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For over a century, Coast Guard Communicators have distinguished themselves in the service of their Nation and the maritime community by using a variety of communications systems to coordinate operations, provide timely weather and navigational information and respond to countless distress calls from around the world. The first Coast Guard communicators were known as Radiomen but earned the nickname Sparks because of the electrical nature of early wireless equipment. "Sparks" also became the term to describe the lightning bolts that became the emblem of the Radioman rating designator.

Originally enlisting operators with a First Class Telegraph License, issued by the Department of Commerce, it wasn't until late 1925 when a formal Radioman School was established at Coast Guard Base Fort Trumbull, in New London, Connecticut. Over the next half century, the school grew in size and scope, and was relocated several times, before arriving at its final location, in late 1971, at Coast Guard Training Center Petaluma California.

In 1994, the Coast Guard changed the name of the Radioman rating to "Telecommunications Specialist", in order to better reflect the job being performed by the communicators operating in the digital era. Although the rate had undergone a significant change, the traditional sparks remained the symbol of the Coast Guard Communicator for another decade.

Today Coast Guard Communicators face a new change, as the Telecommunications Specialist rating becomes incorporated into two new ratings, Information System Technician and Operations Specialist. Along with the passing of the TC rating, we are also witnessing the retirement of the long held insignia for the Coast Guard Communicator - the "sparks" rating designator.

On this historic day, we salute all those who have worn the Sparks and honor all those who have helped bring Coast Guard Communications into the 21st century.

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