

Rescue Boat Captain William Stidham

William began his lifeguard career in 1934 as a seasonal lifeguard for the City of Hermosa Beach. In 1935 he began working for Los Angeles County when they took over operation of the beach. He became a full time lifeguard in 1940. He left this position from 1942-1945 to join the service during World War II. After the war he returned to his lifeguard career and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in 1946. William was appointed the first Baywatch Skipper in 1952. He is credited with taking the concept of high-speed rescue boats from an idea to a reality. He established many of the standards in use today by today's Baywatch Rescue Boats. The Baywatch vessels that are now mainstays in ocean rescues from the beach and in the open sea are the direct result of his vision and hard work.

Stidham was skipper of the Baywatch Redondo in 1969 when it was the key vessel in emergency operations centering on two jetliners that crashed on takeoff from Los Angeles International Airport only days apart. It was one of the finest hours for the Baywatch Fleet, and for Stidham. Stidham, onboard Baywatch Redondo was one of the first emergency vessels to arrive at the crash site for both major airline crashes. On one of the crashes, he directed the emergency response where they successfully rescued 37 passengers from the plane.

William Stidham is the first recipient of the Los Angeles County Lifeguard "Lifetime Achievement" award. It is presented to the Los Angeles County Lifeguard whose career best represents the high standards and professionalism of this lifeguard service.

Stidham retired from lifeguarding in 1970. After his retirement however, Stidham continued to be involved with emergency response by participating with County-area safety specialists in the improvement of the LAX emergency disaster operations plan.