

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

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# *Gresham, 1947*



AGP-9; AVP-57; WAVP / WHEC / WAGW-387  
ex-USS *Willoughby*  
Radio call sign: NODB

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The *Gresham* was named for Secretary of the Treasury Walter Q. Gresham, who was appointed to that position by President Chester Arthur in 1884.

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Builder: Lake Washington Shipyard, Houghton, Washington

Commissioned: 18 January 1944 (USN); transferred to the Coast Guard on 26 June 1946;  
01 December 1947 (USCG)

Decommissioned: 25 April 1973

Disposition: Turned over to the Maritime Administration on 21 May 1973 for lay-up in the James River; sold for scrap on 25 October 1973.

**PARTICULARS, AS OF 1965:**

Length: 309' 9 1/2" oa; 298' 9 3/8" bp

Beam: 41' 2 1/8"

Draft: 13' 1/2" aft (full load)

Displacement: 2,530.7 tons full load

Propulsion: Fairbanks-Morse, direct reversing diesels

SHP: 6,080

Top speed: 18.3 knots (full load)

Economical speed: 11.0 knots; cruising range of 20,500 nautical miles.

Complement: 10 officers, 3 warrants, 138 enlisted crewmen

Radar (1 each): AN-SPS-29D; MK 26 Mod 3; AN-UPX-1; AN-SPA-34; AN-SPS-23; ID-445-SPS; IP-307-SPS; AN-SPA-52; IP-306-SPS

Sonar (1 of each): AN-SQS-1; 55134-B; Mk-461-UQC-1A; AN-SQA-2

Armament: 1 x 5"/38, Mk 30 Mod 65; Mk 52-2 Mod 3 director; Mk 26-4 fire-control radar; 1 x Mk 10-1 A/S projector; 2 x Mk 32 Mod 2 torpedo tubes

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### **Class History:**

The *Casco* class ships were built as small seaplane tenders by the US Navy. They were designed to operate out of small harbors and atolls and had a shallow draft. The fact that the class was very seaworthy, had good habitability, and long range made them well suited to ocean-station duty. In fact, an assessment made by the Coast Guard on the suitability of these vessels for Coast Guard service noted:

"The workmanship on the vessel is generally quite superior to that observed on other vessels constructed during the war. The vessel has ample space for stores, living accommodations, ships, offices and recreational facilities. The main engine system is excellent. . . .The performance of the vessel in moderate to heavy seas is definitely superior to that of any other cutter. This vessel can be operated at higher speed without storm damage than other Coast Guard vessels." [Memo, CDR W. C. Hogan, Commanding Officer, CGC MC CULLOCH to Commandant "SUBJ; CGC MC CULLOCH, Sutiability [sic] for use as CG Cutter.", 12 February 1947; copy in 311-Class Cutter File, USCG Historian's Office.]

Once they were accepted into Coast Guard service, a number of changes were made in these ships to prepare them for ocean-station duty. A balloon shelter was added aft; there were spaces devoted to oceanographic equipment and a hydrographic winch and an oceanographic winch were added.

See *DANFS* for naval service.

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### **Cutter History:**

*Gresham* (ex- USS *Willoughby*) was a Navy *Barnegat* or *Oyster*-class 311- foot ship originally built as a small seaplane tender by the U.S. Navy but was converted during construction to a motor torpedo (PT) boat tender. *Willoughby* was decommissioned on 26 June 1946 and was simultaneously turned over to the Coast Guard at Government Island, Oakland, California. Her name was struck from the Navy list on 19 July 1946. She then underwent a conversion to a weather vessel.

Renamed *Gresham* and classified as WAVP-387, the erstwhile motor torpedo boat tender served with the Coast Guard through the 1960s. She was first assigned to the 12th Coast Guard District and was homeported in Alameda, California until 1970. During her Coast Guard career her primary duty was that of patrolling ocean weather stations in the Pacific for the purpose of gathering meteorological data. She also carried out traditional duties of Coast Guard cutters, including participating in SAR and law enforcement operations and providing navigational and communication assistance to commercial and military aircraft. The *Gresham* was at times assigned to the Bering Sea Patrol. She participated in reserve training cruises to keep members of the Coast Guard Reserve proficient in the seagoing arts, and maintained her military readiness by participating in the U.S. Navy's underway refresher training program. In 1965, she was reclassified as a high endurance cutter, WHEC-387.

She began her first ocean station patrol on 26 March 1948, when she proceeded to Ocean Station Fox. Her duties for the next few months included mine patrols, coastal patrols, and assignment to ocean stations Fox and Able. During July 1949 she helped patrol the Trans-Pacific Yacht Race from Los Angeles to Honolulu. On 9 September 1949 *Gresham* provided assistance to the British steamship *Pacific Enterprise*, which was aground two miles north of the Point Arena Light Station in the thick fog. On 8 January 1950 she was assigned to Ocean Station Peter in the Pacific and was relieved on 29 January by the CGC *Winnebago*. Also during 1950 she had duty on ocean stations Nan and Oboe. In 1951 she added stations Uncle and Sugar to her duty. On 16 June 1951 she was relieved on Ocean Station Sugar by the CGC *Chautauqua* and proceeded to Yokosuka, Japan. Again in March 1952 and February 1954 she made the cruise from Ocean Station Sugar to Yokosuka.

On 22 May 1955 she assisted the SS *David Thompson* which was adrift. During July of that year she again escorted the Trans-Pacific Yacht Race to Honolulu. On 13 August 1956, after several

more weather patrols, *Gresham* departed for Vancouver, British Columbia, via Port Angeles, Washington on a reserve training cruise. On 30 September 1956, she was relieved from Ocean Station November by the CGC *Pontchartrain*. A few days later, on 17 October 1956, the now-famous rescue of the *Sovereign of the Skies* by the *Pontchartrain* took place. The *Gresham* left Alameda to rendezvous with *Pontchartrain* at San Francisco Light Station as she brought in the rescued passengers on 19 October.

Tragedy struck while relieving CGC *Klamath* on Ocean Station Romeo on 17 December 1958. While transferring mail from *Gresham* to *Klamath* while steaming in line-ahead with 500 yards separating the cutters and *Gresham* leading, "A huge wave engulfed the quarter deck of the *Gresham*." The wave injured 11 men and washed ENS George T. Bergman overboard. He apparently sustained a severe head injury as he was flung off the *Gresham* by the wave and was not recovered.

During the next two years, she served on Ocean Station November a total of seven times. She got a slight break from her ordinary routine and a small part to play on the Cold War stage when the Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, paid a visit to San Francisco during his state visit to the United States. The U.S. representative to the United Nations, Henry Cabot Lodge, arranged a tour of San Francisco Bay for the Soviet Premier aboard the *Gresham*, which was in port at the time. She then returned to duty on Ocean Station November throughout the next few years.

In 1967, with the formation of Coast Guard Squadron Three, she operated in conjunction with Navy forces on Operation "Market Time"; the interdiction of communist coastal arms and munitions traffic along the coastline of Vietnam. Other duties included fire support for ground forces, resupplying Coast Guard and Navy patrol boats and SAR as needed. She departed San Francisco for Pearl Harbor on 16 April 1967 under the command of CDR Norman L. Scherer, USCG. Upon her arrival in Hawaii, she was "bestowed the honor" of serving as the flagship for Coast Guard Squadron Three, designated Task Unit 70.8.6, under the command of CAPT John E. Day, who then hoisted his pennant aboard *Gresham* upon activation of the Squadron on 24 April 1967. Serving with *Gresham* were the CGCs *Yakutat*, *Bering Strait*, *Barataria*, and *Half Moon*. They departed Pearl Harbor on 26 April and reported to commander Seventh Fleet for Market Time duty on 4 May 1967. They were joined by Navy DERs of Escort Squadrons 5 and 7. They arrived at Subic Bay on 10 May 1967. Five cutters and five escort ships continuously manned four Market Time stations off Vietnam while only Navy warships served on two Taiwan patrol stations. One ship rotated duty as the station ship in Hong Kong. *Gresham* remained in theatre until 28 January 1968 and arrived home at Alameda on 10 February 1968.

She made her final patrol in the Pacific where she served on Ocean Station November during September of 1969. During this last patrol, on the night of the 23rd, she went to the assistance of the 543-foot containerized cargo vessel SS *Hawaiian Legislator*, which lost power in her main propulsion gear, and was adrift approximately 70 miles south of *Gresham's* position. After rendezvousing first with the USS *Firedrake* (AE-14) to transfer a Coast Guardsman with appendicitis for transport to San Francisco, *Gresham* then steamed to the aid of the merchant vessel and took her under tow towards San Pedro, California. On 26 September 1969 she turned the tow over to a commercial tug and then she sailed for San Francisco, mooring at Government Island, Alameda, on 30 September 1969. She was then deactivated and mothballed.

In January 1970 she was reactivated and then transferred to the east coast with her new homeport being Norfolk, Virginia. Here she was assigned the duty of establishing a new weather station, code-named "Hotel," located approximately 250 miles northeast of Norfolk. The station was opened to report critical weather data necessary to improve the storm-warning forecasts for the Northeast U.S., particularly after the winter storms of 1969 shut down large areas of the northeast. A new buoy, designated the XERB-1, was also tested for use on Ocean Station November in conjunction with the cutter. The *Gresham* arrived in Norfolk on 7 February 1970 and established Ocean Station Hotel on 20 February. Her designation was changed once again, this time on 27 February to WAGW-387, indicating that she was a dedicated meteorological cutter. She was scheduled for decommissioning in 1973 and the *Taney* was assigned to take her place on Ocean Station Hotel. *Gresham* was formally decommissioned on 25 April 1973.

*Gresham* was turned over to the Maritime Administration on 21 May 1973 for lay-up in the James River. She was sold for scrap on 25 October 1973 to B. V. Intershitra of Rotterdam, Holland.

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**Photographs:**



*Gresham, no caption/date [1960?].*



*Gresham*: original caption stated: "USCGC GRESHAM ON MARKET TIME: As flagship of the newly-formed Coast Guard Squadron Three, *Gresham* leads the five-ship convoy west from Pearl Harbor to the Philippines. From Subic Bay, after last minute briefings and additional training, the cutters sailed on to Vietnam and Market Time patrols."; Coast Guard Photo Number Gresham-050867-1 (#1 of 10); M.E. Beach, SN, USCG, photographer



*Gresham*: original caption stated: "USCGC GRESHAM ON MARKET TIME: Two of her 'charges' approach *Gresham* to receive food, ammunition and fresh crews. The speedy little swift boats help cover the Market Time patrol areas in closer to shore, but depend upon the larger ships for support. Normally the six-man swift boat crews spend 24 hours on patrol, then switch crews for the next 24. On many Market Time stations the relief crews actually live aboard the cutters while waiting for their next patrol."; Coast Guard Photo Number Gresham-091367-1 (#9 of 10); M. E. Beach, SN, USCG, photographer.



*Gresham*: original caption stated: "USCGC GRESHAM ON MARKET TIME: *Gresham*'s five-incher provides gunfire support for friendly forces ashore in South Vietnam. On at least 10 occasions during the past few months, she has been called upon to bombard enemy staging areas, supply points, or troop concentrations several miles inland, and in each instance the accuracy of her fire has been sufficient to accomplish the intended objective. She is also equipped with several .50 caliber machine guns and 81mm mortars for use in short range combat."; Coast Guard Photo Number Gresham-111767-1 (#8 of 10); M. E. Beach, SN, USCG, photographer



*Gresham*, broadside: original caption stated: "The 311-foot high endurance Cutter GRESHAM (WHEC 387)."; No number listed; date unknown; M.E. Beach, SN, USCG, photographer.



*Gresham*, 10 February 1968, on her way home from Vietnam; no caption/photo number

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**Sources:**

*Gresham*, Cutter Subject File, USCG Historian's Office

*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. VIII (1981), pp. 384-387.

"Listings: AVP's"; compiled and written by LCDR J. P. Smith, USCGR, copy in 311' Class Cutter File, USCG Historian's Office.

Memo, CDR W. C. Hogan, Commanding Officer, CGC MC CULLOCH to Commandant "SUBJ; CGC MC CULLOCH, Sutiability [sic] for use as CG Cutter.", 12 February 1947; copy in 311-Class Cutter File, USCG Historian's Office.

Robert Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), pp. 10-16.

*Ship's Characteristics Card: USCGC Gresham*, 30 April 1965.

