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In football, a shoestring tackle is a desperation move –the last chance a defensive player has to tackle the ball carrier before the ball is taken to the end zone.

During World War II near LaPush, Coast Guardsmen tackled a rescue with what they had: shoestring. As a result, 51 were saved.

In 1919 the U. S. commissioned the *Lake El Pueblo*, a steel steamer. Ten years later she was sold to the Russian merchant marine and renamed *Lamut*. By 1943 she was taking wartime cargo from Portland to her home base in Vladivostok.

When she left Portland on April 1, 1943, there was 75-knot winds and heavy rain along the Washington coast. Disoriented, the captain took her closer to shore. The *Lamut* slammed against the towering Quillayute Needles, near Teahwhit Head, about 10 p.m. It was lodged between rocks. The SOS was heard along the coast, but her position was incorrect.

“The grinding and tearing of her steel hull shattered the eardrums as breakers forced her on her beam ends,” wrote nautical historian James A Gibbs. “Aboard 44 men and eight women scrambled like sheep, violently frightened and not knowing which way to run.”

The crew tried to launch a lifeboat, but the waves smashed it, killing one crew member and wounding another.

A Coast Guard beach patrolman discovered the vessel while walking his beat. He called headquarters at LaPush. Early the next morning a 36-foot motor lifeboat left LaPush but could not reach the site.

Meanwhile, a shore party blazed a trail to the shore, two miles south of the site. Then the guardsmen climbed over slippery rocks to the top of a cliff, where they could look down on the pinned vessel.

Bert Webber describes what happened next:

“The beach patrolmen did not have special equipment and could not wait for the rescue group that was following overland with equipment and ropes.

“How to get a line down to the ship when they did not have any rope with them was their concern. The patrolmen at the scene had to improvise. Each man wore over-the-ankle boots. If they took all of the boot laces and tied them together would this make a light line that would reach the vessel?”

Too short, so gauze bandages from each man’s first-aid kit, were added. Because gauze stretches, it reached the ship. “Then a heavier line was tied to it on the ship and by doing this several times, each time with a heavier line, the cable became strong enough.”

The rescued crew, including the injured crew member lashed to a stretcher, was now on the beach, in the care of an Army medical detail, within 24 hours of the shipwreck.

Two postscripts:

Russian sea captains who lost their ships usually faced death when they returned home. Americans wrote to Premier Joseph Stalin, who apparently spared the captain's life.

The *Lake Gebhart* – built under the same government program as the *Lake El Pueblo* – sank in May 1923, several miles from where her sister ship was lashed against the rocks.

For a full account, read "*Shipwrecks and Rescues on the Northwest Coast*" by Bert Webber; It can be ordered from the Webb Research Group website.