

Captain Michael Augustine Healy

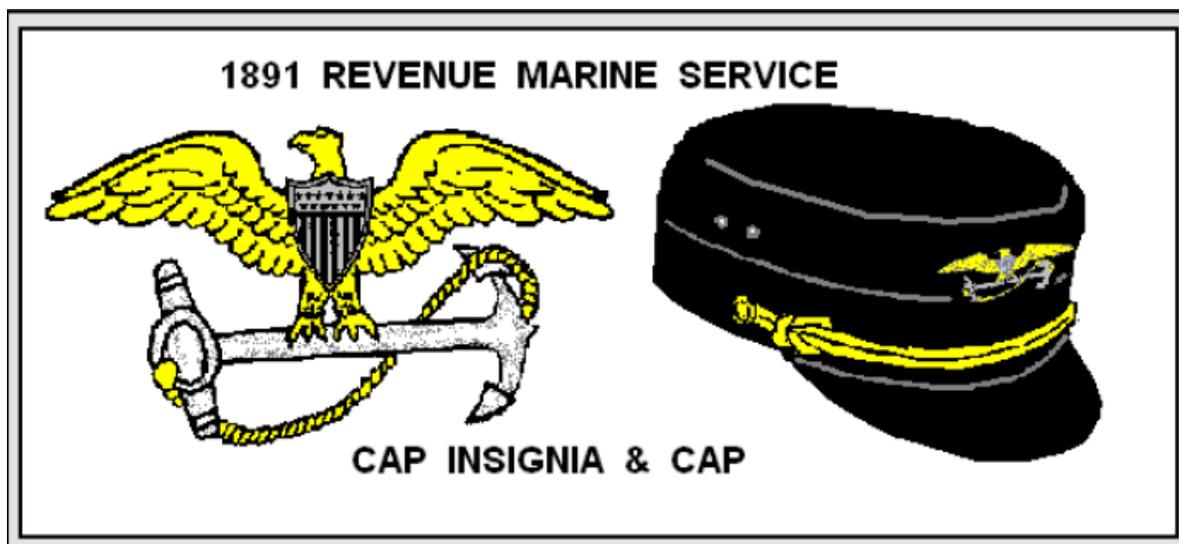
Captain Michael Augustine Healy was a career officer for the US Revenue Cutter Service who served as commanding officer of five ships and is a legend in Alaskan waters. Healy was born near Macon, Georgia in 1839 and was the fifth of ten children belonging to Michael M. Healy, a plantation owner, and his wife Mary Smith, a slave. Captain Healy was uninterested in academics and opted to work as a cabin boy onboard the American East Indian Clipper *Jumna* in 1854. In 1864, he applied for an assignment in the US Revenue Cutter Service and was accepted as a third lieutenant. He took command of the *Bear* in 1887. While at the helm he became known as “Hell-Roaring Mike,” he commanded Alaskan waters for more than two decades as: doctor, police and judge to Alaskan Natives, merchant marines and whalers. Healy died in 1904 in San Francisco and at the time of his death his African-American ancestry was largely unknown. Healy’s legacy remains over a century after his death, he is known as the first African-American to command a US government ship and in 1999 the USCGC Healy was commissioned in his honor.



Portrait of Captain Mike Healy taken on U.S.R.C BEAR ca. 1895

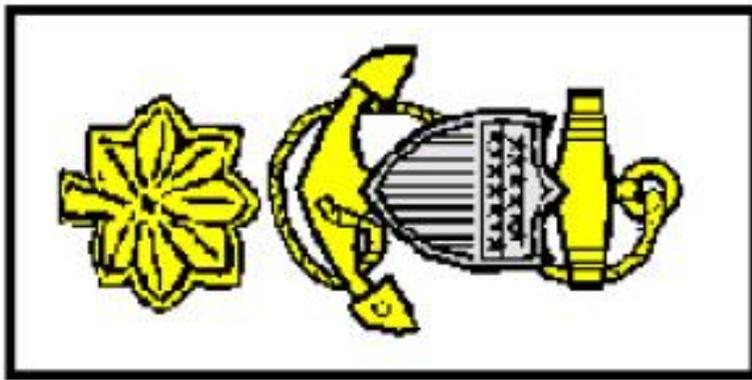
Captain Healy was most frequently photographed wearing a US Revenue Cutter Service service uniform. The 1891 regulation service uniform consisted of: a cap, service coat, waist coat, trousers, and boots. Each piece of the uniform was to conform to government standards and were to be purchased by the servicemen. For that reason, Healy was at times photographed wearing outdated pieces and devices. Healy and his men would have only been able to purchase their uniform in San Francisco and would have been considered a luxury item rather than a necessity while serving in Alaska.

An officers cap was to be made of dark navy cloth with a black patent leather visor. The 1891 cap device consists of a gold eagle perched on a fouled silver anchor.

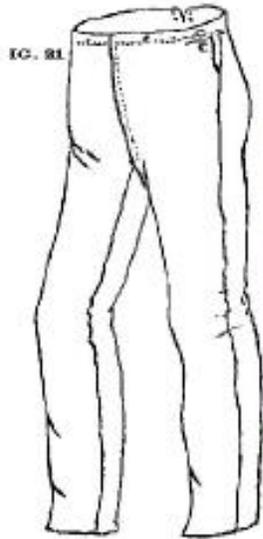


Healy was often photographed with his service coat open, revealing a waistcoat. He is also seen wearing a black necktie and a white cotton or linen shirt with a stiff upright collar. Commissioned officers were required to wear a waistcoat of dark blue cloth with seven USRCS buttons. USRCS issued buttons were to be made of brass and were decorated with a fouled anchor resting on a wreath over a Treasury shield. The letters U S are divided by the shield. In 1891, the military tunic, or service coat, was introduced to the US Revenue Cutter Service marine service uniform. It is characterized as a tight-fitting, single-breasted coat with a low-standing collar. The fly-front concealed 6 large round black rubber buttons. During the latter part of the 19th Century, Good Year Tire made durable buttons that were favored for work and military clothes. Service coats were furnished with collar devices and sleeve lace. 1891 Captain collar devices consisted of a gold oak leaf at the end and a gold embroidered fouled anchor and a silver embroidered shield on the shank. Sleeve lace on the military tunic was grey rather than the gold on frock and dress coats.





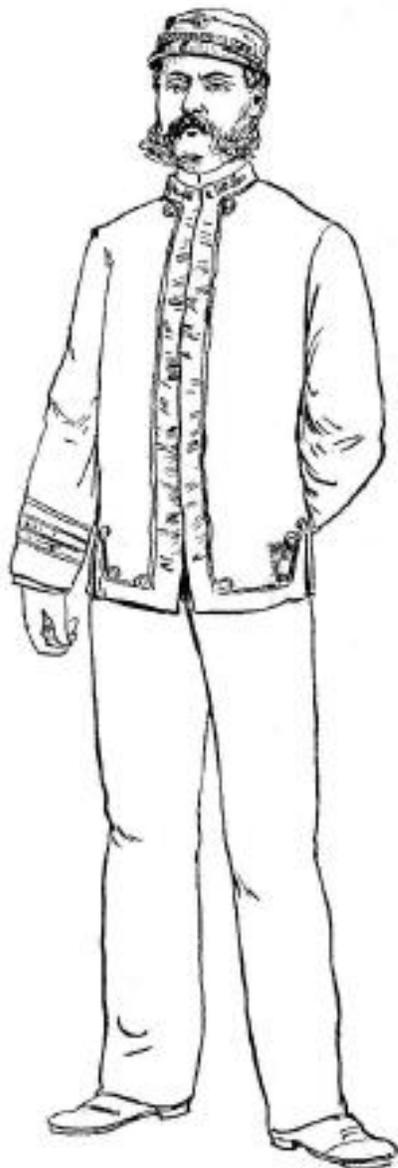
CAPTAIN



TROUSERS



Trousers consisted of dark navy-blue cloth or serge with a button fly. Black leather brogue boots were worn with trouser legs over top of the boot shaft. An ulster overcoat would have been a staple on board the *Bear*.



Service Coat



(L) Example of an officer in Service Uniform based on 1891 regulations and (R) Captain Healy in 1891 Service Uniform on board the BEAR

Selected Bibliography

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