Timberland Regional Library, which is also in Ocean Park and elsewhere in Washington in Naselle the Appelo Archives has it - in Astoria, the Columbia River Maritime Museum, Godfathers Books and Espresso, the Clatsop County Historical Society, they all have it. The library doesn't have it in Astoria, but I bet if a couple of patrons ask them, they will. They will get it for you. And I would love to see it circulated that way. Warrenton, The Fort Stevens Visitor Center has it. And then in Cannon Beach. The Cannon Beach Historical History Center Museum has it as well as other places that you can see on on Facebook or on Amazon. And I want to give a huge shout out to those all those booksellers, because they've really supported me and supported this story and the preservation of Coast Guard history.”

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