

1945 September 3-9

Semper Paratus in La Crosse

Semper Paratus, "Always Ready," is the motto of the [United States Coast Guard](#).¹ Even though La Crosse County does not have a traditional coast in the sense of being on the ocean, inland waterways are also under the purview of the Coast Guard. La Crosse had a temporary Coast Guard reserve unit during World War II that carried out duties at home while regular Coast Guard personnel were sailing in supply and troop transport convoys overseas and landing soldiers and supplies on beachheads.²

La Crosse Coast Guard Unit Gets Security Shield Of Honor

For successful completion of their duties throughout the war, the La Crosse temporary coast guard reserve unit under the command of Ensign Russell E. Aldrich, of 2021 Madison street, has been awarded the security shield of honor.

With the end of the war, all members of the temporary reserve will be disenrolled within the next 30 days, according to Commodore Beckwith Jordan, St. Louis ninth naval district coast guard officer.

The temporary reserve, organized in October, 1942, was composed of men and women for all walks of life who volunteered to devote some of their own time, without pay, to duty with the coast guard. The volunteers were issued uniforms, and after enrollment were required to spend 12 hours each week on duty assigned them by the Captain of the Port. Their ranks included bankers, industrialists, shipyard and defense plant workers, grocery clerks, newsmen, city officials and housewives, all of whom were either in essential jobs, in 4-F classifications, or exempt from regular military service because of age or dependency. These part time coast guardsmen, in uniform only when on duty, made it possible to release thousands of regular coast guardsmen for active duty on combat vessels and in overseas ports.

The temporary reserve took over such important tasks as guarding docks and harbor areas and coastlines from fire and sabotage, and on the east and west coasts and the Gulf of Mexico even did anti-submarine patrol work—especially off the Florida coast, where nearly 50

temporary reservists gave their lives in the desperate war against the marauding U-boats. Picket boats, charter boats, and other small craft, donated for the most part by members of the coast guard auxiliary, were used for harbor patrol and security patrol work. Along the mid-western waterways, regular river patrols were operated by the temporary reserve, and war ships, built at inland shipyards and ferried down to tidewater by coast guard river pilots, were escorted past towns and cities by auxiliary boats manned by temporary reservists. The temporary reservists also did guard duty around warehouses and defense plants.

In making the announcement regarding the immediate disenrollment of the temporary reserve, Commodore Jordan made specific mention of the fine job of flood relief and evacuation of flood refugees done by the temporary reserve of the St. Louis district during the several critical floods on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and their tributaries in the past three years. Several men in the district have been cited for lifesaving.

In the St. Louis district the temporary reserve at present numbers some 2,043 men and women, and includes units in St. Louis, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, Louisville, and many other cities along the inland waterways, the unit at Pittsburgh being the largest.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 September 9, page 11)

The Coast Guard Reserve was authorized by Congress on February 19, 1941. It included Regular Reservists and Temporary Reservists. Those in the Temporary Reserve, such as the La Crosse unit, were unpaid volunteers. During World War II, there were 125,000 men and women in the Temporary Reserve.³

In La Crosse, the Coast Guard Reserve unit was organized and led by **Russell E. Aldrich**.⁴

Russell Everett Aldrich was born July 16, 1908, at West Salem, Wisconsin.⁵ His parents were Howard and Mary (Moran) Aldrich.⁶ Russell Aldrich graduated from Onalaska High School, and then he attended La Crosse State Teachers College⁷ starting in 1928 before leaving a couple of years later to enter the labor force.⁸

Aldrich began his career in business in 1936 when he opened the Aldrich Standard Service station at 10th and Main streets in La Crosse.⁹



(La Crosse Tribune, 1938 December 4, page 5)



Detail from a 1939 complimentary calendar
(eBay)

Russell Aldrich married Dena Rauk on August 14, 1938, in Taylor, Wisconsin. Dena Rauk had been a teacher in the [Webster Elementary School](#) in La Crosse for the three years prior to their marriage. They made their home at 2021 Madison Street in La Crosse.¹⁰

Dena's brother, Karl Rauk, was a graduate of the [West Point Military Academy](#) and a pilot with the Army Air Force during World War II.¹¹

During World War II, Russell Aldrich found another way to serve. Before the war, he had an interest in boating. In 1937, Aldrich was supposedly the first person in La Crosse to own a sailboat.¹² It was fitting for him to become the leader of the local Coast Guard Reserve.

The La Crosse unit was part of the St. Louis Ninth Naval District. The unit consisted of business and professional men who volunteered to be part-time reservists in the Coast Guard. As more regular Coast Guard men were needed on the battlefield, the responsibilities of the Temporary Reserve increased. By the fall of 1943, a "uniform system of class instruction and training" was being developed.¹³

As the war demanded even more manpower, the Coast Guard Reserve started recruiting women in early 1944. The [SPARS](#) was open to women over the age of 18 who were willing to volunteer at least 12 hours per week to doing office work such as record keeping. After two classes per week for five weeks, the women would be issued a uniform and be attached to a Temporary Reserve unit.¹⁴

The first official inspection of the La Crosse unit by regular Coast Guard officers was in September 1944 at the YMCA gymnasium. Captain Roger C. Heimer from the St. Louis district office awarded certificates to all members and also presented certificates of merit to unit commander Ensign Russell Aldrich and Chief Petty Officer Frank H. Griffin for 600 hours or more of service. Heimer and Commander J. H. Kimberly of Washington D. C., assistant director of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Temporary Reserve, performed the inspection.¹⁵



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 January 27, page 8)

Some of the responsibilities taken over by the Temporary Reserve revolved around safety. Promoting safe boating by civilians was one of them.¹⁶ Organizing search parties for missing persons was another one.¹⁷ When the Black and Mississippi Rivers flooded in early 1945, the Coast Guard Reserve was available to help with evacuations.¹⁸

The Coast Guard Reserve also participated in parades for Memorial Day and Flag Day.¹⁹



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 31, page 20)

Now in September 1945, with the war over, the temporary Coast Guard Reserves were being disbanded.²⁰

But it was just the beginning of Russell Aldrich's business and civic service to the community.

Aldrich continued operating the Standard Oil service station at 10th and Main streets until he sold it in 1954. That is when he became part-owner and manager of Culligan Soft Water Service.²¹ In 1963, Aldrich was elected as a director of the Water Conditioning Association International.²² He retired from Culligan in 1974.²³

In 1957, Aldrich was elected to the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors. He was re-elected two more times.²⁴

He was involved in a long list of civic, fraternal, religious, social, and recreational organizations, including the Kiwanis Club (president and district governor), Friends of the La Crosse Public Library (president), La

Crosse County Historical Society, Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, Red Cross, Boy Scouts, YMCA, the Elks Club, La Crosse Ski Club, La Crosse Country Club, First Congregational Church, and the Masons.

Aldrich was also involved in fundraising campaigns such as the March of Dimes and the United Fund (chairman).²⁵ His work raising funds for the YMCA earned him the right to be "one of two people who turned the first shovelful of dirt before construction of the YMCA building at West Avenue and Main Street."²⁶

Boating, especially sailing, was his main recreational passion. Aldrich was a charter member and past commodore of the La Crosse Yacht Club. Along with Tom Markos, he founded the La Crosse Sailing Club in 1948. Besides sailing on Lake Onalaska, Aldrich frequently sailed in Lake Michigan and the Caribbean.²⁷

Even though he did not finish college, Aldrich was a lifelong learner. After he retired in 1974, he audited classes (attended but was not tested or graded) at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with several of his friends.²⁸ Over the course of 39 semesters, Aldrich earned 145 credits. He was honored for that achievement at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Maurice O. Graff Distinguished Alumni Awards ceremony in May 2000.²⁹

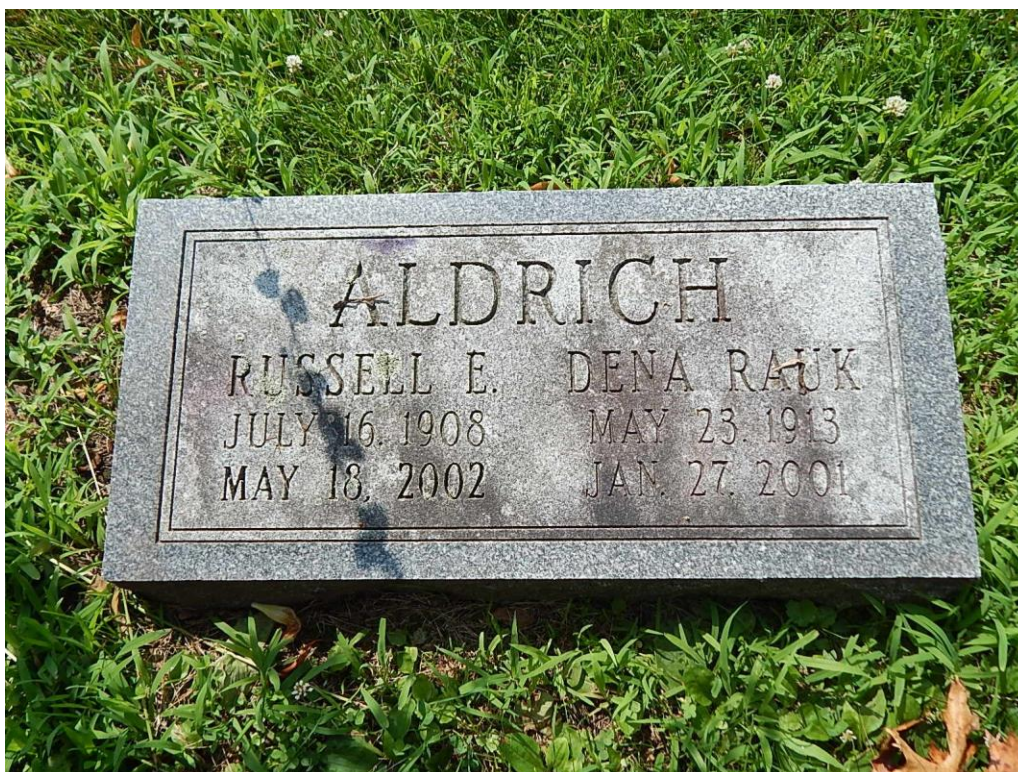
Aldrich and his wife left a legacy of two scholarship funds at UW-La Crosse. One is the Dena Rauk and Russell E. Aldrich Scholarship Fund in Special Education.³⁰ The other is in memory of their daughter, Tamzin Aldrich Esposito.³¹ Esposito died in October 1985 at the age of 44 and is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.³²

Dena Aldrich died on January 27, 2001. Russell lived just a little more than a year after his wife passed away. Russell Aldrich died on May 18, 2002, at the Bethany Riverside Nursing Home. He was 93 years old. The Bethany Riverside staff wrote: "We will miss Russell's bright smile and his charm. He was a true gentleman. He loved to sit and talk with others. We were in awe of his vocabulary; he continued to educate us with his words. Russell was a special man who is going to be missed . . ."³³



Aldrich

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 26, page C1)



(Find a Grave.com)

A simple gravestone in Oak Grove Cemetery marks the final resting place for a man who was always ready to do whatever it took to make his community a safer and better place to live.

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Sources & Notes:

¹ "Semper Paratus (Always Ready)," *United States Coast Guard Historian's Office*, accessed 2020 September 12, <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/History-Heritage-Traditions/Semper-Paratus/#:~:text=Why%20is%20%22Semper%20Paratus%22%20the%20Coast%20Guard's%20official%20motto%3F>

² "The Coast Guard During World War II," *National Park Service*, accessed 2020 September 12, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/wapa/extContent/wapa/coast_guard/cg1.htm#:~:text=The%20Coast%20Guard's%20participation%20in,75%20frigates%2C%20and%2031%20transports. See also: William H. Thiesen, "The Coast Guard's World War II Crucible," *U.S. Naval Institute*, October 2016, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2016/october/coast-guards-world-war-ii-crucible>.

³ "Coast Guard Reserve History," *United States Coast Guard Reserve*, accessed 2020 September 12, <https://www.reserve.uscg.mil/about/history/#:~:text=history&text=The%20Coast%20Guard%20Reserve%20was,Act%20of%20February%2019%2C%201941.&text=More%20than%2092%25%20of%20the,serving%20in%20the%20Temporary%20Reserve>.

⁴ "Russell E. Aldrich," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2002 May 19, page C7.

⁵ The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System*, 147; Box: 6; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 September 12).

⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

⁷ "Supervisor," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1957 March 3, page 7.

⁸ Randy Erickson, "Sailing club founder dies at 93," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2002 May 26, page C1.
⁹ Erickson.

¹⁰ "Dena G. Rauk And Russell Aldrich Wed," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1938 August 19, page 8.

¹¹ "Locals," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 June 8, page 8. See also: "Plane Trip," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1943 March 23, page 4.

¹² *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

¹³ "Aldrich Attends District Meeting," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1943 September 13, page 3.

¹⁴ "Women Recruits For Unit Sought," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 March 2, page 15.

¹⁵ "Coast Guard Has Inspection," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 September 9, page 6.

¹⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 September 9.

¹⁷ "From Files Of The La Crosse Tribune," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1953 November 11, page 6. This article refers to an unsuccessful search for an unidentified man reportedly shot while hunting near the mouth of the Root River in November 1943.

¹⁸ "River Passes 12-Foot Mark At La Crosse," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 19, page 1.

¹⁹ "Flag Day Event Attracts Crowd," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 15, page 10. See also: *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 31, page 20.

²⁰ "La Crosse Coast Guard Unit Gets Security Shield Of Honor," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 September 9, page 11.

²¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

²² "Aldrich Elected By National Group," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1963 August 23, page 3.

²³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

²⁴ Erickson.

²⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

²⁶ Erickson.

²⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

²⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.

²⁹ "Millston woman's love of learning almost enough to earn degree at UW-L," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2000 May 13, page A1.

³⁰ "Dean Rauk and Russell E. Aldrich Scholarship Fund in Special Education (SOE)," University of Wisconsin La Crosse Foundation, accessed 2020 September 12, <https://uwlax.academicworks.com/opportunities/21240>.

³¹ Erickson.

³² "Tamzin Ann Aldrich Esposito," Find A Grave, accessed 2020 September 12, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/124112950/tamzin-ann-esposito>.

³³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 2002 May 19.