

## **The Red Cross in the USA**

### **WATER SAFETY AND FIRST AID**

The year 1964 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the American National Red Cross water safety program. In that year, 232 persons were awarded the coveted Certificate of Merit for saving lives through skills learned in Red Cross courses. The certificate they won, which is signed by the President of the United States and the Chairman of the American Red Cross, may be granted to people who have had water safety or first aid training. Both programs share in the overall purpose of the American organization's Safety Services: the saving of lives through public education in accident prevention and through courses that teach people how to respond when accidents do happen in the home, at work, on the highway, in the water, and elsewhere. Thousands of heroes and heroines, many unrecognized, have used their training to avert tragedies throughout the United States over the past 50 years.

The idea of Red Cross was born when Henry Dunant and his volunteer helpers, the village women of Castiglione, gave first aid to the wounded soldiers left behind by the opposing armies at the battle of Solferino. Since the realization of Dunant's dream, with the establishment of the international Red Cross movement, most National Societies have stressed the teaching of first aid. Millions of people all over the world have been trained in Red Cross courses to know what to do when accidents occur. The American Red Cross officially organized its First Aid Service in 1910 and, shortly thereafter, added instruction in water safety to supplement standard first aid training.

The pioneering water safety efforts of the American Red Cross were spurred by Commodore Wilbert E. Longfellow, a man of great vision who started the nation's first classes in swimming and lifesaving. He strove all his life for what he aptly termed "the waterproofing of America". In 1914 he established the Red Cross Life Saving Corps, forerunner of the present-day water safety program, and began the crusade that was ultimately to bring water safety training to every part of the country. From the beginning, the program was enthusiastically received by the public and was supplemented by the work of many other organizations. The results of nationwide teamwork in water safety training have been heartening. During the past half century the annual drowning rate in the United States has dropped from 10.4 per 100,000 persons to 3.4 per 100,000. The reduction represents a remarkable achievement for a period that has also been marked by a hundred-fold increase in the popularity of water sports. However, as more and more people of all ages take up swimming and boating every year, the Red Cross recognizes that continued expansion of its water safety program is necessary.

Today, Safety Services staff members cooperate with a number of other groups engaged in safeguarding aquatic-minded Americans: the National Safety Council, the United States Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the United States Power Squadron, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts of America, the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, and many more.

Red Cross personnel work closely with manufacturers, engineers, and legislators who are responsible for building safety into water sports equipment and for incorporating it in waterways legislation. Increasingly, national safety leaders have been emphasizing the importance of special first aid and water safety programs for people with special needs. The Red Cross wholeheartedly supports these programs and provides instructors for many of them. Swimming instructors from chapters all over the country are taking part in the exciting venture "Operation Waterproof Fourth Grade", sponsored by the National Safety Council. This operation is designed to teach youngsters to swim at the earliest age at which they can learn in groups. It has had marked success and has recently been extended on an experimental basis to towns that have limited

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swimming facilities. In these places, Red Cross volunteers serving as instructors are using portable collapsible swimming pools supplied by the National Swimming Pool Association and set up temporarily at elementary schools. In one little town in Kentucky, fourth graders learned to swim in a pool crowded into one end of their school cafeteria.

The Red Cross also provides volunteers to serve as instructors for "Operation Westwide", initiated by the Bureau of Reclamation of the United States Department of the Interior to teach swimming and water safety to residents of formerly landlocked areas where new dams, reservoirs, and irrigation ditches have been built by the government. Some of these new facilities are used for aquatic sports. All of them are potentially dangerous for non-swimmers.

In addition to cooperating in many programs set up by other agencies, the American Red Cross offers its own special courses designed to meet special needs. Along with the thousands of regular swimming, diving, and lifesaving classes taught every year, the Red Cross gives classes in survival swimming for sportsmen and members of the armed forces and classes in swimming for the handicapped. It trains young boys and girls who want to become water safety aides before they are old enough to take senior life-saving courses. It organizes safety clinics for owners of home swimming pools and every year gives an increasing number of small craft safety courses for boating enthusiasts.

The expanding Swim and Stay Fit activities were planned for swimmers of all ages but seem to appeal particularly to older people, especially those who need regular exercise to help them overcome health problems. One holder of a Swim and Stay Fit certificate, which is issued for completing 50 miles of swimming in easy stages, is a nurse who some time ago was forced to give up her career because of the crippling effects of arthritis. At her doctor's suggestion, she learned to swim. Daily swimming helped her condition so much that she was eventually able to return to work. She still swims every morning when she comes off night duty.

The American Red Cross reaches the public with water safety and first aid ideas through broad utilization of all information

media. Materials of many kinds are supplied to national magazines, large and small newspapers, publishing houses, and radio and television stations. To reach the large audience of boat owners and users, the Red Cross makes its safety recommendations available for inclusion in articles in yachting and other sports magazines. It has recently published a series of small-craft books, which can be purchased by the public at nominal cost through local chapters. A Red Cross manual for parents has sold nearly 550,000 copies since its publication in 1957.

An especially noteworthy safety effort in which the American Red Cross has played an important role is the public education campaign to promote knowledge of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The mouth-to-mouth or mouth-to-nose method of artificial respiration can be used by people of all ages in all kinds of circumstances to save life in the critical first 4 minutes after accident victims stop breathing. In 1957, the American Red Cross recommended this technique for use with infants and children. In 1959, its use for adults was adopted. Recognizing the value of wide-spread knowledge of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, the organization teaches the method in both first aid and water safety courses and exploits every opportunity to publicize it.

Special films, television shows, and posters demonstrate the technique. It is illustrated in many Red Cross manuals and pamphlets. Books published by commercial firms often include material on the method and feature Red Cross instructions for the use of the method. It is even illustrated in simple sketches on cardboard cartons of milk sold in many places, especially in vacation areas where water sports abound. Newspapers across the nation have repeatedly run accounts of the actual use of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in emergencies.

During the past several years stories appearing in many states and in Canada have told of lives saved with the mouth-to-mouth method of resuscitation by persons who have learned the technique from seeing Red Cross demonstrations. More and more of the affidavits submitted each year along with recommendations for the award of the Certificate of Merit give substantiating evidence of how quickly and how easily mouth-to-mouth resuscitation can be employed, often in extraordinary circumstances. Here are a few

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examples from descriptions of events behind some of the 1964 awards:

On the Florida coast, William K. went to the rescue of a swimmer floundering in heavy surf. The victim lost consciousness while being towed ashore. William K., despite his own growing exhaustion, was able to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in high waves at a considerable distance from the beach and to keep the man breathing while pulling him close enough to shore for another swimmer to help. In Wisconsin, Bernard F. gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on the top of an electric pole to a fellow worker who had been severely burned and shocked.

In California, a girl going on 12, saved her 8-year-old brother's life with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when he got sick and stopped breathing.

Pages could be filled with additional examples of effective assistance given in emergencies of all kinds by ordinary men and women, old and young, who have been trained to know what to do for an accident victim until medical help arrives. Schools, churches, businesses, and industry stress the value of training to prevent accidents or to be ready to give aid quickly and properly when accidents do happen. Many groups call on the American Red Cross for help with their accident prevention and preparedness efforts. In addition to the regular Red Cross water safety and first aid courses, a variety of specialized courses in first aid have been developed for particular categories of people who are likely to encounter emergencies during their leisure pursuits or on their jobs.

The 5,000 members of the National Ski Patrol System, whose headquarters is in Denver, Colorado, are ready to assist victims of skiing and mountaineering accidents in winter sports centers throughout the country—thanks, in part, to the regular and refresher first aid courses set up for them by the Red Cross chapter in Denver. Truck and bus drivers trained and equipped by the Red Cross to give on-the-spot first aid in motor accidents are helping daily to combat the mounting death toll on America's crowded highways. In a new program, apprentices in the hazardous building trades are being taught how to avoid accidents themselves and how to give first aid to fellow workers if it is needed. Dozens

of other sports or occupational groups get similar specialized training.

The annual figures on water safety and first aid classes taught, certificates issued, and services provided to communities show at a glance how far the American Red Cross safety operations reach. Following is the 1963-64 chapter, statistically speaking, in the Safety Services story:

Water safety certificates issued totaled 2,451,500. Of these, 339,000 were in lifesaving, 2,091,300 in swimming, and in small craft handling. Volunteer instructors numbered 112,400. They spent 8,545,500 hours training persons who spent more than 82,000,000 hours receiving instruction—a total equivalent of 10,337 calendar years invested in learning how to enjoy swimming and boating safely.

Participants in the Swim and Stay Fit program earned 27,000 certificates logging 588,000 miles in pools across the country.

At 24 Red Cross national aquatic and small-craft schools for community water safety leaders, 3,000 volunteers acquired special training.

Certificates numbering 1,074,300 were issued to persons who completed first aid classes, bringing the grand total of certificates granted since the start of first aid training in 1910 to 25,808,000.

Qualified instructors numbering 82,000 gave 2,500,000 volunteer hours teaching persons who spent 15,000,000 hours learning first aid.

Twelve hundred chapters operated first aid stations, detachments, and mobile units providing first aid services. One chapter alone supplied 560 trained first aiders to work with a volunteer staff of 150 doctors and nurses at 155 public events. Of the 3,000,000 people attending these functions, 3,100 needed emergency treatment.

Highway first aid stations, detachments, and mobile units numbering 26,900 gave emergency service in accidents. At the 1,800 first aid stations along the highways, 5,500 trained volunteers were available to render assistance.

As an integrated part of the educational efforts of schools and colleges, youth organizations, business and industry, city, state, and federal government, the water safety and first aid work of the

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American Red Cross touches citizens of the United States at every level. The Red Cross safety program is “portable”. It can stay at home with a young mother, go out into a windstorm with a telephone company repairman, sail out of a marina, stand by on the sidelines at a school ball game, hurry to the scene of a wreck on an icy road, respond to a frantic call for help from a farm pond. Persons trained by the Red Cross in water safety and first aid can serve in any place at any time. Their continuing aim is simple and basic: to save a life whenever and wherever possible.

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At Quang Nam, ICRC relief for displaced persons being distributed by the Red Cross of the Republic of Vietnam.



At Danang, distribution of ICRC relief to displaced persons.

Danang civil hospital. Crutches being presented to the disabled by Mr. A. Modoux, ICRC delegate, accompanied by representatives of the Vietnamese Red Cross.

