



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

HAMILTON (1967)

WHEC-715

Motto: "Semper Primus" (Always First)

Call Sign: NMAG

Nicknames: "The Love Boat"; "Ham-Bone"; "Big White Pig Boat" (Prior to FRAM, there was a vanity plate on the starboard side of the main bridge console with the Navy designator WPG-715, on which someone had scratched an "I" making her WPIG); "FRAMilton"; "Spamilton"; "Building 715" ("by our supportive friends at ISC Long Beach"); and Hamil-tron.

Source of Name

WHEC-715 was named after Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury and a strong proponent of the revenue cutter service.

Alexander Hamilton (1755(?)-1804):

Alexander Hamilton, born at Nevis in the Leeward Islands in either 1755 or 1757, emigrated to New York in 1772. He entered Kings College (now Columbia University) in 1773, but interrupted his studies to author several pamphlets supporting the colonial cause. When war came, he was commissioned the captain of an artillery company. Hamilton participated in the Long Island campaign and the retreat through New Jersey. He attracted General George Washington's attention and became his secretary and aide de camp in March 1777. He served as a lieutenant colonel until February 1781 when he resigned his post after a quarrel with Washington. Washington, well aware of Hamilton's ability, allowed him to be appointed to head an infantry regiment which he led brilliantly during the Yorktown campaign.

When the war ended, Hamilton read law at Albany, N.Y., and was admitted to the bar. After a single term in the Continental Congress he returned to private life and began a law practice in New York City. However, he remained active in his support for a strong federal government. He was appointed a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and then waged an almost lone campaign in New York to secure

ratification of the Constitution. In a fierce newspaper war supporting adoption, he conceived the idea for the *Federalist Papers*, most of which he wrote alone or in cooperation with James Madison. Though New York at the time opposed ratification, the sheer force of Hamilton's arguments secured the state's support for the Constitution at the Poughkeepsie meeting in July 1788. In that year he returned to the Continental Congress and figured prominently in the formation of the new government.

Hamilton was appointed Secretary of the Treasury in September 1789 and immediately set out to establish the nation's credit on a sound basis. On 14 January 1790, he submitted a plan to the House of Representatives which became one of his lasting contributions to the foundation of the federal government. He argued that the central government should be responsible for all debts contracted during the Revolution--foreign and domestic--including the debts of the individual states. After fierce opposition, he finally secured adoption of the plan on 4 August 1791.

Hamilton's tenure of office as Secretary of the Treasury lasted until 1795 despite verbal battles with Jefferson, Hamilton's natural antagonist. Both Hamilton and Jefferson conducted propaganda campaigns in the press, and Jefferson finally obtained nine resolutions of censure against Hamilton in Congress. The defeat of those resolutions in 1793 vindicated Hamilton and his policies. Hamilton exercised a great deal of influence over John Adams' negotiations with Great Britain, which secured a treaty favorable to the new nation's domestic economy. This meddling in foreign affairs no doubt influenced Jefferson's decision to resign as Secretary of State at the end of 1793. Jefferson intensified his anti-Hamilton campaign after that because he felt Hamilton to be too speculative at home and pro-British abroad. Domestically, however, Hamilton was secure. He proved that in 1794 when he played a leading role in the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion. He regarded decisive action at this time as an outstanding opportunity for the federal government to exhibit its strength.

Personal financial difficulties forced Hamilton to resign from the cabinet in January 1795 and he never returned to public office. However, he continued to support the Federalist cause and remained a close advisor to Washington. Personal antipathy to John Adams minimized Hamilton's influence during that presidency, though he tried to influence the cabinet. His last two great acts came in 1800 and 1804, respectively, and both had Aaron Burr as their target. During the election of 1800, when Jefferson and Burr tied for the Presidency and the election went to the House of Representatives, Hamilton broke with the other Federalists and used his influence to secure Jefferson's election. In 1804, he successfully maneuvered to assure Burr's defeat in his bid to become governor of New York. It was believed that Burr would probably have joined the secessionist Northern Confederacy had he been elected. Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel on the pretext that Hamilton had expressed a "despicable opinion of him." The duel took place at Weehawken, N.J., on 11 July 1804. Burr wounded Hamilton mortally, and Hamilton died the following day. He was buried at Trinity Church in New York

Earlier Ships of the Name:

Four earlier revenue service and Coast Guard vessels have borne Hamilton's name:

The first *Hamilton*, commissioned in 1830, was the first of a class of 13 revenue cutters, topsail schooners designed by Joshua Humphreys, famed for his "Baltimore clipper" designs. *Hamilton* became well-known as the fastest of her class. *Hamilton* was also famous for numerous rescues. A popular musical number, the "Hamilton Quick Step," celebrated her reputation. *Hamilton* was transferred to Charleston in 1851 and lost in a gale in 1853.

The second *Hamilton*, commissioned in 1871, was a steam-powered single-screw topsail schooner, built at Buffalo, N.Y. From 1871 to 1898, this cutter operated out of Boston, Philadelphia and Norfolk. Detailed to Navy service in the Spanish-American War in 1898, she served briefly on the Havana blockade, coming under fire but not engaging. *Hamilton* returned to Charleston, S.C., and Treasury service and subsequently served on the Carolina, Florida and Gulf coasts until decommissioned and sold in 1906 at Mobile, Ala.

The third *Hamilton* was originally a Navy *Annapolis* class gunboat, *U.S.S. Vicksburg*, authorized in 1895 and built at Bath, Me. *Vicksburg* was steel-framed and wood-planked, with a barkentine rig. Obsolete for combat purposes, *Vicksburg* was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1921 and recommissioned as *Alexander Hamilton*, serving as the training vessel for the Coast Guard Academy for nine years. In 1931 she became a receiving ship at Curtis Bay, Md. From 1939 to 1942 she served as a barracks ship for the Coast Guard Academy. Then she returned to Curtis Bay where she served as a machinists' and water-tender training vessel, renamed *Beta*. *Beta* was decommissioned on 30 December 1944 and transferred to the War Shipping Administration in 1946.

The fourth ship of the name was a cruising cutter of the Treasury class christened *Alexander Hamilton* in 1937, then renamed *Hamilton*, which reverted to her original name while serving with the Navy, to avoid confusion with a minesweeper also named *Hamilton*. She served in the northern Pacific in Alaskan waters until mid 1939, when she was ordered to Norfolk, Va., to operate with Navy Destroyer Division 18 in the North Atlantic. On 29 January 1942, while escorting a disabled storeship into Reykjavik, *Alexander Hamilton* was torpedoed by the German submarine U-132 amidships on the starboard side, flooding the engine rooms and disabling the generators. A total of 32 of her crew died as a result of the attack. Eighty-one men were successfully taken off and the crippled vessel taken in tow until she capsized the following day. Her escorts sank the hull by gunfire to avoid leaving a hazard to navigation. Her final resting place was unknown until August, 2009 when the Icelandic Coast Guard found her wreck in Faxflói, or Faxe Bay, 28 miles off the coast of Iceland.

Coast Guard High-Endurance Cutter WHEC 715

“High endurance” cutters of the Hamilton class (designated WHEC) succeeded cruising cutters for ocean service. The basic criterion for a high-endurance cutter was ability to operate continuously at sea for 30 days or more, so that they could maintain established ocean and weather stations as well as perform coastal missions. At the time the new WHECs were designed, the Coast Guard had been relying since 1944 on vessels converted from the U.S. Navy service for its largest cutters.

The *Hamilton* class of twelve WHEC cutters met added design criteria for inter-operability with U.S. Navy warships, including weapons systems and speed. They achieved the speed by using CODOG (combination diesel or gasoline) technology which permitted them to cruise at economic speeds under diesel power or pursuit speeds using gasoline-fueled aircraft turbines for power. At the time they were built only one class of warship in the world used a similar system, a West German frigate design. This technology has since become standard for high performance vessels.

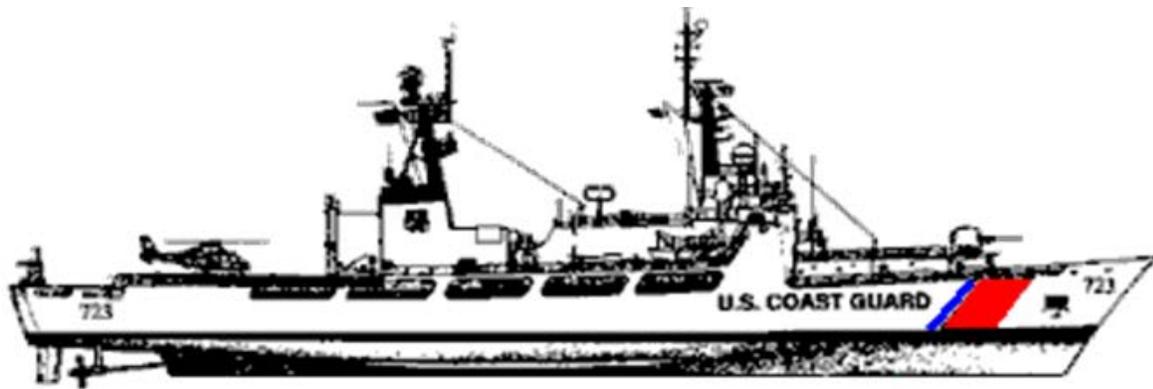
In addition to the main propulsion system, the ships in this class had a retractable, fully rotatable General Electric bow thruster which boosted their maneuverability and permitted them to operate at up to five knots without using the main propulsion system.

Other design features included large and more comfortable living spaces to permit longer times at sea; a hull design that drew on the British-favored V cross section rather than the U cross-section then favored for U.S. Navy vessels; and wet and dry labs to support oceanographic and meteorological research while on station. The longer sea-time capability was expected to enhance the value of cutters as ocean navigational aids and weather stations. The new hull design was the result of extensive tank testing of four 20-foot wooden hull models, which led to a hull expected to survive and stay afloat longer after suffering damage. The original design also included an 80-foot landing pad that could accommodate the large boat-hulled amphibious helicopters then used by the Coast Guard for air-sea rescues. It was also equipped with a weather balloon shelter which also served as a “nose shelter” for the large helicopters.

In order to maintain their inter-operability with U.S. Navy warships the entire class underwent Fleet Retention and Maintenance (FRAM) renovation after two decades which increased their Coast Guard service life to 44 years and added aviation, electronic and gunnery capabilities. One aviation modification is visible in profile in the expandable hangar, that rolls out onto the landing pad to permit today’s smaller helicopters to be completely sheltered from heavy weather and to be maintained at sea, shortening the usable length of the landing pad. Another visible change was the enclosure of the sixth bay of the open walkways that originally stretched from just aft of the bridge to the afterdeck, which changed the original sleek lines of the class. Other visible changes in profile included the elevation of the forward gun platform, as well as the addition of an electronics dome atop the bridge and forward of the mast. Later a Phalanx CIWS anti-ship-missile system was mounted at the stern rail.



Hamilton class before FRAM modifications



Hamilton class as re-configured by 1999

The first two cutters of this class retired from service (*Hamilton* and *Chase*) have been commissioned in the Philippine and Nigerian navies respectively as frigates.

Builder: Avondale Shipyard (Northrop Grumman), New Orleans, La.

Launched: December 18, 1965

Commissioned: March 18, 1967

Decommissioned: March 28, 2011 Sold to the Philippine Navy and recommissioned as patrol frigate *Gregorio del Pilar* (PF-15).

Length: 378' overall, 350' waterline.

Beam: 42'

Draft: 13'6" (design)

Displacement: 2,716 tons (approx.)

Hull: V-shaped bow design, aluminum with welded steel, two compartment floodable length and anti-rolling tank

Speed: Maximum sustained, 29 knots; cruising 20 knots, minimum, all speeds down to 0 knots

Endurance: 2,000 miles at 29 knots; 9600 miles @ 20 knots

Range at 20 knots: 12,000 nautical miles

Power: 36,000 shaft horsepower

Fuel capacity: 732 tons diesel, 18 tons JP5 (aviation)

Fresh water capacity: 16,000 gallons; 7,500 gallons/day evaporation

Auxiliary power generator 3 @ 500 KW each

Main propulsion: Two controllable pitch propellers; diesels, 3,500 hp per shaft; gas turbines, 18,000 hp per shaft

Control: Pilot house, engine room control booth, and local

Armament: pre-FRAM – one 5-inch/38 caliber dual-purpose gun forward; two Mk 67 20mm cannons; post-FRAM – one Otobreda 76 mm (3-inch) cannon on an elevated platform, two 25 mm Mk 38 antiaircraft cannons; later addition -- one stern-mounted Mk 15 20 mm Phalanx Close In Weapons System (CIWS), a radar-guided anti-ship-missile "Gatling gun"

Crew capacity: 15 officers, 149 enlisted; later increased to a total of 173.

Cutter History:

Fourteen months after launch, *Hamilton* was commissioned in 1967 and homeported at Boston, from which it patrolled Atlantic Ocean Stations Bravo, Charlie and Delta.

In November 1969 *Hamilton* joined Coast Guard Squadron Three, fifth deployment, with sister cutters *Dallas* (WHEC 716), *Mellon* (WHEC 717), *Chase* (WHEC 718) and the older *Ponchartrain*, (WHEC 70). Squadron Three's duties included participation in the

Navy's Market Time operation, consisting of coastal surveillance and naval gunfire support (NGFS) missions. In this role *Hamilton* interdicted weapons smuggling and fired more than 4,600 rounds of gunfire in support of troops ashore. *Hamilton's* crew also participated in medical civilian assistance programs (MEDCAPs) providing temporary medical dispensaries, civic action and charitable projects to civilians ashore.

After ten months in the Vietnam theatre, *Hamilton* returned to Boston and resumed ocean station patrols in the Atlantic and Caribbean, participating in oceanographic, law enforcement and search and rescue (SAR) operations. After closure of the ocean stations in 1975, *Hamilton* participated in Operation Buccaneer, a surveillance and interdiction effort to intercept marijuana and contraband shipments in the Windward Channel. These operations lasted until 1984.

In October 1985 *Hamilton* began FRAM reconstruction at Bath Iron Works, Bath, Me., which continued to the end of 1988. In 1991 *Hamilton* left its Boston homeport for a new homeport in San Pedro, California.

In 1993 and 1994 *Hamilton* participated in Operations Able Manner and Able Vigil. During Operation Able Manner (15 January 1993 to 26 November 1994), *Hamilton* was the on-scene commander for seventeen cutters, nine aircraft, and five U.S. Navy vessels operating off the Haitian coast, intercepting 25,177 individual migrants fleeing Haiti, as many as 3,247 in a single day. The operation took over 6,000 cutter days and 14,000 flight hours. The second mission, Operation Able Vigil (19 August to 23 September 1994) involved twenty-nine cutters, including *Hamilton*, six aircraft, and nine U.S. Navy ships operating in the Straits of Florida, and intercepted 30,224 Cuban migrants, as many as 3,253 in one day. *Hamilton* received the Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation for rescuing 135 Haitians from the sea after their sailboat capsized and sank.

In 1996, *Hamilton* once again transited the Panama Canal and served as the command and control platform for Operation Frontier Shield, a multi-agency effort to curtail the influx of narcotics into the United States via the Panama Canal and the Caribbean. *Hamilton* intercepted 14 drug-laden vessels carrying more than 115 tons of contraband worth 200 million dollars. In 1999, *Hamilton* seized over 2,700 kilograms of cocaine bound for the U.S. in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The same year *Hamilton* was transferred to San Diego.

Between these interdiction operations, *Hamilton's* usual patrols and missions included search and rescue (SAR); patrolling the Bering Sea off the Alaska coast at the Maritime Boundary Line (MBL), which separates the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of Russia and the United States; and supporting Homeland Security operations.

In March 2007 *Hamilton* assisted the *Sherman* in the largest recorded maritime drug seizure to date. The two vessels intercepted the Panamanian-flagged fishing vessel *Gatun* in international waters and recovered 20 metric tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$600 million dollars.

In his announcement of her decommissioning in 2011, after 44 years of service, Commandant Papp concluded with this summary:

“DURING HER LAST YEAR OF SERVICE, CGC HAMILTON CRUISED ALL AHEAD FULL, SAILING FOR 205 DAYS IN 2010, COVERING OVER 50,000 NAUTICAL MILES, IN SUPPORT OF HAITIAN EARTHQUAKE RELIEF, EASTPAC COUNTER-DRUG OPERATIONS, AND WINTER PATROL IN THE BERING SEA. I KNOW THAT IT WAS HER HARD WORKING CREW THAT MADE THESE EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS POSSIBLE - THIS IS AN ACHIEVEMENT THAT TRULY HONORS OUR PROFESSION.”

Sources:

Cutter History File, U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Scheina, Robert. U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

