

Stretching some 362 miles from Astoria to the California border and known for its cliffs and rocky shores, the Oregon coast literally bears the brunt of the Pacific Ocean. Arguably the best testimony to the ocean's sheer power and potential to destruct is Cape Disappointment. This area has as one of the most treacherous river bars in the world and because of the large number of shipwrecks near the river entrance it is often called 'The Graveyard of the Pacific', with over 1500 ships lost in this area. During winter storms, wind-driven ocean swells often reach a height of 20-30 ft at the entrance of the bar. To its south is Cape Blanco, one of the windiest places on Earth with gusts of 125 miles per hour (200 km/h) or more during severe winter storms. Patrolling these

tempestuous seas and the waterways of the Pacific Northwest is the task of United States Coast Guard District 13, headquartered in Seattle, Washington. Currently commanded by Rear Admiral John P Currier, it is one of nine in the USA, with responsibility for two group/air stations and one air facility within the State of Oregon, plus another in Port Angeles, Washington.



Oregon Defenders

Part 2: US Coast Guard

HH-60J and HH-65C helicopters

GROUP/AIR STATION ASTORIA

The oldest of District 13's Group/Air Stations is located at Astoria, a coastal city near the mouth of the Columbia River that was named after the American investor (and first millionaire) John Jacob Astor. Centered strategically at the mouth of the Columbia River, Coast Guard Sector Astoria guards one of the most beautiful but also one of the deadliest stretches of coast in the United States. Its area of responsibility stretches from Cape Kiwanda in the south to Queets River on the Washington coast, and also includes the Columbia River east to Longview, Washington.

Back in World War II, Naval Air Station Astoria was home to a combat aircrew refresher training unit, naval radio station, sub-issuing office and a naval training school but shortly after the war ended, the station was declared surplus by the Navy and returned to the City of Astoria. It was the Coast Guard that brought military activity back to Astoria, although it did not make use of the airport, initially. Instead, it established its Group/Air Station at Tongue Point Naval Station on 14 August 1964. With a crew of 22 officers and 104 enlisted men, it operated two single-engine Sikorsky HH-52A Seaguards from that location and only during periods of inclement weather did the helicopters stage from the Port

of Astoria Airport. This changed when the air station was moved to the airport on 25 February 1966.

The HH-52A helicopters were replaced with three larger twin-engine HH-3F Pelicans in March 1973 and two HU-25A Guardian aircraft were assigned in October 1983 to enhance the law enforcement effort, as well as contribute to Search and Rescue (SAR) and logistical missions. The larger helicopters and the two Falcon jets obviously required a larger facility and a \$4.8 million construction and modification project began in 1982, with completion in August 1984. This resulted in a two-fold expansion of the hangar building. In addition, the air station inaugurated a new medical building and swimmer shop building. Ultimately, the HH-3F Pelicans were replaced with three HH-65 Dolphins in September 1987 while a third HU-25A Falcon joined the fleet in June 1988. Subsequently, on 28 May 1995, the HU-25As and HH-65s were replaced by three Sikorsky HH-60J Medium Range Recovery (MRR) helicopters.

Air Station Astoria at its current airport location not only houses the air component and its three HH-60J Jayhawks, but the sector's headquarters as well. As a consequence, this station is a so-called Group/Air Station whereby the current commander, Capt. Peter Troedsson, is



responsible for all Coast Guard assets, air and nautical, in the sector. These include the aids-to-navigation comprising some nine lighthouses and over 600 beacons that include day-lights, fog signals and floating buoys. As many of these aids are inaccessible by boat or vehicle, the Jayhawks frequently are required to get personnel and equipment to them.

Equally essential are the three lifeboat stations that maintain a surface SAR presence on the northern Oregon and southern Washington coasts. They use a variety of vessels for their missions, including 25-ft (7.6 m) response boats for harbour and shallow water operations and 47-ft (14.3-m) motor lifeboats for heavy weather and surf conditions.

Coast Guard Station Grays Harbor and its 48-person crew are located in the middle of the town of Westport, Washington, some 80 miles