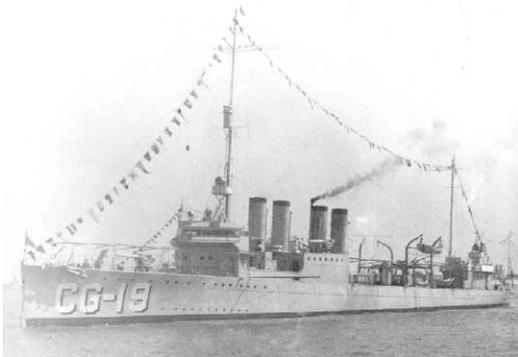




Wood (Welborn C.)

(CG-19)



Welborn Cicero Wood—born in Georgia on 15 January 1876—was appointed to the United States Naval Academy on 6 September 1895. He served as a midshipman in the battleship *Texas* during the war with Spain in 1898, before graduating with the class of 1899, and later joined *Oregon* (Battleship No. 3) on the Asiatic Station to serve part of the two years required by law before commissioning. Subsequently given command of the gunboat *Urdaneta*—then operating in the Philippines during the Insurrection—Naval Cadet Wood was killed in action on 17 September 1899, when his ship ran aground in the Orani River, near Manila, and was overwhelmed by insurgent troops who enfiladed the gunboat with a withering fire from the shoreline.

Displacement: 1,190 tons

Dimensions: 314' 5" oa x 31' 9" x 9'10" draft

Machinery: Geared turbines, 2 screws, 26,500, 35 kts

Complement: 101 (USN)

Armament: 5-4"/50 (USN)

Built: Newport News Shipbuilding Company, Newport News VA

Commissioned (USN): 14 Jan1921

Acquired: 1 Oct 1930

Commissioned (USCG): 15 Apr 1931

Decommissioned: 21 May 1934

Design and Service

A total of thirty-one Navy destroyers were lent to the Coast Guard for the enforcement of Prohibition. The vessels ranged from the prewar 742-ton "flivvers" to the postwar four-stack flush deckers like *Wood*. Adapting these vessels to service was thought to be less costly than building new ships. The wartime service and exceedingly poor condition of earlier destroyer classes often required nearly a year of reconditioning before they were seaworthy. The flush deckers, on the other hand, were in much better condition. Not having had wartime service, they were more quickly reconditioned for anti-bootlegging patrols.

These vessels were also by far the largest and most sophisticated vessels ever operated by the service. Trained personnel were nearly nonexistent. Congress authorized hundreds of new enlistees. It was these inexperienced men that generally made up the crews of these vessels. All were capable of over 25 knots, an advantage in the rum-chasing business, but they were easily outmaneuvered by smaller boats. As a result, the destroyers' mission was to picket the larger supply ships ("mother ships") and prevent them from off-loading their cargo onto smaller, speedier contact boats. *Wood* was stationed at New London, CT and was with the Cuban Expedition in 1933.

History:

Welborn C. Wood (DD-195) was laid down on 24 September 1918 at Newport News, Va., by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co.; launched on 6 March 1920; sponsored by Miss Virginia Mary Tate; designated DD-195 during the assignment of alphanumeric hull number designations on 17 July 1920; and commissioned at the Norfolk Navy Yard on 14 January 1921, Lt. (jg.) Leon W. Mills in temporary command pending the arrival of Lt. (jg.) Brady J. Dayton 11 days later.

Welborn C. Wood operated off the eastern seaboard with the Atlantic Fleet, on a routine schedule of exercises and maneuvers until decommissioned at Philadelphia on 8 August 1922. During the ship's ensuing sojourn in reserve, the establishment of Prohibition gave rise to smuggling of illicit liquor into the United States. To deal with this problem, 25 older destroyers were transferred by the Navy to the Treasury Department for service with the Coast Guard in enforcing Prohibition. Some began to show signs of wear and tear after the often arduous pace of operations on the "rum patrol" and required replacement. Accordingly, five of the newer "flush deck" destroyers were transferred to the Treasury Department in 1930 and 1931.

Welborn C. Wood was transferred to the Coast Guard on 1 October 1930 and was simultaneously struck from the Navy list. Reconditioned at Philadelphia, the destroyer soon bore a new hull number—CG-19—on her bows and was commissioned on 15 April 1931 at Philadelphia. She arrived at New London, Conn., a week later, for service out of her permanent station there. She operated on the "rum patrol" out of New London, trailing rumrunners and keeping a weather eye on them. Shifting south to Florida waters for target practice soon thereafter, she returned to New London upon the conclusion of her exercises and operated out of that port into the autumn of 1932.

After another period of routine patrols off the eastern seaboard, *Welborn C. Wood* operated with the Navy in Cuban waters, off Nueva Gerona, in September and October 1933, interrupting her scheduled target practices. Released from this duty on 6 November, she sailed north for New York that day.

Arriving at Stapleton, N.Y., on 10 November, *Welborn C. Wood* shifted to New London soon thereafter. Subsequently decommissioned at Philadelphia on 21 May 1934, *Welborn C. Wood* resumed her sojourn in reserve with the Navy, as the repeal of Prohibition in late 1933 had obviated the need for the destroyer's service in law enforcement duties.

While the warship lay in reserve, she was reinstated on the Navy list with many of her sisters in Philadelphia's reserve basin as the world situation slowly worsened. One crisis after another abroad in the late 1930's seemed to steadily erode what security the United States held by virtue of its self-imposed isolation from world affairs. On 1 September 1939, German forces invaded Poland, triggering a chain reaction on the part of Poland's allies, Great Britain and France, who rushed to her aid.

President Roosevelt swiftly ordered a Neutrality Patrol to sea to safeguard American coastlines. The Atlantic Squadron found itself hard pressed to meet the initial demands of the patrol and found itself needing more ships. Accordingly, 77 light minelayers and destroyers on both coasts (San Diego and Philadelphia) were recommissioned for duty on the Neutrality Patrol to augment the units already at sea.

On 4 September 1939, *Welborn C. Wood* was recommissioned at Philadelphia, Lt. Comdr. Robert E. Cronin in command. She was fitted out for sea and soon sailed to join the Neutrality Patrol. The destroyer conducted these operations interspersed with accelerated training evolutions off the eastern seaboard and into the Caribbean and gulf regions. Meanwhile, the situation in Europe continued to worsen, as Hitler's German legions overran western Europe and forced England's back to the wall by the late spring of 1940.

British destroyer forces had suffered heavily since the outbreak of war—primarily in the disastrous Norwegian campaign of May 1940. In addition, the entrance of Italy into the war in June meant that British escort forces would be thinly spread to protect not only the North Atlantic convoys but also the Mediterranean ones as well. Accordingly, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill shaped a plea for help from the United States—to which President Roosevelt answered affirmatively.

Welborn C. Wood became one of the first of the 50 over-age destroyers to be transferred to the British government in return for 99-year leases on important base sites in the Western Hemisphere. She and the rest of her division, Destroyer Division 67, arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 6 September 1940. Her crew instructed the Britishers slated to man the ship in the brief few days preceding the turnover ceremonies. On 9 September, *Welborn C. Wood*'s commissioning pennant came down; her American crew mustered ashore and marched off to board a train waiting to take them back to the United States; and the British officers and ratings assigned to the "flush decker" manned the destroyer. *Welborn C. Wood* was subsequently struck from the Navy list on 8 January 1941.

Commissioned into the Royal Navy simultaneously, the destroyer became HMS *Chesterfield* (1.28). Initially, her new crew must have found the ship difficult to handle, as she twice rammed HMS *Churchill* (1.45) (formerly *Haraden*, DD-138) which was lying alongside a pier, fitting out, before she sailed for the British Isles. As part of the first "Town" flotilla—so called because each British ship bore the name of a town common to both Great Britain and the United States (the Canadian vessels—six of them—bore names of common rivers)—*Chesterfield* sailed for Belfast, Northern Ireland, and arrived at her destination on 18 November. Shifting to Plymouth on the 22d, the destroyer underwent a refit at Chatham before joining the 11th Escort Group, Western Approaches Command, based at Greenock.

From 1941 to 1943, *Chesterfield* escorted convoys in the North Atlantic. Screening Convoy HX-222 on 17 January 1943, the destroyer attacked *U-268* with a depth charge barrage, only to

suffer damage from her own charges. Limping to Plymouth for repairs soon thereafter, the ship remained there until November 1943.

Allocated to the 5th Western Approaches Command for duty as a target vessel for aircraft, she remained engaged in this vital, but unglamorous, duty through 1944. Subsequently placed in reserve at Grangemouth, Firth of Forth, on 17 January 1945 *Chesterfield* was eventually broken up for scrap in 1947.

Coast Guard Operational Highlights:

15 Apr 1931 Transferred from US Navy and commissioned at Philadelphia Navy Yard.

28 Apr 1931 Arrived at New London and reported to permanent duty station.

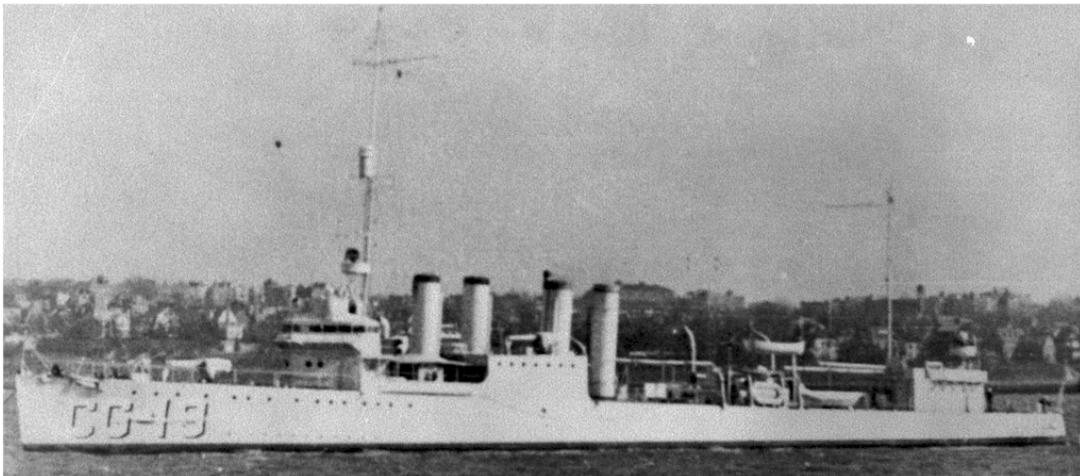
Cuban Expedition

7 Sep 1933 Discontinued target practice off Hampton Roads, VA and left for Key West.

9 Sep 1933 Arrived for duty with US Navy.

6 Nov 1933 Released from duty with US Navy. Directed to return to duty in Eastern Area.

21 May 1934 Decommissioned and returned to US Navy.



Sources:

Cutter History Files, CG Historian's Office

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships



