



Mendota, 1929

(later-HMS *Culver*, Y-87)

The cutter *Mendota* was named for the largest of the "Four Lakes" near Madison, Wisconsin.

Builder: Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, Quincy, MA

Launched: 27 November 1928

Commissioned: 23 March 1929

Displacement: 2,075 tons

Dimensions: 250' oa (236' bp) x 42' x 12' 11" draft (mean)

Machinery 1 turbine-driven electric motor (General Electric), 2 boilers, 3,350 shp, 14.8 knots (cruising), 17.5 knots max

Propellers: single, 4 blades

Complement: 97 (1940)

Armament: 1 x 5"/51; 1 x 3"/50; 2 x 6-pdrs (1929)

Cost: \$900,000 each (hull & machinery)

"LAKE"-CLASS DESIGN

The 250-foot class cutters were designed by the Coast Guard and were, in many respects, modernized 240-footers. Captain Q.B. Newman, USCG, designed its innovative turbine-electric-drive power plant, which developed an amazing 3,350 shp. These were the first to have alternating current, and a synchronous motor for propulsion. The whole ship ran off the main turbine. The auxiliary generators were tied into the main generator electrically, after sufficient speed was attained. At that point, no steam was required to drive the turbines on the auxiliary

generators. The propulsion plant achieved remarkable efficiency. The counter stern and plumb bow of the older class had given way to the flared stem and cruiser stern. These features were an attempt to improve sea qualities over the 240-foot class, particularly to eliminate the heavy shocks common in the North Atlantic Ice Patrol.

Initially this class was made up of ten cutters, all of which were transferred to Great Britain under Lend-Lease in 1941. They were to be replaced in the USCG inventory by the 255-foot Owasco-class vessels, laid down in 1943. Three vessels were lost while in British service, one was not returned, and the remainder turned back to the Coast Guard in 1946. Initially, the Coast Guard planned to renovate the *Champlain*, *Itasca*, *Mocomo*, and *Tampa* and return them to service. The remaining two vessels, the *Chelan* and *Tahoe*, were stripped of parts for use in the restoration of the other four ships. Due to economic constraints following the war, however, only the *Mocomo* and *Tampa* were placed in commission.

TYPES OF WORK DONE BY THE LAKE-CLASS CUTTERS

It was only during the last five years that a detailed statistical record had been kept of various types of work performed by the ten transferred cutters. Most of the cutters performed an equal amount of boarding work during this period, with the exception of *Tahoe*, whose record of 809 vessels boarded was over twice the group average for the period, and of *Itasca*, whose 528 boardings were 50 percent above the average. *Shoshone* reported two and a half times the average number of vessels reported by the group for infractions of navigation laws, and *Tahoe* twice the average.

Sebago led in derelicts destroyed, and *Chelan* in regattas patrolled. *Cayuga* and *Mendota* did the greatest amount of anti-smuggling patrol work, while *Itasca* and *Mendota* led in time devoted to assistance work. *Mendota* and *Pontchartrain* spent over twice the average number of hours in winter cruising, while *Shoshone*, *Itasca*, and *Chelan* did all of the Bering Sea Patrol work done by the group. *Champlain* and *Chelan* led in the International Ice Patrol activity, and *Cayuga* devoted more time than any of the rest to USCG Academy cadet practice cruises. *Tahoe* gave the greatest amount of time of any in the group to icebreaking.

CUTTER HISTORY:

After commissioning, *Mendota* was stationed at Norfolk, Virginia. Among other duties she was also used for cadet practice cruises. On 22 December 1939,

Sebago went to the assistance of the 2,847-ton Greek SS *Aliakmon*, which had grounded two miles north of Wash Woods Beach, Virginia. The 12-inch hawser which *Sebago* had secured to the bow of the Greek vessel parted, but *Mendota*, which had come to the scene a few hours later, succeeded in floating the \$200,000 vessel at 4:00 a.m. with its crew of 27. On another occasion, 26 March 1935, *Mendota* received a message from the million dollar Belgian S.S. *Jean Jadot* stating that her rudder was hopelessly broken. The *Mendota's* fuel supply, on meeting the vessel, being low, the steamship at first towed the cutter that acted as a rudder. This operation not being successful because the rudder plates had taken a permanent set which continually forced the steamer's bow to starboard, *Mendota* took the steamer in tow and two days later delivered the vessel safely to a salvage tug from Halifax, Nova Scotia, having towed her 210 miles. The 5,783-ton vessel had a cargo valued at \$2,000,000 and a crew of 51. On 13 November 1937, *Mendota* picked up 15 survivors from the Greek freighter *Tzenny Chandris*, which had foundered in a storm in the Gulf Stream.

On 5 April 1941, President Roosevelt authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to transfer ten 250-foot cutters of the United States Coast Guard to the United Kingdom. This action was taken in accordance with the terms of the Act of 11 March 1941, (an Act to Promote the Defense of the United States). The President, having consulted with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Coast Guard, had found that the defense of the United Kingdom was vital to the defense of the United States, and that it would be in the interests of our national defense to transfer the ten cutters as defense articles under an agreement which had been duly concluded with His Majesty's Government.

The cutters in question had been built between the years 1928 and 1932. They were all 42-foot beam, 16-foot maximum draft and 1,979 tons displacement. Five of them, the *Cayuga*, *Itasca*, *Saranac*, *Sebago*, and *Shoshone* were 3200 horsepower, and five of them, the *Champlain*, *Mendota*, *Chelan*, *Pontchartrain*, and *Tahoe*, were 3000 horsepower. They were all fuel oil burners of single screw, steel-hull construction, each with a speed of 16 knots per hour, driven by turbine electric power, and with a capacity of 90,500 gallons of fuel oil each. The *Cayuga* had a cruising radius at economical speed of 6,050 miles and all the others of 7,542 miles. At the maximum speed all but the *Itasca*, *Shoshone*, and *Mendota* had a cruising radius at maximum speed of 3,600 miles. These three had a cruising radius at maximum speed of 4,500 miles. The ten cutters each had a complement under the Coast Guard of 8 commissioned officers, 4 warrant officers and 85 enlisted men. During the fiscal year 1940 they had cruised an average of 20,705 miles each at an average annual cost of operation for each of \$186,029.00.

On 5 April 1941, the Commandant sent identical instructions to the commanding officers of each of the ten vessels that, when all armament had been installed and their vessels degaussed and calibrated, they were to report to the

Commander of the New York District. Each vessel was to be prepared for delivery to the British following detailed instructions, and the actual transfer of command and delivery of each vessel was to be on a date designated by the Commander of the New York District. The delivery of the ten vessels was to be made at the Navy Yard, Brooklyn, NY and was to be as early as practicable, consistent with the readiness of the vessels and the availability of the relieving personnel. The vessels and equipment were to be delivered "as is" except as modified by Headquarters' orders or the following detailed instructions.

Prior to transfer of command and delivery of vessels, certain action was outlined. In these instructions, each commander was to obliterate the ship's name from the hull by the removal of the letters and, also, the ship's name and Service designation on all equipment, carefully repainting over surfaces after such removal. Records of public property and all other ship's records were to be complete as of delivery date. Quintuplicate priced invoices were to be prepared on all equipment; stores, including commissary stores and supplies, including ammunition, to be transferred with the vessel. After the arrival of each vessel in New York, the personnel was to be reduced to the minimum required under prevailing conditions, with surplus personnel to be transferred as directed by the Commander of the New York District. The commander of each vessel, however, was required to furnish competent details of men for the instruction and indoctrination of the British personnel relieving them. Personnel records, pay accounts and muster rolls were to be brought up to date and, together with publications and equipment, transferred as subsequently directed. Each vessel was to be fueled to capacity, with an adequate supply of lubricants taken on board, and fresh water tanks filled to capacity. All ship's accounts, including allotments, mess accounts, clothing and ship's service store were to be closed out.

During the period of transfer, the crews were to be mixed--Coast Guard and British, but all Coast Guard personnel were to be removed from the cutters prior to their final departure from a United States port. The Commander of the New York District was to designate in advance a date of transfer agreeable to the relieving British commanding officer. On that date the vessel and her equipment were to be delivered to the new British commanding officer, he was to be supplied with the priced invoices of equipment, stores and supplies to be transferred with the vessel, and his receipt obtained. All keys, including magazine keys, were to be turned over and receipted for.

There would follow the transfer of all Coast Guard personnel, except the special details required for instruction or indoctrination, such personnel to remain on board while in a United States port only as observers and without responsibility. A roster of such observers was to be submitted by each commanding officer to the Commander of the New York District. Each commanding officer was to report to the New York District Commander the time and date the transfer was affected, together with a statement that all instructions had been complied with.

He was also to submit copies of all receipted invoices in triplicate for transmission to Headquarters.

Publications to be removed and forwarded to the issuing officer at Headquarters included *Coast Guard Regulations* with changes and circular letters, *Pay and Supply Instructions* with amendments, *Courts and Boards*, *Ordnance*, *Manual of Engineering Instructions*, *Bulletin of Engineering Information*, *U.S. Navy (Restricted)*, and *Communications and Uniform Regulations*. The same treatment was to be accorded all ship's files and records, except those necessary for the operation of the ship by the new command, including all engineering log books subsequent to June, 1940; the engineering letter file except letter DG-RR; all secret, confidential and restricted letters, publications, charts and devices, registered or non-registered; and boat number plates. To be forwarded to the district to which the vessel was permanently attached were all records and files pertaining to allotment ledger and pay accounts, after closure, including rough rolls, file copies of vouchers, allotment ledgers, schedules, etc.

To the Depot were to be shipped the bronze Coast Guard plaque that was located in the wardroom of each vessel, metal identifying letters on bows of boats and cast letters forming names of cutters located on the stern. To the New York Store, for issue upon Headquarters' authorization, were to go all uniform clothing, athletic equipment, broadcast receivers and spare parts, fictional and professional libraries, motion picture projectors, accessories and spare parts, motion picture cameras and accessories, photographic equipment and supplies, portable public address systems anti spare parts. Personnel instructions were to be destroyed. All articles transferred out of the ship were to be invoiced to the units to which they were forwarded.

By 9 April 1941, all machinery for the transfer had been set in motion, and the transfers were expected to take place in an orderly manner with Captain H. W. Dempwolf, Coast Guard Commander at New York representing the Coast Guard, and Captain A.F.E. Palliser, RN, HMS *Malaya*, representing the British. Four cutters were on that date being painted the British war color by the United States Navy Yard, in accordance with the request of the British authorities, and, upon completion of the painting, these vessels would be in all respects ready for transfer. The other six would follow along in accordance with the schedule as planned. Instruction and indoctrination of the British crew were to be made in Long Island Sound over a period of two weeks, after which it was expected that the British could take over the cutters and navigate them satisfactorily alone. Two Coast Guard officers, Lieutenant Commander H.E. Grogan and Lieutenant J. P. German, Commanding Officer and Engineer Officer, respectively, of the *Pontchartrain*, were designated to act as liaison between commanding officers of the Coast Guard vessels and the relieving British commanding officers.

On April 30, 1941, the first four of the ten Coast Guard cutters were turned over to the British, after a short ceremony attended by Rear Admiral Russell R.

Waesche, USCG, Admiral A. Andrews, USN, and Captain H.V. McKittrick, USN. The cutters were handed over by Captain H.W. Dempwolf, Commander of the New York District, USCG, and accepted on behalf of the Royal Navy by Captain A.F.E. Palliser, DSO, RN. The cutters in question were renamed as follows:

USCGC *Saranac*: HMS *Banff*

USCGC *Tahoe*: HMS *Fishguard*

USCGC *Pontchartrain*: HMS *Hartland*

USCGC *Mendota*: HMS *Culver*

After her transfer to the Royal Navy, she was torpedoed by a German U-boat and sunk on 31 January 1942.

PHOTOGRAPHS [click on description to access image]:

[USCGC *Mendota*; under construction, circa 1928.](#)

[USCGC *Mendota*; at anchor, view from forward, starboard-side.](#)

SOURCES:

Cutter files, USCG Historian's Office.

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