

## *U.S. Coast Guard History Program*

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### *Wachusett, 1946*



WPG / WHEC-44  
Call sign: NRUJ

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*Wachusett* was named for Wachusett Lake, Massachusetts.

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Builder: Western Pipe & Steel Co., San Pedro, CA

Commissioned: 23 March 1946

Decommissioned: 30 August 1973; sold 18 November 1974

Length: 254'oa; 245'bp

Navigation Draft: 17'3" max (1966)

Beam: 43'1" max

Displacement: 1,978 fl (1966); 1,342 light (1966)

Main Engines: 1 Westinghouse electric motor driven by a turbine.

SHP: 4,000 total (1945)

Performance, Maximum Sustained: 17.0 kts, 6,157-mi radius (1966)

Performance, Economic: 10.0 kts., 10,376-mi radius (1966)

Fuel Capacity: 141,755 gal (Oil, 95%)

Complement: 10 officers, 3 warrants, 130 men (1966)

Electronics:

Detection Radar: SPS-23, SPS-29, Mk 26, Mk 27 (1966)

Sonar: SQS-1 (1966)

Armament: 1 x 5"/38; Hedgehog; 2 x Mk 32 ASW TT (*Winnebago*, 1966 – most units without TTs)

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**Class History**—“The bow and the stern for each other yearn, and the lack of interval shows...”

Myths have long shadowed the design history of the 255-foot class. These cutters were to have been much larger ships, and two theories persist as to why they were shortened. The first is that these cutters were built to replace the ships given to Great Britain under lend lease, and Congress stipulated that the Coast Guard had to build these replacement cutters to the same size and character as those provided to the British. The second is that their length was determined by the maximum length that could pass through the locks of the Welland Canal from the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River. The Great Lakes shipbuilding industry brought pressure on Congress to ensure that it had the potential to bid on the contract. The first theory seems to be correct, but the second cannot be ruled out.

The Coast Guard had prepared a design for a 316-foot cutter that was to have been an austere 327. This design was cut down into the 255-foot ship. To accomplish this, everything was squeezed down and automated to a degree not before achieved in a turbo-electric-driven ship.

The machinery design of the 255s was compact and innovative, but overly complex. It had pilothouse control, variable-rate (10 to 1) burners, and automatic synchronizing between the turbo-generator and the motor. Westinghouse engineers developed a system of synchronization and a variable-frequency drive for main-propulsion auxiliary equipment, which kept the pumps and other items at about two-thirds the power required for constant-frequency operation. The combined boiler room/engine room was a break with tradition.

The turbo-alternators for ship-service power exhausted at 20 psi gauge pressure instead of into a condenser. This steam was used all over the ship before finally going to a condenser. Space, heating, galley, cooking, laundry, freshwater evaporation, fuel, and feed-water heating were all taken from the 20 psi backpressure line.

The 255-foot class was an ice-going design. Ice operations had been assigned to the Coast Guard early in the war, and almost all new construction was either ice-going or ice-breaking.

The hull was designed with constant flare at the waterline for ice-going. The structure was longitudinally framed with heavy web frames and an ice belt of heavy plating, and it had extra transverse framing above and below the design waterline. Enormous amounts of weight were removed through the use of electric welding. The 250-foot cutters' weights were used for estimating purposes. Tapered bulkhead stiffeners cut from 12" I-beams went from the main deck (4' depth of web) to the bottom (8" depth of web). As weight was cut out of the hull structure, electronics and ordnance were increased, but at much greater heights. This top weight required ballasting the fuel tanks with seawater to maintain stability both for wind and damaged conditions.

The superstructure of the 255s was originally divided into two islands in order to accommodate an aircraft amidships, but this requirement was dropped before any of the units became operational. Construction of this class received a low priority, and none of the cutters served in the war. Following completion of the preliminary design by the Coast Guard, the work was assigned to George G. Sharp of New York to prepare the contract design.

The number of units – 13 of them – had an interesting origin. Three were to have been replacements for over-aged cutters, the *Ossipee*, *Tallapoosa*, and *Unalaga*; ten units were to be replacements for the 250-foot class transferred to Great Britain under lend-lease. For economy, all 13 units were built to the same design.

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### **Cutter History:**

The *Wachusett* was originally named *Huron*. Throughout 1946, she was stationed at Port Angeles, WA, and used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations in the Pacific. For the next two years, she was homeported at Juneau, AK, and added Bering Sea Patrol to the list of her duties.

From 1949 to 30 August 1973, she was stationed at Seattle, WA, and returned to her initial three major areas of operations. On 12 May 1957, she rescued two crew members from a USAF B-57 when they bailed out between Honolulu and San Francisco. On 11 February 1958, she assisted the tug USS *Yuma* in towing the USS *Tinian* 10 miles west-southwest of Cape Flattery. On 14 April 1964, the *Wachusett* rescued four persons from F/V *Mary Carol* east of Chiniak Bay, AK.

She stood by the disabled Chinese M/V *Taihsing* in the North Pacific from 18 to 22 May 1964 until a commercial tug arrived. On 19 August 1964, she located the barge *Lumberjack* adrift off California. On 5 June 1965, she seized the Japanese F/V *Wakashio Maru* for violation of the 1953 International Fishing Convention east of 175°W. The *Wachusett* was assigned to Coast Guard Squadron Three, Vietnam, from 10 September 1968 to 1 June 1969.

She was decommissioned on 30 August 1973 and was consequently sold for scrap on 18 November 1974.

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**Photographs:**



No caption; 28 January 1966; Photo No. 040166-04; photographer unknown.



No caption; 3 February 1970; Photo No. 13CGD 020370-007; photographer unknown.

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**Sources:**

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 1-3.

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), pp. 18-26.

255' Cutter Sailors' Page, hosted by 255' cutter historian Doak Walker, RMC, USCG (Ret.):  
[255wpg.11.net.com/](http://255wpg.11.net.com/)

Cutter File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Ship's Characteristics Card.

