The United States Coast Guard Receiving Center on Cold Spring Inlet in Cape May, N. J., was officially commissioned at its present site on May 31, 1948, after moving all east coast recruit training facilities of the Coast Guard from Mayport, Fla.

Notwithstanding this, the history of the approximate 500-acre training center can be traced back to the American Revolution, when the area was an island sitting in Cape Sound, used by the Continental Navy as a harbor. During the War of 1812 . . . the British also frequented the area, coming ashore for fresh water and supplies from nearby farms. So exquisite were the refuge facilities here . . . pirates made their abodes and lairs in the surrounding area. Piracy legends and tales are recorded in history . . . and even to this day, recounts of their buried hoards are heard.

On April 14, 1917, the United States Navy took over Sewell's Point converting it into a training base, and calling it "Camp Wissahickon," in honor of a dispossessed recreation club. United States' Lifesaving Service surf stations . . . which dotted the eastern seaboard, merged with the U. S. Lighthouse Service, which maintained the constant navigational aid vigil, in 1915 to form the "United States Coast Guard," so the presence of the Coast Guard, although at that time as separate organizations, stretches as far back as late colonial times. Consequently, when the Navy apportioned this tract of land, they operated collaterally with the Coast Guard.

All amusement buildings were utilized, and temporary ones constructed, lending a paradoxical air of sallacy between the bland military structures and the maze of odd-shaped buildings. On July 4, 1918, a holocaustal fire razed all of the old buildings . . . and the Navy set about a reconstruction program featuring the standard military buildings.

With the culmination of World War I in 1918, the Navy ended most of its major defense facets here in Cape May, and adopted construction "en masse" of "lighter-than-air" craft. This project was soon abandoned, as dirigibles lost their primary usefulness . . . and most of the austere structures, some, such as hangars rising as high as 130 feet into the air, were demolished.

In 1924, the Coast Guard established conventional air facilities here, with planes used primarily in coastal patrols and in support of the U. S. Department of Customs.

The land was used in this capacity until February of 1941, when more acreage was dredged and a larger air strip constructed. It then served as a training base for future Navy aircraft carrier pilots . . . because of its unique approach to the field over the water. During this time, the Coast Guard also maintained an anti-submarine base here. In 1944, the Navy again relinquished the base, and a handful of Coast Guardsmen remained . . . primarily for use as mechanics for surrounding Coast Guard vessels, as well as the routine coastal patrols.

Today, the Coast Guard uses this land as one of two recruit training centers . . . entrusted with the grave program of converting raw recruits into trained and qualified Coast Guardsmen. The Cape May center trains men from the east coast up to the Rocky Mountains, while the Center in Alameda, Calif., takes men west of the Rockies, west coast, Alaska and Hawaii.

The curriculum, spanning a 12-week training period, embraces military customs and courtesies, fundamentals of the Coast Guard, Coast Guard history, marksmanship, as well as seamanship and small boat handling, with swimming, water safety and navigation to complete the transition.

Men reporting in are placed in "companies" under the direction of a "company commander." Under the direction of this man, and any of his assistants, the company is paced through their training phases until graduation and transfer to the field.

In addition to the professional aspects actively pursued, extra-curricular activities, such as intra-mural sports, a band, Protestant and Catholic chaits, top movies, an Exchange and canteen, plus a host of other diversions, offer the recruit a break from routine.

Men usually report in on a Wednesday, and the rest of that week is utilized in getting their initial issue of uniforms and other pertinent equipment. Indoctrination as to Training Center rules and regulations takes place, in addition to the proverbial "haircut."

The following Monday, training begins in earnest, as the recruits start attending regular classes in all aspects of Coast Guard operations. During the first eight weeks, no liberty (time OFF the Center) is granted, but then, perhaps no one would really WANT to leave with their heads shorn!! At the end of this eight-week period, liberty is granted, and the recruits stream into Cape May or perhaps nearby Wildwood, N. J.

The rest of the time is taken up with various training aids, such as instruction movies, simulated boat drills, navigation equipment, all directed toward equipping the man for his eventual place in the Coast Guard.

Some 300 permanently assigned personnel are consigned with this conversion program, in nearly every capacity imaginable. In addition to the company commanders, men in classification and interviewing sections assist the recruit in finding his real talents, for his benefit and the Service. Men in the vital Personnel Division assist him in choosing his first duty station, insofar as the exigencies of the Service will permit. Two Navy chaplains on board are continuously available for consultation and guidance, and of course, the ever-vigilant, Medical Department for anything from various aches and pains to surgery.

Upon successful completion of recruit training, men are transferred to Coast Guard field units, or, if they have qualified, may be assigned to a petty officers' school at the Coast Guard Training Station in Groton, Conn. These schools train men in job specialties pertinent to Coast Guard operations.

Completion of recruit training need not be the finish of schooling, for, in addition to the Training Station's 12 various schools, certain Navy and civilian schools are available for advanced training. Also, men may apply for an officer's commission by either entering the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., a four-year college course leading to a Bachelor of Science degree and a commission as Ensign, in the U. S. Coast Guard. For specially qualified college graduates and enlisted men presently in the Coast Guard meeting the stringent requirements, the 16-week course, Officers' Candidate School, located in Yorktown, Va., proffers officer indoctrination, leading to a commission in the regular Coast Guard Reserve.

The United States Coast Guard is the country's oldest continuous sea-going armed force . . . having been founded on August 4, 1790. A far cry from the first "fleet" of ten two and three-masted cutters, it now has approximately 350 cutters of various lengths, designs and purposes, and over 1,500 shore units all over the world.