



## Alert, 1927

WSC / WMEC-127



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Vigilantly attentive; watchful.

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CLASS: Active Class Patrol Boat

BUILDER: American Brown Boveri Electric Corp., Camden, NJ

COMMISSIONED: 27 January 1927

LAUNCHED: 30 November 1926

DECOMMISSIONED: 10 January 1969 and sold 6 October 1969

DISPLACEMENT: 232 tons

LENGTH: 125 feet

BEAM: 23 feet, 6 inches

DRAFT: 7 feet, 6 inches

PROPULSION: 2 x 6-cylinder, 300 hp diesel engines

PERFORMANCE:

Max speed: 13 knots, 1945, 2,500 mile range

Econ. speed: 8.0 knots, 3,500 mile range

COMPLEMENT: 3 officers, 17 men

ARMAMENT: 1927: 1x 3"/27

1941: 1 x 3"/23, 2 x depth charge tracks

1945: 1 x 40mm/80 (single), 2 x 20mm/80 (single), 2 x depth charge tracks, 2 x mousetraps

1960: 1 x 40mm/60

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### Class History:

This class of vessels was one of the most useful and long-lasting in Coast Guard service with 16 cutters still in use in the 1960s. The last to be decommissioned from active service was the *Morris* in 1970; the last in actual service was the *Cuyahoga*, which sank after an accidental collision in 1978. They were designed

for trailing the "mother ships" along the outer line of patrol during Prohibition. They were constructed at a cost of \$63,173 each. They gained a reputation for durability that was only enhanced by their re-engining in the late 1930's; their original 6-cylinder diesels were replaced by significantly more powerful 8-cylinder units that used the original engine beds and gave the vessels 3 additional knots. All served in World War II, but two, the *Jackson* and *Bedloe*, were lost in a storm in 1944. Ten were refitted as buoy tenders during the war and reverted to patrol work afterward.

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## History:

The contract for the *Alert* was awarded on 27 May 1926. She was built by the American Brown Boveri Electrical Corporation at Camden, New Jersey, and was launched on 30 November 1926. She was placed in commission on 27 January 1927 under the command of [Warrant] Boatswain A. F. Pitman, USCG.

Immediately following her commissioning, the *Alert* proceeded to her permanent station at Boston, Massachusetts, holding sea trials, formation drills, anchorage drills, and gunnery practice enroute. She berthed at the Boston Navy Yard. Pitman resigned from the service and was relieved by Boatswain Ray E. Parker, USCG, during the first week of March, 1927. Parker remained in command of the *Alert* until 4 November 1927 when Boatswain Stacy Y. Hammond, USCG, relieved him. Hammond commanded the cutter until 15 May 1931. The *Alert* continued operating out of Boston as a unit of Division One, Offshore Patrol Force, a Prohibition enforcement unit, until mid-November 1928, when she was detached and ordered to the West Coast as a new permanent station. Officially her permanent change of station to Oakland, California, took place on 5 January 1929.

After steaming to New London, Connecticut, the *Alert* joined company with other cutters of her class: *Bonham*, *Ewing*, *Morris*, and *McLane*, enroute to their new stations. The cutters stopped at New York, New York; Charleston, South Carolina; Kingston, Jamaica; both sides of the Panama Canal; Acapulco, Mexico; Mazatlan, Mexico, and arrived at San Pedro, California on 6 January 1929. After receiving a report from the Commander, Pacific Division, Offshore Patrol Force regarding this voyage, the *Alert* was commended by the Commandant as follows: In the 6,000 mile run the *ALERT* was always exactly on station in formation, at no time did she report machinery trouble, and upon arriving in San Francisco she was ready to go on patrol. This excellent performance is, of course, directly attributable to the energy and efficiency of the personnel attached.

The *Alert* proceeded to San Francisco, where arrangements were made to berth her at the Base Eleven Docks at Oakland. Early in June, 1929, the *Alert* received orders to change her permanent station to San Pedro, California, where she operated out of Base Seventeen. This change of station was due to the operational methods of the "Blacks" (large "mother rumships" that sailed in

international waters offshore and transferred liquor to smaller vessels that made the run to shore). These Blacks had changed their locations to off Guadalupe Island and far down the coast of lower California, necessitating a run of 600 miles or more before the 125-footers stationed at Oakland reached the scene of picketing.

The *Alert* continued operations out of this station, performing regular patrols, responding to distress calls, and towing work as assigned until her permanent station was changed to Ketchikan, Alaska, on 5 May 1931. At that time Hammond was relieved of command by Chief Boatswain Albert Nelson. During her stay at Ketchikan, she was assigned to the Bering Sea Patrol on the following dates:

15 July 1937 - 8 September 1937

20 April 1938 - 2 July 1938

1 July 1939 - 9 September 1939

On 2 February 1940 she was assigned to Alameda, California, as a permanent changed of station. Previously, she had been assigned to the 1940 Bering Sea Patrol on 24 January 1940 and , on 7 February 1940, she was ordered to be a standby vessel for the Bering Sea Patrol, in case her services were needed. After having additional weaponry added, she was assigned to the Navy's Western Sea Frontier but her permanent station officially remained Alameda. She was given the designation and hull number WSC-127 at this time. During the war she was assigned as a training vessel.

On 8 September 1945 the Navy returned administrative and operations control of the *Alert* back to the Coast Guard, at which time she resumed her normal duties at her permanent station at Alameda. Four years after the end of World War II the cutters' permanent station was changed to Morro Bay, California on 21 June 1949. The Commander, 12th Coast Guard District, explained the rationale for such a change as follows:

The decision to station the *ALERT* (WSC-127) at Morro Bay and the *EWING* (WSC-137) at Alameda was based on the advisability of having the *EWING*, which has been in the mothball fleet for approximately two years, closer to the district offices and Bay area shipyards for the purpose of closer supervision of the numerous details associated with recommissioning.

During her time at Morro Bay, she participated in the search and rescue case for the first "LEHI" raft which attempted to float to Hawaii. By the mid-1950s, the continued erosion of the Morro Bay breakwater indicated that it "will eventually make egress and ingress to Morro Bay extremely hazardous for the *ALERT*." Also the "extent of CG assistance work in the area covered by the *ALERT* is below that of any other comparable area within the 12th District. This is probably due to the absence of suitable ports for fishing and pleasure boats." Accordingly,

thought was given to the recommendation that "a vessel of the ALERT class be stationed in the southern part of the 12th District." On 20 February 1959 she had her permanent station changed to San Diego, where she was berthed at the Grape Street Pier. During this transfer, the *Alert* and the CGC *Perseus* exchanged crews. From San Diego her patrol area included the waters between Oceanside to Baja California's Cape San Lucas. A press release dated from 1967 noted that:

An estimated 90 per cent of her underway time is spent assisting distressed small craft skippers. The remainder is generally allotted to disabled members of San Diego's commercial fishing fleet. Most of the cutter's 65 to 70 rescue cases each year emanate within a 25-mile radius of Point Loma. During 1966, three emergencies involving American boatmen necessitated runs along nearly the entire length of Baja California's 750-mile peninsula. Carrying a crew of three officers and 25 enlisted men, the 290-ton Alert boats a beam of 24-feet. While cruising at 10 knots, she has a range of 2300 miles. Her twin 400-horsepower diesel engines can develop a top speed of 19 knots.

A former crewman noted that the aforementioned press release was overly optimistic about her top speed. The crewman noted: "Now I spent two tours for a total of 4 years as her radioman back in the late 50s and mid 60s and having been qualified as an underway OOD I can tell you for sure she would not get a kick over 13 kts."

Her decommissioning was authorized on 12 July 1968 and on 10 January 1969 she was decommissioned. On 28 October 1969 she was sold to Highland Laboratories of San Francisco for \$30,476.19.

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**USCGC *Alert* in the mid-1950s. BM3 Chuck Needels is the coxswain of *Alert's* small boat in this photo.**

**Provided courtesy of Jerry Gilmartin & Chuck Needels.**

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**Sources:**

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