

THE SINKING
OF THE
C.G.C. ESCANABA



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On the 13th of June, 1943, at 0510 the Coast Guard Cutter ESCANABA blew up and sank within three minutes in the North Atlantic. Her normal complement was about 60. The entire complement aboard the cutter was lost with the exception of two men. These were Melvin Baldwin, Boat-swain's Mate, second class, USCG, and Raymond F. O'Malley, Seaman First Class, USCG. The cutter was under the command of Lt. Comdr. Carl Uno Peterson of Newtonville, Mass. Observers aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter STORIS, the vessel nearest the ESCANABA, said a cloud of smoke and flame billowed upwards into the air and the cutter sank, leaving only small bits of wreckage afloat. The ship sank so quickly it had no time to send out signals. The U. S. Coast Guard Cutter RARITAN picked up the two enlisted men who said they had no idea what caused the explosion. The most probably explanation is that the loss was caused by mine, torpedo or internal explosion of magazine and depth charges, but the evidence is not sufficiently conclusive to attach a cause directly or even remotely to any of these.

TESTIMONY OF
SURVIVOR

Raymond O'Malley, Seaman, first class, one of the survivors who was helmsman at the time stated that a noise which sounded like three or four bursts of 20 mm. machine gun fire was clearly heard in the pilot house immediately preceding the explosion. He further stated that such firing on the ESCANABA was virtually impossible and no other ship was sufficiently close at the time to have done such firing. One remote but possible explanation would be the hydrophone effect of a torpedo heard thru the loud speaker, which was connected and clearly audible in the pilot house.

ESCANABA
WAS ESCORT-
ING CONVOY

At the time of the sinking the ESCANABA was part of Task Unit 24.8.2 which was escorting convoy G.S. 24 from Narssarsuak, Greenland to St. Johns, Newfoundland. The convoy had departed Greenland on the 10th of June and was made up of the CGC MOJAVE (Flag), the CGC TAMPA and the CGC ESCANABA, escorting the U.S.A.T. FAIRFAX and the USS RARITAN. On the 12th the CGC STORIS and the CGC ALGONQUIN joined as escorts. Before their departure the STORIS and ALGONQUIN had been ordered to conduct a search for a submarine reported by the Army, to be in Brede Fjord. Other vessels anchored in the fjord had been ordered to prepare for action and had listened on their hydrophones for any indication of the presence of a submarine but without result. The convoy, accordingly at 2200 on the 10th of June, 1943 had gotten underway. On the 12th many bergs and growlers were encountered and dense fog at times made navigation difficult and dangerous. The convoy proceeded to the northwest in order to pass around the ice. Early in the morning of the 13th they had passed to the West and South around the ice



MELVIN BALDWIN & RAYMOND F. O'MALLEY, ONLY SURVIVORS OF THE ESCANABA

field and had reached position 60°50'N, 52°00'W, when at 0510 dense black and yellow smoke was reported rising from the ESCANABA. She sank at 0513. The STORIS and RARITAN were ordered to investigate and rescue survivors and the convoy began zigzagging and steering evasive courses to avoid any submarine which may have been in the vicinity. At 0715 the STORIS reported returning with the RARITAN to the convoy, having rescued 2 survivors and found the body of Lt. Robert H. Prause, which was on the RARITAN. No explosion had been heard by the other escort vessels and no signals had been either seen or heard. Although the STORIS and RARITAN were at the position of the sinking within ten minutes after the disappearance of the ESCANABA, only these two survivors could be found.

MEMORIAL
SERVICE

On 4 August, 1943, the District Coast Guard Officer of the Chicago, Ninth Naval District, visited Grand Haven, Mich., for many years the permanent station of the CGC ESCANABA. The city authorities participated in the ceremonies celebrating Coast Guard Day and in the evening held a religious service in the city park, with three ministers of the gospel taking part. This was attended by about 20,000 persons and the relatives of the men lost on the ESCANABA.

ESCANABA HAD
ENVILABLE RES-
QUE RECORD

Earlier in the year, the ESCANABA had participated in a remarkable rescue operation. During the early morning of 3 February, 1943, the ESCANABA had been one of three escort vessels in Task Unit 24.8.3 which was escorting a convoy of three vessels, composed of the ill-fated SS DORCHESTER, which carried the convoy Commodore, the freighter SS LUTZ, and the freighter SS BISCAYA, from St. Johns, Newfoundland, to Greenland. The first indication of trouble came from the convoy at 0102 on that morning, when a white flash was observed to come from the SS DORCHESTER, just abaft her smokestack. This flash was followed by a clearly visible cloud of black smoke and the sound of an explosion. There followed immediately two blasts from the whistle of the SS DORCHESTER and lights were seen to flash on in numerous spots on the ship. At 0104 the officer of the Deck of the CGC COMANCHE, which was approximately 2500 yards on the port beam of the DORCHESTER, sounded the general alarm and all stations were manned. At 0112, the COMANCHE, in accordance with pre-arranged instructions, commenced maneuvering to intercept and destroy any enemy submarines in the vicinity. At this time all lights left burning on the SS DORCHESTER went out and it is believed she sank immediately after this at 0120. At 0226 instructions were received from the Escort Commander, aboard the TAMPA, for the COMANCHE to proceed to the scene of the sinking and cooperate with the USS ESCANABA in the rescue of survivors. Upon arriving at the scene at 0302 the COMANCHE passed through an oil slick in which numerous red life jacket lights were seen burning, but upon attempting to pick up some of these, it was discovered that the men in the jackets, close aboard, had already perished or had become unconscious and were unable to respond or act in any way. At 0345, forty survivors from a lifeboat were brought aboard the COMANCHE as she screened the ESCANABA against submarine attack. Altogether the COMANCHE rescued 93 survivors.

ESCANABA, REMODELED FOR WAR



ESCANABA
PREPARES
FOR RESCUE

As the ESCANABA had moved in to pick up survivors, the men designated for this operation got the rescue equipment ready. Lines were cut and made ready for hauling helpless men aboard. Sea ladders were placed so that they would be readily available when needed. Heaving lines were made ready, the cargo net was dropped, ready for use and the ESCANABA's retrievers were put into their rubber suits with lines made fast to them. All these things had to be done beforehand because no illumination could be used on deck and confusion would have resulted if the required equipment could not have been readily found in the dark, once rescue operations had been started. The sea was smooth due to the heavy oil slick and the wind was light. The ability to see objects in the water, however, was very poor due to darkness and overcast clouds.

TECHNIQUE
OF RESCUE
WORK

The ship was stopped and drifted down into a mass of survivors. Some of them were trying to stay on doughnut rafts, others were staying afloat only with the aid of their life jackets. As was expected from previous experience gained in rescuing survivors from the SS CHEROKEE, the majority of the men were suffering from severe shock and exposure and could not climb up the sea ladders or the cargo net. In fact, they couldn't even hang on to the lines with running bowlines on them long enough to secure the lines under their arms so that they could be hauled aboard. It was for this reason that the retrievers were put over the side. They would get hold of the men or of the rafts and the men tending the retrievers' lines could pull the group close to the ship. The retrievers could then quickly put lines around the survivors and they were hauled aboard in short order. This system saved much valuable time and many lives. The ship did not have to wait until it drifted the last twenty yards or so to a raft but the retrievers got the raft in to the ship immediately. Thus the ship was able to contact that many more groups before exposure could freeze them to death. At the same time it made it possible to haul on board unconscious survivors many of whom later recovered. Even when a victim looked dead he was brought on board and only 12 out of 50 apparently dead thus rescued, were actually found to be dead by the ship's doctor, Asst. Surgeon Ralph R. Nix of the U.S. Public Health Service. He worked valiantly, with the assistance of members of the crew and of those survivors who had recovered, on those who showed signs of life and was posthumously awarded a letter of commendation on August 18, 1943.

HEROIC
ACTION

Ensign Richard A. Arrighi, USCGR, who was posthumously awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal on August 18, 1943, was the first to go over the side as a retriever. This act boosted the morale of the whole crew and gave confidence to the other retrievers. During the early hours of the rescue operations, one lifeboat, was contacted which was in fair condition. This boat had picked up the other survivors and was fairly crowded. As the lifeboat was made fast to the ESCANABA's side, one of its helpless members fell in between the cutter and the lifeboat. This poor man was covered with oil and the



LIEUT. COMM. CARL U. PETERSON, USCG, COMMANDER OF THE ESCANABA

men in the lifeboat simply could not extricate him from his perilous position. Ensign Arrighi, who was working in the water at the time, swam in between the boat and the ship, pulled the man out so that he would not be crushed, held him up so that a line could be put around him and helped the men in the boat get him on board. Arrighi was in grave danger of being himself crushed between the boat and the ship's side, but due to his disregard of his own safety and to his quick action he was spared, only to lose his life in June when the ESCANABA blew up. Arrighi was in and out of the water rescuing survivors, working in the dark with a rough sea running and quitting only when his rubber suit became worn and filled with water. After that he had to be hauled on board and treated for exposure.

TWO OTHERS
DECORATED

The Navy and Marine Corps Medal also went posthumously to Forrest O. Rednour (Sc2c) and Warren T. Deyampert (Off. Std. 3c) who worked between three and four hours in the water during darkness, pulling rafts in close to the ship, securing them with lines from the ship, securing bowlines about the survivors so that they could be hauled aboard the ESCANABA, and at times keeping helpless survivors afloat until they could put lines about them. They, too, were often in danger of being crushed by the life rafts as they brought them close to the ship's side. Rednour stuck with a raft loaded with survivors as it drifted under the ship's counter and the propeller had to be backed to get the raft in position where the survivors could be unloaded. Deyampert stuck with a single floating survivor as he drifted astern under the counter, in order to keep him clear of the propeller, just in case it turned. He disregarded this danger to himself, in order that the survivor might be kept clear of it. Rednour worked the longest of all retrievers and accounted for the greatest number of survivors, but finally had to quit when his rubber suit became torn.

LEGION
OF MERIT

Lieut. Comdr. Carl U. Peterson, USCG, Commanding Officer of the ESCANABA was awarded the Legion of Merit posthumously. He and Executive Officer, Lt. Robert H. Prause, to whom a Letter of Commendation was awarded, did outstanding jobs of organizing and supervising on the scene all the rescue operations. The handling, by Lt. Prause, of the survivors and crew members in the water while the ship was maneuvering, plus the prompt recovery of two crew members who were pulled overboard as they tried to keep the survivors alongside, displayed sound judgement and excellent seamanship. Despite the lack of illumination there was no confusion. Everyone worked with grim determination to cheat the enemy out of as many victims as possible, despite the constant threat of submarine action. Lt. Prause had previously planned the retriever method of rescue and had gone into the icy water off the dock at Blue West One, Greenland, in a rubber suit with a line attached. The experiment paid great dividends. The total number rescued by the ESCANABA was 133 alive, of which one died on board. Twelve bodies were also recovered.

ESCANABA, ON DUTY IN LAKE MICHIGAN



DESCRIPTION
OF THE CGC
ESCANABA

The Coast Guard Cutter ESCANABA was one of six cutters of her class and was built at the Defoe Works, Bay City, Mich., being completed in 1932. Her hull was steel-strengthened for ice breaking and before entering upon convoy duty in the North Atlantic, she was used on the Great Lakes with Grand Haven, Michigan, as her permanent station. She carried two 3 in. 50 caliber guns and two 6 pounders. She was powered with turbine machinery with double reduction gear and burned oil as fuel. She was 165 ft. in length. Other characteristics were:

| <u>Beam</u> <u>Molded</u> | <u>Draft</u> <u>Maximum</u> | <u>Displace-</u> <u>ment</u> | <u>Gross</u> <u>Tonnage C.H.</u> | <u>Material</u> <u>Hull</u> | <u>Speed</u> <u>Knots</u> | <u>H.P.</u> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| 36'0" | 13'7" | 1005 | 718 | Steel | 13 | 1500 |

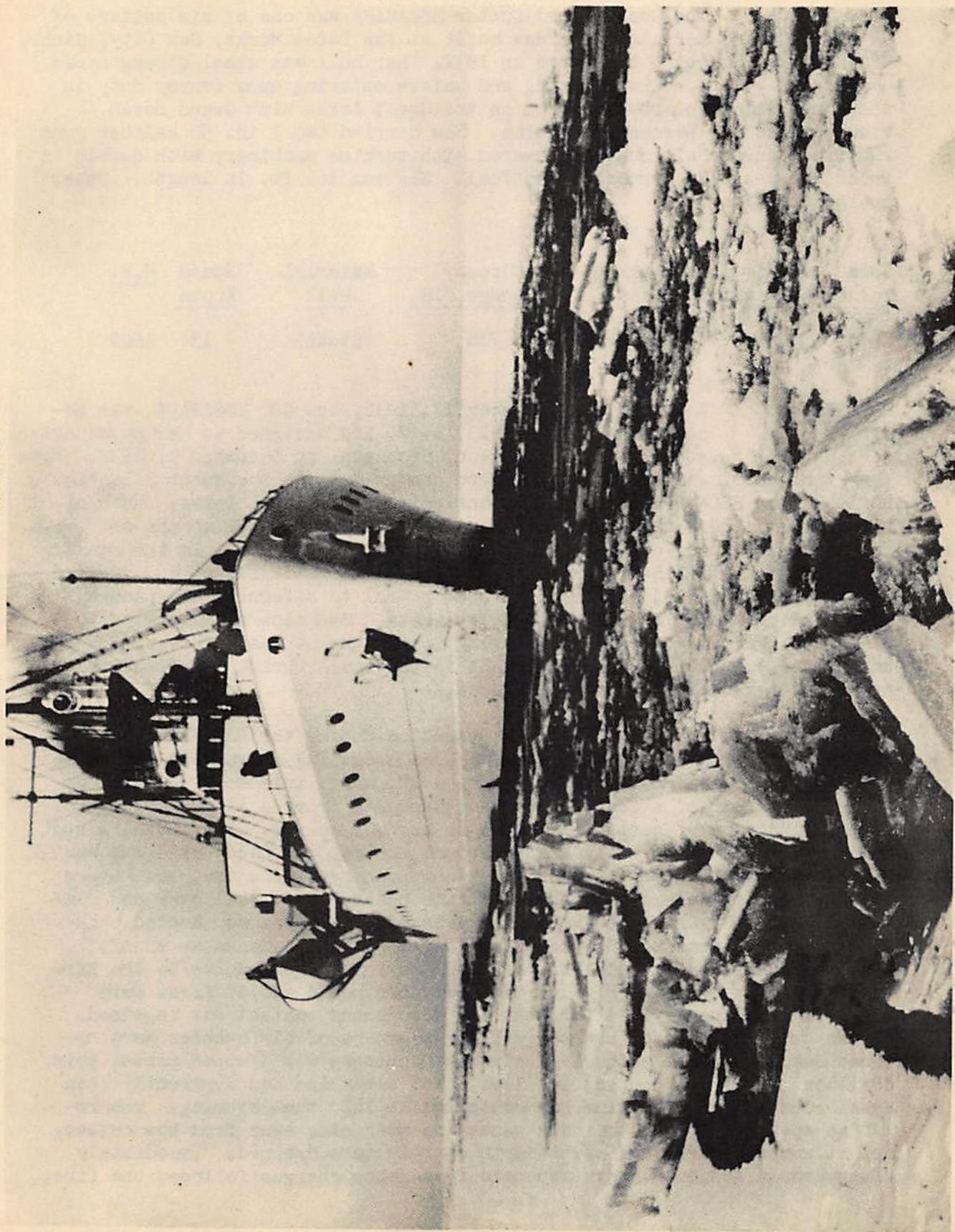
HISTORICAL
SKETCH

Launched on September 17, 1932, the CGC ESCANABA, was accepted on November 23, 1932, and assigned to her permanent station at Grand Haven, Michigan, on December 3, 1932. From that time until she was transferred to convoy duty in the North Atlantic in 1942, the ESCANABA had operated entirely on the Great Lakes. Much of her activity there was in ice breaking. During the winter months she released many fishing boats that had been caught in the ice. In the summer of 1933, when Italian planes made their trans-atlantic flight and visited Chicago, the ESCANABA maintained a boat patrol to safeguard the planes, illuminating their landing with searchlights. She made annual trips to Sault Ste. Marie each spring, breaking ice in the St. Marys River, and helping to cut out ore vessels caught in the ice. During the summer she patrolled regattas and motorboat races.

SINKS TWO
SUBMARINES

From these routine peacetime duties the ESCANABA embarked upon the hazardous work of escorting convoys in the North Atlantic. On 15 June, 1942, while in escort position on the port quarter of a convoy bound for Cape Cod from Halifax, N.S., a definite underwater contact was made on her QC machine. The ESCANABA went into the attack immediately and the sound contact was held until she was 200 yards from the target, when eight depth charges were dropped. Stern lookouts and others aft saw the submarine break water, roll over and disappear. At 800 yards, the ESCANABA reversed her course and headed back for the second attack. She could no longer get the underwater sounds from the submarine's propeller that had previously guided her to the target. The only underwater sounds the operators could get at first were those of escaping air. After that the echo sound contact was regained. As the cutter closed on the target, large groups of air bubbles were noticed dead ahead. A pattern of six depth charges was dropped across this position. Then all contact was lost. The submarine had apparently been sunk. The second submarine was contacted at 1820 that evening. The relative speed indicated that the submarine was going away from the cutter, but it was overtaken and eight depth charges were dropped. Immediately afterwards a second run was made and five depth charges followed the first.

ESCANABA, AS AN ICE BREAKER



Shortly after this, a dark smoke arose to the surface. A large oil slick area was noted, with messes of brown substance floating about. The ESCANABA was unable to regain contact.

RESCUES SUR-
VIVORS OF USS
CHEROKEE

One hour later the ESCANABA was ordered to rejoin the convoy and at 2315 flares and rockets indicated a submarine attack was on. The USS CHEROKEE had been sunk and the survivors were milling around in the water. A monomoy surfboat was put over the side of the ESCANABA in the dark with a volunteer rescue crew. The order was to pick up men swimming alone. Men kept floating near the ship but they could not hold on to the life rings attached to lines that were thrown to them. One man finally got alongside but could not hold on to the rope so as to be pulled aboard. The Executive Officer had husky members of the crew take hold of another one's legs and lower him down the ship's side. As the ship rolled he grabbed the lad in the water and brought him aboard. This method was discarded after that as being too dangerous. However, another plan of action was developed. The ship was taken to the windward of the rafts and the men were allowed to drift down by the rafts. As they drifted to the leeward of the rafts, the propeller was backed intermittently for short intervals so as not to suck survivors under with it. In this manner, the rafts were brought right up under the counter and were secured alongside. All other maneuvers to bring rafts or individual survivors alongside met with failure, since the surface backwash produced by the high seas forced the survivors away from the ship's side. One by one the men on the raft climbed up a fire hose passed from the ship. At the same time men on the quarterdeck hauled them up with a line passed to the raft from the quarterdeck, each survivor being instructed to place the bowline under his arms as his turn came to be hauled aboard. The monomoy surfboat returned with 11 survivors, all of whom had been swimming singly. Eleven men had been brought aboard the ESCANABA with the use of the boat, bringing the total survivors to 22. The use of a boat is very dangerous at such a time for in the darkness it is hard to find when the time comes to depart. If sudden departure were necessary, the ship might have to leave its own boat's crew on the scene of action.

LIGHTS AT-
TRACT SUB

It was planned, however, to send the ship's boat out again, but an unidentified Corvette and the NORLAGA, a small freighter of the convoy which had been designated as a rescue ship, began to use lights to aid in picking up the survivors. These lights were just enough to attract a submarine to the scene in an attempt to sink the rescue ships. A destroyer got a contact with such a submarine coming to attack and made a quick counter attack. The Corvette disappeared and the NORLAGA ran off the scene, and the ESCANABA's boat had to be quickly hoisted in spite of the desire of the boat's crew to go back and pick up other survivors.

DEPTH
CHARGES
LOW

A quick sound sweep was made over the area as soon as the ESCANABA got underway. At the same time, the area was scanned for survivors. The cutter then began a zigzag

evasion course for Boston. If there had been sufficient depth charges on board, the cutter would have remained in the area until daybreak. With so few charges left, however, the cutter was unable to make even one good attack on a submarine. All hands regretted the necessity of leaving when there were men still remaining in the water.

CGC ESCANABARECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

| FISCAL YEAR | Lives Saved or Persons Rescued from Peril (crew and passgrs.) | Persons on Board Vessels Assisted (crew and Passgrs.) | Instances Of lives Saved and vessels as- sisted (Major) | Instances of Miscellaneous Assistance | Value of Vessels Assisted | Value of Cargo |
|-------------|---|--|--|---|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1936 | | 162 | 6 | 1 | \$1,958,900 | \$ 290,200 |
| 1937 | 2 | 124 | 15 | | 998,405 | 57,788 |
| 1938 | 11 | 332 | 6 | | 1,544,750 | 24,500 |
| 1939 | | 63 | 2 | | 1,075,000 | 375,000 |
| 1940 | 11 | 161 | 20 | 4 | 18,170 | 788,000 |
| 1941 | 2 | 28 | 9 | 12 | 1,912,800 | |
| 1942 | 1 | 30 | 5 | | 30,800 | |
| TOTAL | 27 | 900 | 63 | 17 | \$7,538,825 | \$1,535,488 |

CGC ESCANABA

PRINCIPAL WORK PERFORMED

Fiscal Years 1936-1941

| FISCAL YEAR | N U M B E R O F H O U R S E N G A G E D I N | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| | Hours Under Way | Miles Cruised (Nautical) | Vessels Boarded | Vessels Reported | Regattas Patrolled | Assistance Work | Towing Stranded Vessels | Breaking Ice |
| Jan.-June 1936 | 1047 | 5263 | | | | 80 | 38 | 733 |
| 1937 | 1173 | 11277 | | | 9 | 161 | | 390 |
| 1938 | 633 | 6508 | 23 | 1 | 1 | 65 | 27 | 180 |
| 1939 | 831 | 8275 | 1 | | 1 | 212 | 15 | 246 |
| 1940 | 1426 | 10334 | 88 | 24 | 2 | 73 | 5 | 160 |
| 1941 | 1162 | 6992 | 35 | | 3 | 118 | | 657 |

CGC ESCANABARECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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