



Iris, 1865

A plant of the genus *Iris*, with sword-shaped leaves and variously colored flowers.

Builder: Brooklyn, New York

Length: 87'

Beam: 23' 2"

Draft: 9' 6"

Displacement: 281 tons

Cost: \$13,500

Commissioned: 1865

Decommissioned: 1892

Disposition: Sold

Machinery: Overhead LP condensing independent slide valve steam engine; single Flue Water Leg coal-fired boiler; single propeller; 70 BHP

Performance & Endurance:

Max:

Cruising:

Deck Gear:

Complement:

Armament: None (USLHS)

History:

Iris was built as *Willet Rowe* at Brooklyn, New York, in 1863 and was purchased by the Navy in New York City from C. W. Copeland 16 October of that year. She was outfitted as an armed tug and sailed from New York 2 November to join the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron off Charleston 6 November. She took station inside the bar at Charleston where she served faithfully during most of the remainder of the war. *Iris* steamed with *Nipsic* to the North Edisto River 8 February 1864 to support a reconnaissance in force undertaken by the Army as a diversion to prevent Southern troops in the Charleston area from moving to Florida for action against Brigadier General Truman Seymour. A week later she was back at her old station inside the bar. On 12 December *Iris* moved to the Savannah River to be on hand to support General W. T. Sherman at the end of his march through Georgia to the sea where he was assured of supplies and a secure operating base behind the big guns of the Navy. From Savannah she sailed to Port Royal for repairs, arriving 1 January 1865. *Iris* returned to service early in February in time to participate in the expedition to Bull's Bay which diverted Confederate troops from General Sherman's path as he marched north close to the sea ever ready to retire to the coast under Naval protection if necessary. The combined forces departed Charleston Roads on the night of 11 February and entered Bull's Bay before daybreak the next morning. The Union ships engaged enemy forts at Andersonville 13 February but found the Confederate positions too strong to carry. The next 2 days were spent exploring the marshlands in the area seeking a route which would enable the Northern vessels to approach Andersonville from the rear. A passage was found on the night of 15 February enabling *Iris* and other ships to land troops behind the fortress which soon fell. This diversionary movement was one of the factors which compelled the Confederacy to evacuate Charleston where the war had begun four long years earlier, with the firing on Fort Sumter. *Iris* remained in Charleston until 28 April when she sailed with eight other ships to the coast of Florida to intercept Jefferson Davis and his cabinet in their flight toward political asylum in Cuba. Upon learning of Davis' capture at Irwinville, GA, she returned to Charleston where she remained until sailing north with Rear Admiral Dahlgren in *Pawnee* 17 June.

She decommissioned at Washington Navy Yard 15 July 1865 and was transferred to the Treasury Department for the Lighthouse Service 18 October 1865. She was the first propeller-driven ship brought into the Lighthouse Service and she served as an engineering tender. She was assigned to the 1st Lighthouse District and was based out of Portland, ME. She was rebuilt by Dialogue & Wood of Camden, New Jersey, in 1871 at a cost of \$27,945 and was lengthened to 115 feet. She received new boilers in the fall of 1879 and then again in October, 1888. She was decommissioned and sold for \$2,200 in 1892.

Sources:

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.

Douglas Peterson. *United States Lighthouse Service Tenders, 1840-1939.* Annapolis: Eastwind Publishing, 2000.
