

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Hudson, 1893



A river in eastern New York that flows south to the Atlantic Ocean at New York City.

Builder: John H. Dialogue, Camden, NJ

Cost: \$36,500

Completed and accepted: 17 August 1893

Decommissioned: 3 May 1935

Displacement: 128 tons

Length: 94' 6-1/4"

Beam: 20' 6"

Draft: 10' 3"

Powerplant: Triple-expansion reciprocating steam engine

Speed: 12 knots maximum

Complement: 11

Armament: 2 x 6-pound Driggs-Schroeder rapid fire guns; 1 x Model 1895 Colt automatic "machine" gun.

Cutter's History:

Hudson was the Revenue Service's first vessel to have a steel hull and triple-expansion plating. After entering service on 17 August 1893 she was assigned to duty in New York harbor. She was originally manned by the crew of the cutter *Washington*, the cutter *Hudson* replaced in New York. *Hudson* was ordered to service with the Navy beginning on 24 March 1898 for service during the Spanish-American War. On 11 May 1898 the cutter *Hudson*, along with the Navy warships *Winslow*, *Machias*, and *Wilmington*, had pursued three Spanish gunboats into the bay of Cardenas, Cuba. There, shore batteries fired on the U.S. vessels and disabled *Winslow*, knocking out her steering and a boiler, thereby putting *Winslow* adrift. The accurate Spanish fire wounded the *Winslow's* commanding officer and killed another officer and many of the crew.

In the face of "a most galling fire" from the Spanish guns for over thirty minutes, *Hudson*, commanded by First Lieutenant Frank H. Newcomb, sailed into the bay to save the crippled *Winslow*. Though under fire, Newcomb kept *Hudson* positioned in shoal waters near the *Winslow*, risking running aground herself, until a line was passed to the Navy warship and made fast. *Hudson* then towed *Winslow* out of danger. During the time in the bay, both vessels continually fired on the Spanish positions.

Hudson carried the bodies of those killed as well as the wounded, along with the dispatches of the squadron off Cardenas, to Havana, arriving there on 14 May 1898. [See below for a copy of Newcomb's report of the action.] She remained there on blockade duty for a short time before departing to Key West. Another period of patrol ended 10 July as she returned to the blockading fleet with further dispatches. *Hudson* captured two fishing vessels that attempted to run the blockade off Havana. She then departed for Norfolk, via Key West and Savannah, and arrived there on 21 August 1898 where she returned to service with the Treasury Department out of New York.

She continued with her traditional duties and was once again taken into the Navy for service during World War I beginning on 6 April 1917. *Hudson* continued her service with the Navy until returned to Treasury Department control on 28 August 1919. She returned to service with the Coast Guard until she was decommissioned in 1935.

Record of Movements

1893 August 30: Crew of cutter *Washington* ordered transferred to *Hudson* and latter vessel ordered to New York.

1893 September 4: Sailed. September 5 arrived at New York. To perform duties heretofore done by *Washington*.

1897 June 1: Lieutenant McLellan granted permission for daughter to reside on board for a short time.

1898 Mar 26: Ordered to Norfolk, Virginia, April 3, arrived same day.

1898 Mar 24: Vessel ordered to cooperate with the U.S. Navy.

1898 June 27: The President recommends medals for officers and crew of *Hudson* and the thanks of Congress for gallant services rendered in rescuing USS *Winslow* in the face of a most galling fire at Cardenas, Cuba, May 11, 1898. Record 55th Congress, 2nd Session, page 7171.

1898 Aug 17: *Hudson* returned to Treasury Department by Executive Order.

1898 Sep 23: Ordered to return to New York for duty. Sailed from Norfolk, October 5. Arrived New York, Oct. 6.

1898 Oct 24: Ordered to Philadelphia to participate in naval parade on 25th.

1898 Oct 27: Ordered to New York and resume duties, when repairs are completed.

1912 Dec 27: Relieved *Calumet* on boarding duty.

1914 June 26: Assisted patrol Intercollegiate regatta, Poughkeepsie, New York.

1917 Apr 6: Temporarily transferred to the Navy.

1919 Aug 28: Coast Guard returned to Treasury Department by Executive Order.

1921 June 2: Arrived at Norfolk, Virginia.

1923 Jan 1: Permanent station at New York, New York.

1927 Dec 22: Ordered to [Coast Guard] Depot for repairs.

1928 July 14: Repairs completed, sailed for New York.

1935 May 3: Decommissioned and sold.

Naval Battle of Cardenas Bay, Cuba, May 11, 1898.

Official Report of the Commanding Officer: U.S. Revenue Steamer *Hudson*

[Report of engagement at Cardenas Bay, Cuba, May 11, 1898]

*U. S. S. HUDSON,
Key West, Fla., May 13, 1898.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following report of the participation of this vessel in the engagement with the Spanish forces at Cardenas on the 11th instant:

At 11.30 a.m., while off the main entrance to Cardenas Bay, the *Hudson* was ordered by the senior officer present to accompany the U.S.S. *Wilmington* and the U.S. torpedo boat *Winslow* inside. All three vessels started immediately, and, after some preliminary soundings to determine the best water, passed through Blanco Channel into the bay and headed for Cardenas.

About 1 p.m., when abreast of Corogal Point, the *Hudson* was ordered by the commanding officer of the U.S.S. *Wilmington* to "go out and look at small craft." Steamed over toward Diana Cay and skirted the western shore of the bay. Discovered no vessels, and observing that the *Wilmington* and *Winslow* were nearing Cardenas, at 1.35 p.m. steamed toward them at full speed. At 1.45, when a little over a mile distant from our vessels, saw firing commence from the shore, which was immediately returned by our ships. At 1.50, when within range of the shore guns, the *Hudson* opened fire upon them with her two 6-pounders. Observing that the *Winslow* was quite inshore and exposed to the full strength of the enemy's guns, ran up alongside of the *Wilmington* and asked if we should go to her assistance (*Winslow*). Received the answer, "Yes," and at once steamed into the immediate vicinity of the *Winslow*, keeping up a constant and rapid fire from the *Hudson's* battery upon the enemy's guns on shore. At 2.20, commanding officer of the *Winslow* reported his vessel totally disabled, and requested to be towed out of range. Owing to the shoal water and the rapid drift toward shore of the *Winslow* (the wind was on shore), it was fully thirty minutes before the *Hudson* succeeded in making a line fast from the *Winslow* and started ahead with her. The enemy kept up a constant fire during this time, which appeared to be especially directed toward the *Winslow*, and which was returned at every opportunity by the *Winslow* and *Hudson*.

The *Winslow* was towed alongside the *Wilmington*, from which vessel a boat was sent with a medical officer, who transferred the dead and wounded from the *Winslow* to the *Wilmington*. Finally, at about 3.30 p.m., all three vessels steamed out of the bay, the *Winslow* in tow of the *Hudson*. At about dark joined the U.S.S. *Machias* outside where the *Winslow* was anchored. At 9.15 p.m., the *Hudson* started for Key West with dispatches for the senior officer commanding that station, and carrying the dead and wounded from the *Winslow*. Reported to the senior officer commanding at Key West, at 7.10 on the morning of the 12th instant. The only damage resulting to the *Hudson* during the engagement was a few slight marks from small projectiles upon two of the fire-room ventilators, and a few bullet marks upon the outside of the pilot-house plating. One hundred and thirty-five shells were fired from the two 6-pounders during the action.

Respectfully, yours,

FRANK H. NEWCOMB,
First Lieutenant, R.C.S., Commanding.

(Through senior officer commanding naval station, Key West, Fla.)

Note:

President William McKinley noted in his request to Congress to recognized the gallantry of Newcomb and his crew with a special medal. The President noted that "In the face of a most galling fire from the enemy's guns, the revenue cutter HUDSON, commanded by First Lieutenant Frank H. Newcomb, United States Revenue Cutter Service, rescued the disabled WINSLOW, her wounded commander and remaining crew. The commander of the HUDSON kept his vessel in the very hottest fire of the action, although in constant danger of going ashore on account of the shallow water, until he finally got a line fast to the WINSLOW and towed that vessel out of range of the enemy's guns, a deed of special gallantry." Congress awarded Newcomb a gold Congressional medal, the officers of Hudson received silver medals, and the crew received bronze medals for their heroism. These were the only specially struck medals awarded for bravery during the war.

The Battle of Cardenas Bay and the Importance of Honor and Teamwork

by William Thiesen, Ph.D.

The War with Spain in 1898 was a very brief engagement as most wars go, but it proved another reminder of the U.S. Revenue Service's ability to serve its nation honorably. A predecessor service to today's Coast Guard, the Revenue Service fought proudly in both Atlantic and Pacific theaters of this war, also known to as the Spanish-American War. While numerous revenue cutters served honorably throughout the hostilities, few distinguished themselves as much as Revenue Cutter *Hudson*.

In March of 1898, after the United States declared war with Spain, an executive order placed *Hudson* and all other revenue cutters under the direction of the U.S. Navy. Shortly thereafter this small cutter received an armament of two six-pound rapid-fire guns and a Colt automatic "machine" gun. Designed to serve harbor patrol duties on the East Coast, the new ninety-five foot *Hudson* was technologically advanced for its time with all steel plating and a triple-expansion reciprocating steam engine.

Despite its special features, *Hudson's* crew really set the cutter apart from the rest of the fleet. The crew of twenty included First Lieutenant J.H. Scott, Third Lieutenant Ernest E. Mead, First Assistant Engineer N.E. Cutchin, Second Assistant Engineer T.G. Lewton, Steward's Mate H. Savage and Cook Moses Jones. *Hudson's* captain, Lt. Frank H. Newcomb, had served in the Civil War and would later serve as a Coast Guard officer in World War I. Newcombe was the only crew member that had served in wartime, but he would later write in an after action report that each of his crewmen performed "in a cool and efficient manner" under fire.

By May of 1898, *Hudson* had been attached to the naval squadron blockading Spanish shipping between Matanzas and Cardenas, Cuba. During the early days of that month, three Spanish gunboats had sortied from Cardenas to harass the American squadron. Due to the threat posed by these enemy vessels, squadron leader Commander John Merry (USN) decided to destroy the gunboats while they sat moored in Cardenas harbor. On May 11th the torpedo boat USS *Winslow* spearheaded the attack with the slower *Hudson* following behind. As soon as *Winslow* entered the harbor, Spanish shore batteries and the gunboats opened fire on the torpedo boat, disabling it and killing or wounding many on board.

During the battle, crewmembers of the *Hudson* served with honor as they manned guns and worked on deck without any protection from enemy fire. Commanded by Lieutenants Scott and Mead, the gun crews kept up a steady covering fire at close range as *Hudson* moved in to rescue the crippled *Winslow* and its surviving crew members. At the height of the action *Hudson* kept up a hot covering fire of 135 rounds in the span of twenty minutes. According to Mead, each one of the rounds "shook *Hudson* from stem to stern." As *Hudson* drew nearer to *Winslow*, enemy rounds landed all around, and one of them felled a group of torpedo boat crew members trying to receive the towline. After half-an-hour under constant fire, the crew of the *Hudson* managed to secure a line to *Winslow* and tow the boat out of range of Spanish guns. The day's action had resulted in the destruction of two Spanish gunboats, but it cost the lives of several crewmembers aboard the *Winslow*, including the only naval officer lost during the War. *Hudson* had been spared serious damage and departed that evening carrying dispatches and *Winslow's* dead and wounded crewmen to Key West.

Many men had served with honor that day at Cardenas. Congress awarded three *Winslow* crewmembers the Medal of Honor. On special recommendation by President McKinley, Congress honored *Hudson's* crew with specially minted medals for their valor. A joint resolution provided Lt. Newcombe with the War's only gold medal awarded by Congress and silver medals to his officers. Congress awarded bronze medals to the crew, including Steward's Mate Savage and Cook Jones, who each fed ammunition to their respective six-pound gun installations. This is

likely the first time in Coast Guard history that African-Americans have received such recognition for action against an enemy on the high seas.

The crew of the *Hudson* performed honorably in the face of intense enemy fire. In a letter written to the Treasury Department a month after the enemy action at Cardenas, Newcombe reported that "Each and every member of the crew . . . did his whole duty cheerfully and without the least hesitation." The honor and discipline demonstrated by *Hudson's* officers and enlisted men allowed the crew to work as a team to fulfill the vessel's mission in spite of the odds against their success.

Images:



Original caption: "Revenue Cutter 'Hudson.' Navy Yard, Norfolk, VA, April 21st, 1898; photographer unknown.

Hudson being converted for naval service during the Spanish-American War. Note the armor plating and gun mounted on her quarterdeck.



USRC *Hudson*; "Revenue Cutter 'HUDSON.' Navy Yard, Norfolk, VA., April 21st, 1898." photographer unknown.



Captain Frank Newcomb's Congressional Gold Medal.



Captain Frank Newcomb's Congressional Gold Medal.



Second Lieutenant J. Hutchinson Scott's Congressional Silver Medal.



Second Lieutenant J. Hutchinson Scott's Congressional Silver Medal.

Sources:

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