

Crime Service

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Lifeguard Program Has Made Beaches Safe For Public Use

By Fred McPherson III

Nearly 30 years ago on a busy Easter Sunday a series of accidents on the Santa Cruz beaches prompted Amos H. Roff, then city commissioner of public health and safety, to set up a lifeguard program.

Since the late 1920's Warren (Skip) Littlefield had been the only lifeguard at the Santa Cruz beaches. He was employed by the Seaside company and used to keep a bicycle parked in front of the plunge door.

One of the nation's top swimmers at the time, Littlefield would ride up and down the beaches on his bicycle watching for swimmers who were in trouble.

In 1934, the city found it necessary to hire three lifeguards for the local beaches.

Under the direction of recently-hired James "Kelly" Bryan, the city today has nine lifeguards ready for duty.

"We normally use between five and eight guards each day, depending on the water and crowd conditions," says Carl Bengston, city park and recreation director.

Bryan, a retired air force lieutenant colonel, took his rescue test from Fred Mills of Santa Cruz back in 1928. Since that time he has conducted physical education programs for the air force and Red Cross.

"Our job here is to organize a water safety program so that swimmers can have fun with the greatest amount of safety and protection," Bryan says.

Concerning the boundaries for

Unless a diver judges the tide just right it is more than likely that he will hit bottom. There has been several serious injuries to divers in this area.

Jumping off the railroad trestle is not allowed, but "we get them every day," says Bryan. Sometimes the water is only two or three feet deep below the trestle.

The wharf is another place where diving is prohibited because there is danger of hitting a passing boat or getting tangled in fishing lines, says Bryan.

A standardized test has been set up to qualify men for guard duty.

The test consists of a distance swim of 1000 yards which must be completed in less than 25 minutes. The present nine guards average about 16 minutes. Ken strong has turned in the fastest time, 12 minutes and 22 seconds.

Guards must know two types of rescues. One involving a victim and a surfboard and another with a victim and an innertube.

The third phase is to test the guard's endurance. It includes a 100-yard sprint, a 200-yard swim, and another 100-yard run.

Bryan has set up a dozen drills to keep his guards ready for emergency. One of the races is run every morning before the guards go on duty.

"I put the element of competition into the program to keep the morale and enthusiasm of the guards up," relates Bryan.

This summer's lifeguard staff includes: Bob Biddle, Jim Albrecht, Bob Crompton, John D'Anna, Roger Hansen, Don Biexoto, Dick Scotter, Ed Stark,



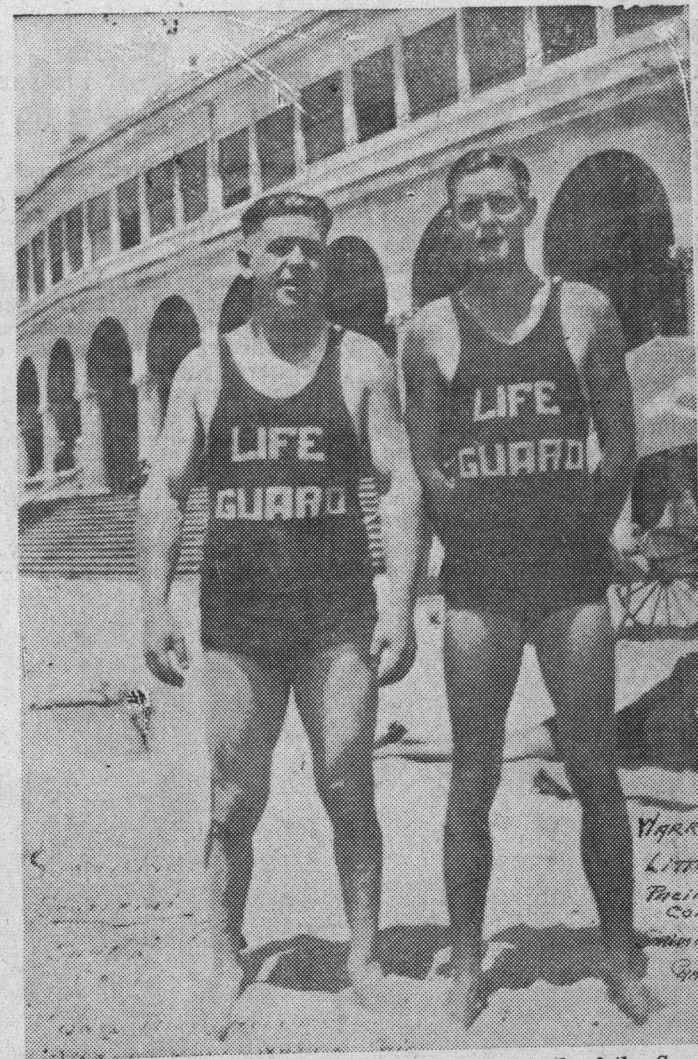
where they could not ordinarily swim without assistance. A wave could knock an innertube away from a child and a dangerous situation could develop.

Oddly enough, it is not until the late afternoon when the mouth of the river gets heavily populated. This is when the tide is up and the waves are big.

The lifeguard communications

Lifeguard Dick Scotter carries drowning victim guard, (Bob Biddle) out of surf to prepare him for artificial respiration. Guards must know cor-

rect manner of carrying victim. Often drowning victim's swallow their tongue; this must be determined immediately by the guard before the actual artificial respiration is administered.



It was thought necessary to have two guards on duty for the huge July 4 crowd in 1928. Skip Littlefield, right, and the late Dido "Submarine" Scettrini covered the area from Cowell's

beach to the mouth of the San Lorenzo river on Fourth of July. They also were responsible for the Plunge. It wasn't until 1934 that the city hired three full-time life guards for the local beaches.

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"Our job here is to organize a water safety program so that swimmers can have fun with the greatest amount of safety and protection," Bryan says.

Concerning the boundaries for swimmers and boats, lifeguards are governed primarily by state laws and the city recreation department.

Boats are not allowed inside the buoys between the mouth of the San Lorenzo river and the point at the far end of Cowell's beach. This area is for swimmers only. Surfers must stay outside of this boundary also, according to Bryan.

Bryan says many situations are left up to the guard on duty as to how safe an area is for swimming. The changing tides, size of crowds, and undertow areas all have to be kept in mind by the guards.

About 90 per cent of our problems arise at the river mouth," says Bryan. The hole at the mouth of the river is a very dangerous area. At times a guard is stationed at the point with a megaphone to keep swimmers away, according to Bryan.

People who dive off the point at the river mouth add to the problems of the city lifeguards.

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The fire department takes the guards for training in artificial respiration. "We are very fortunate to have this service," says Bryan.

A daily record is kept of the number of rescues and first aid calls made by each of the guards.

"When we get the boat owners, surfers and skin divers on our side we can pay full attention to our primary job," says Bryan.

"Surfers and skin divers have been very co-operative," he added.

"We would like parents to watch their children closely and not let them wander out of sight." Parents can be helpful if they watch for warning signs that are put up by lifeguards (usually in the rivermouth area) in times of danger, the guard coordinator said.

The former physical education teacher also warned that parents shouldn't give children anything to keep them afloat in waters

swim without a life preserver. "I could knock an innertube away from a child and a dangerous situation could develop.

Oddly enough, it is not until the late afternoon when the mouth of the river gets heavily populated. This is when the tide is up and the waves are big.

The lifeguard communications system has developed from the days of Littlefield and his bicycle to the present "hotline" telephone setup from the six guard towers to the headquarters on the wharf and to the downtown office.

Today when a guard goes out for a rescue he lifts the phone to let the nearest guards know. This puts the other guards on the alert to cover for the guard who is occupied.

Some rescues call for four or five guards. "These are the times when the "hotline" phone will enable us to act much faster," Bryan says.

The lifeguard system includes six guard towers, two roving guards, and a jeep equipped with a power speaker.

The guards come on duty at 10 a.m. and usually go off duty at 6 p.m., sometimes later. At the end of the day a guard tours the beach in the jeep to let late swimmers know that the guards are going off duty.

(Bob Biddle) out of surf to prepare him for artificial respiration. Guards must know cor-

low their tongue, this must be determined immediately by the guard before the actual artificial respiration is administered.



Guard John D'Anna demonstrates correct way to rescue a tired swimmer in deep water. Guard first makes sure victim has hold on board, then grabs swimmer by leg and swings him him onto board so he is facing the nose. This way the victim is easier to paddle to safety. The guards handle the boards with ease during the fast action. D'Anna is a Cabrillo college swimming instructor and is on the swim team.



In the days when Skip Littlefield patrolled the beaches by himself in this row boat or his bicycle he was kept mighty busy. There hasn't been a drowning accident since 1950 on the Santa Cruz beaches that are

guarded, according to Littlefield. "This is a pretty safe area to swim in," he says. Littlefield served as supervisory life guard for 29 years, until 1961 when the city park and recreation department took over the job from the police department.

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