



Richard Etheridge

(1842 – 1900)

Black Life Saver

Before there was the United States Coast Guard, there was the United States Lifesaving Service.

The Lifesaving Service was responsible for operating lifesaving stations in coastal regions and rescuing shipwreck victims.

In 1880, Richard Etheridge became the first African American to command a Life Saving Station when he was appointed keeper (head life saver) of the Pea Island Station on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Etheridge led an all-black crew and developed rigorous lifesaving drills to ensure his crew was able to tackle all lifesaving tasks. He was well-known as one of the most courageous and ingenious lifesavers in the service. Under him, Pea Island Station became one of the most efficient lifesaving stations in the country.

In 1996, the Coast Guard awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal posthumously to Etheridge and his Pea Island crew for their daring rescue of the crew of the E.S. Newman in 1896



Etheridge (L) and crew of Pea Island Station



Richard Etheridge was born into slavery in 1842. At the age of 21, he joined the Second North Carolina Colored Volunteers and served three years in the Union Army. He died in 1900 while still in service at the Pea Island Life-Saving Station.