

We've Been In The Water For A Long Time

A Brief History of Red Cross Aquatics

"Water is a good friend or a deadly enemy. After you have been properly introduced to it, keep on good terms with it. Don't slap it, try hugging it—an armful at a time!"

- Commodore Wilbert E. Longfellow

In February 1914, the Red Cross Life Saving Corps was formed with water safety instructor Commodore Wilbert E. Longfellow as the head of the program. The service was officially known as the Life Saving Corps of the American National Red Cross. Soon after, the first life saving station in Pablo Beach, Florida was established and was quickly followed by others.

The program grew, and Longfellow traveled around the country as the lone field representative teaching police officers, boy scouts and YMCA groups as well as visiting colleges and universities. As public demand for swimming and lifesaving instruction spread, the toll of lives lost through drowning receded.

By the time the country entered World War I, the groundwork for the program was in place and the Red Cross Lifesaving Corps moved into army camps and naval stations. The setting was different, but the challenge was the same—to teach fighting men to swim and men who were already good swimmers to save lives.

In 1922, the Red Cross added national aquatic schools for training and qualifying water safety and first aid instructors. Further developments by the onset of World War II included a new kind of swimming, called functional or combat swimming, for the protection and efficiency of the armed forces. Functional swimming was in full use throughout the country in the months following Pearl Harbor and was used extensively in the United States and overseas all through the conflict.

Swimming Through The Years

Water safety consciousness gradually became a part of American life as the program extended to hundreds of Red Cross chapters and every part of the nation. And today, the American Red Cross aquatics program continues to reach millions of Americans through its innovative water safety resources.



*The Red Cross
is still making a
big splash after
100 years.*

Learn about our Lifeguarding, Learn-to-Swim and water safety programs. Visit redcross.org.

Download the Red Cross Swim App and have water safety tips with you on-the-go. VISIT redcross.org/apps, TEXT 'SWIM' to 90999 or SEARCH 'Red Cross Swim' in the Apple App Store, Google Play or Amazon Marketplace.

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