

Emergency network

Rescue 21 radio system covers the coast

BY EDWARD STRATTON | THE DAILY ASTORIAN



On Dec. 29, 1997, 13-year-old Daniel Cornett radioed a mayday to the U.S. Coast Guard after the sailing vessel he was on with his father Michael, older brother Michael Paul and cousin Bobby Lee Hurd struck a jetty near the entrance to the Charleston harbor and started breaking up.

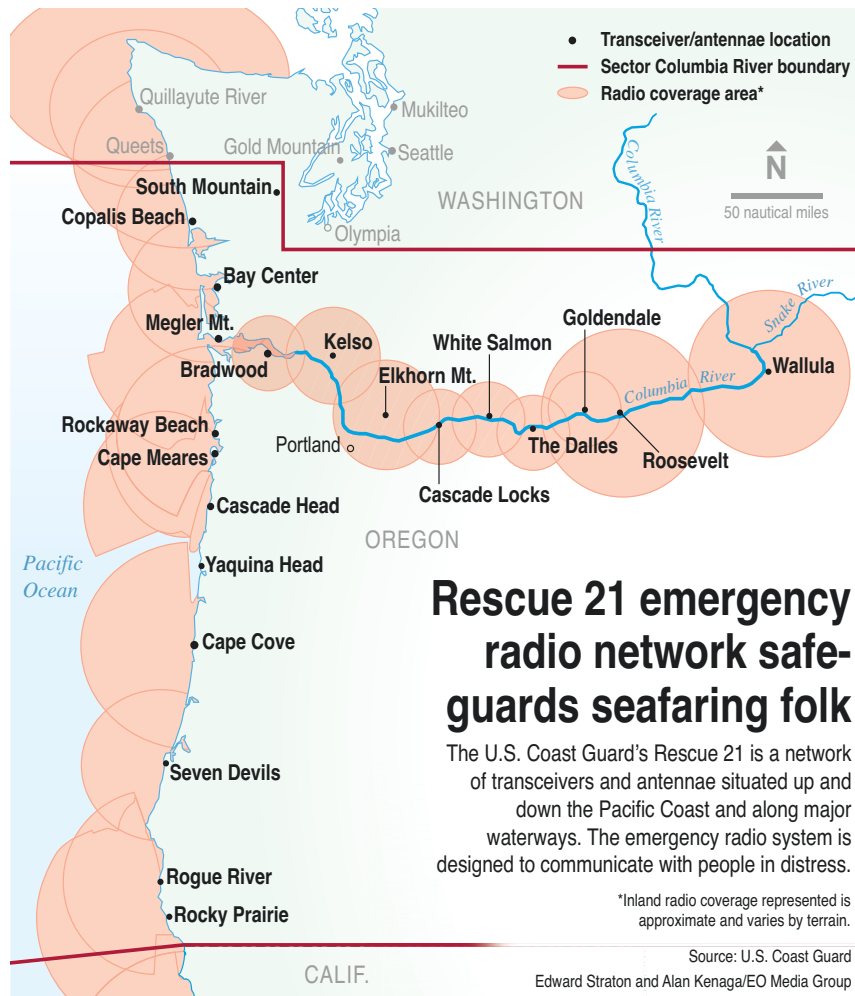
But a Coast Guard watch stander couldn't decipher the message, took it as a hoax and never started a search. The father, sons and cousin all drowned, less than 10 miles away from a Coast Guard station in South Carolina. The U.S. Treasury paid out \$21 million in damages to their family.

The incident sparked a nationwide review of Coast Guard rescue policies, validated the need for a new VHF-FM radio system and resulted in Rescue 21, an advanced communications system now blanketing the coasts of the U.S., along with the Columbia River and other inland waterways.

Automation

Each Rescue 21 station includes receivers guarding VHF channels 16 and 70. Channel 16 is used for international distress, safety and calling. Ships, the Coast Guard and most coastal stations keep watch on the station. Channel 70, a core part of the Global Maritime Distress Safety System, is used for predefined digital messages being sent to medium- high- and very high-frequency maritime radios.

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