



Mendota, 1945

WPG/WHEC-69

The *Mendota* was named for Mendota Lake, Minnesota.

Call sign: NRUS

Builder: Coast Guard Yard, Curtis Bay, MD

Commissioned: 2 June 1945; decommissioned 1 November 1973; sold for scrap (?)

PARTICULARS, AS OF 1966:

Length: 254'oa; 245'bp

Navigation Draft: 17'3" max

Beam: 43'1" max

Displacement: 1,978 fl

Main Engines: 1 Westinghouse 18-P-601 electric motor driven by a turbine.

SHP: 4,000 total

Performance, Maximum Sustained: 17.0 kts, 6,157-mi radius

Performance, Economic: 10.0 kts., 10,376-mi radius

Fuel Capacity: 141,755 gal

Complement: 10 officers, 3 warrants, 130 men

Electronics:

Detection Radar: SPS-23, SPS-29B

Sonar: SQS-1

Armament: 1 x MK-12 M1 5"/38; Hedgehog; 1 x MK-52 M3 director; 1 x MK 26 M3 fire control radar;

2 x MK 44 triple-tube torpedo launchers (added in 1966).

Class history—"The bow and the stern for each other yearn, and the lack of interval shows..."

Myths have long shadowed the design history of the 255-foot class. These cutters were to have been much larger ships, and two theories persist as to why they were shortened. The first is that these cutters were built to replace the ships given to Great Britain under lend lease, and Congress stipulated that the Coast Guard had to build these replacement cutters to the same size and character as those provided to the British. The second is that their length was determined by the maximum length that could pass through the locks of the Welland Canal from the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River. The Great Lakes shipbuilding industry brought pressure on Congress to ensure that it had the potential to bid on the contract. The first theory seems to be correct, but the second cannot be ruled out.

The Coast Guard had prepared a design for a 316-foot cutter that was to have been an austere 327. This design was cut down into the 255-foot ship. To accomplish this, everything was squeezed down and automated to a degree not before achieved in a turbo-electric-driven ship.

The machinery design of the 255s was compact and innovative, but overly complex. It had pilothouse control, variable-rate (10 to 1) burners, and automatic synchronizing between the turbo-generator and the motor. Westinghouse engineers developed a system of synchronization and a variable-frequency drive for main-propulsion auxiliary equipment, which kept the pumps and other items at about two-thirds the power required for constant-frequency operation. The combined boiler room/engine room was a break with tradition.

The turbo-alternators for ship-service power exhausted at 20 psi gauge pressure instead of into a condenser. This steam was used all over the ship before finally going to a condenser. Space, heating, galley, cooking, laundry, freshwater evaporation, fuel, and feed-water heating were all taken from the 20 psi backpressure line.

The 255-foot class was an ice-going design. Ice operations had been assigned to the Coast Guard early in the war, and almost all new construction was either ice-going or ice-breaking.

The hull was designed with constant flare at the waterline for ice-going. The structure was longitudinally framed with heavy web frames and an ice belt of heavy plating, and it had extra transverse framing above and below the design waterline. Enormous amounts of weight were removed through the use of electric welding. The 250-foot cutters' weights were used for estimating purposes. Tapered bulkhead stiffeners cut from 12" I-beams went from the main deck (4' depth of web) to the bottom (8" depth of web). As weight was cut out of the hull structure, electronics and ordnance were increased, but at much greater heights. This top weight required ballasting the fuel tanks with seawater to maintain stability both for wind and damaged conditions.

The superstructure of the 255s was originally divided into two islands in order to accommodate an aircraft amidships, but this requirement was dropped before any of the units became operational. Construction of this class received a low priority, and none of the cutters served in the war. Following completion of the preliminary design by the Coast Guard, the work was assigned to George G. Sharp of New York to prepare the contract design.

The number of units – 13 of them – had an interesting origin. Three were to have been replacements for over-aged cutters, the *Ossipee*, *Tallapoosa*, and *Unalga*; ten units were to be replacements for the 250-foot class transferred to Great Britain under lend-lease. For economy, all 13 units were built to the same design.

[Click here to read a memo regarding one Coast Guard officer's opinion of this class of cutters.](#)

Photographs [click on caption to view image]:

[Mendota, 2 June 1945, deck view looking forward, tied up at Curtis Bay.](#) Photo by The Hughes Co., Baltimore, Maryland. No photo number.

[Mendota, 23 July 1945, underway.](#) No photo number/caption.

[Mendota, circa 1946? Photo CG-5080.](#) Original caption: "One of the newest type ships of the Coast Guard, the MENDOTA, is a peacetime standby on weather and ice patrols. Equipped with the latest weather information, gathering data, she and her sister ships are floating weather stations, gathering vital data from far at sea. This class ship is 255-feet long."

[Mendota, circa 1949.](#) Simulated overseas airline ditching drill off Montauk Point, NY. No photo number.

[Mendota, no caption/date; circa 1965-1966 while on Charlie patrol.](#)

[Mendota, 15 July 1964.](#) Photo CGY 071564-03. No caption.

[Mendota, 1966 at Montego Bay, Jamaica; color photo.](#) Photo courtesy of MM3 Robert Withers, USCG (Ret.).

[Mendota, 1969, returning from Vietnam.](#) No number/caption.

Ship's history:

The *Mendota* was stationed at Boston, MA, from April 1946 to January 1947. She was used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations. She was stationed at Wilmington, NC, from January 1947 to 29 February 1972 with the same duties assigned.

From 14 May to 23 July 1947, the *Mendota* shared an International Ice Patrol with the cutter *Spencer*. Another International Ice Patrol was shared with the cutter *Mocoma* from 26 April to 3 July 1948. While serving on ocean station Charlie in early January 1949, the *Mendota* had to leave early due to an acute case of appendicitis. From 28 to 31 March 1950, she towed the disabled M/V *Edison Mariner* until a commercial tug arrived. On 21 and 22 August 1950, she towed the disabled M/V *South Bend Victory* until relieved by a commercial tug. On 2 January 1952, she medevaced a crewman from F/V *Silver Bay* at 44°47'N, 56°22'W. On 2 March 1952, she provided medical aid to M/V *Rachel Jackson* at 37°30'N, 66°08'W. On 9 March 1952, she recovered a buoy and transferred it to the tender *Madrona*. On 12 and 13 March 1952, she medevaced a crewman from M/V *Saxton Star* and transferred him to M/V *Queen of Bermuda*. On 18 September 1953, she medevaced a crewman from M/V *Government Camp*.

From 15 to 17 March 1954, she towed the disabled F/V *Eagle* to Newfoundland. On 31 August 1954, she towed the disabled tug *Ocean Prince* until relieved. On 11 and 12 January 1955, she escorted the disabled M/V *Flying Cloud III* to Frying Pan Shoal. On 13 January 1955, she assisted the disabled F/V *Stephen Margo* 15 miles northeast of Diamond Shoal. On 14 January 1955, she escorted an ammunition barge. On 15 and 16 August 1955, the *Mendota* rescued 46 crew members and one dog from the Portuguese F/V *Ilhavense Segundo*.

On 11 and 12 March 1957, she assisted disabled F/V *Stella Maris* 63 miles southwest of Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. On 25 January 1958, she towed the disabled USN tug *Sagamore* and the destroyer escort *Stewart* to Southport, ME. On 22 May 1958, while serving on Ocean Station ECHO, she rescued the pilots from two USAF jets that had collided. On 6 January 1959, she assisted M/V *Hillcrest* at 34°43'N, 62°30'W. From 1 to 22 August 1960, she was employed on the reserve cruise visiting Veracruz, Mexico. She paid an official visit to Curacao from 18-21 August, 1961.

In 15 November 1962, she assisted the disabled schooner *Curlew* 90 miles northwest of Bermuda. In March of 1965, she served as on-scene commander following a mid-air collision of two USAF aircraft 200 miles south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. The body of one of the pilots was recovered and returned to Argentina.

Mendota coordinated a search for the S/V *Stella Maris*, a 26-foot yacht with a single crewmember sailing from Newport, RI to Bermuda, in October 1966. The crewman refused assistance when found by the *Mendota*. The *Stella Maris* later disappeared without a trace. *Mendota* participated in a medical emergency on board the SS *Michelangelo* in March, 1967 after the *Michelangelo* was struck by a 110-foot freak wave. On 24 April 1968, the *Mendota* took on board 26 survivors from *Irinis Luck*. In the fall of 1968 she coordinated the rescue of the *Alberto Beneti* during hurricane Helen.

After assignment to Coast Guard Squadron Three *Mendota* departed Wilmington on 27 January 1969, bound ultimately for the waters off the coast of Vietnam. Once in Vietnamese waters, she conducted eight Market Time patrols and *Mendota* detected 1,550 vessels, inspected 825, and boarded 8. She also participated in Special Operation SEALORD missions twice, Navy SEAL support missions three times and Operation Silver Mace once. *Mendota* acted as a troop transport, operational base, and rest stop for Cambodian and Chinese mercenaries and Hoi Chi troops on numerous occasions. The cutter steamed 29,288 miles in the Western Pacific Ocean from March through October, 1969, and was underway 70-percent of that time.

She also conducted naval gunfire support (NGS) missions during her tour. She participated in 31 NGS missions with her main battery, expending 2,527 rounds of ammunition. Additionally 731 rounds of 81 mm mortar were fired and 30,830 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun ammunition. Although many casualty results were not able to be confirmed, Army spotters and ground troops confirmed that the *Mendota's* guns were responsible for 4 Vietcong killed or wounded, while another 11 casualties were estimated. The guns also destroyed 20 structures, 6 bunkers, 3 sampans, and 9 bivouac areas, and damaged 27 structures and 10 bunkers.

The crew of the *Mendota* also participated in humanitarian missions while serving in Vietnam. These missions were concentrated on the village of Song Ong Doc, on the Gulf of Thailand. The medical team conducted MEDCAPS (Medical Care of the Civilian Population), treating over 800 Vietnamese for every variety of medical malady during 14 visits to the village. The crew also helped rebuild a small dispensary. In addition, assistance was rendered to Vietnamese and Thai fishermen who were injured while fishing. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were also treated by the medical personnel.

Mendota was not only home to the 160 men who were permanently assigned as her crew. She also served as a mother ship to U.S. Navy Swift boats and their crews, and to a lesser degree the Coast Guard 82-foot patrol boats, which operated in the inner barrier closer to shore. *Mendota* serviced the 82-footers forty times during her stay while the Swift boats received logistic support daily, and the crews alternated being on board *Mendota* every other day. The medical staff also aided 51 men who had been wounded in action.

Mendota established an excellent record as Hong Kong station ship. For one month, from 6 May through 6 June, 1969, CAPT C. S. Marple, USCG, the commanding officer of *Mendota*, was Senior Officer Present Afloat for Administration, or SOPA (ADMIN), Hong Kong, and the ship's personnel handled all administrative matters for U.S. naval vessels visiting Hong Kong. The crew also maintained a permanent Shore Party detachment to assist and supervise liberty visits ashore.

Mendota returned home to her homeport of Wilmington, North Carolina, on 27 November 1969. During her mission to Vietnam and back *Mendota* steamed over 60,000 miles. She transited the Panama Canal in both directions, and visited Hawaii, Guam, Bangkok, Thailand, Kaohsiung, Formosa, and Subic Bay in the Republic of the Philippines.

She was decommissioned on 29 February 1972 at the Coast Guard Yard and was placed in "Out of Commission in Reserve" status. Later that year sufficient funding was appropriated to place her back in service. A memo dated 7 June 1972 ordered that *Mendota* would be recommissioned "primarily as an offshore law enforcement vessel for fisheries patrol" but would be "a fully capable 255' high endurance cutter and [would be] available to conduct other Coast Guard missions when special circumstances warrant and when such use will not interfere with the basic mission." She was to be placed in "In Commission, Special" status on 30 June 1972 and she ordered to be homeported at New Bedford, Massachusetts. She reported arriving at New Bedford on 31 July 1972.

She was permanently decommissioned on 1 November 1973. She was mothballed initially but was sold to North American Smelting Company of Bordentown, New Jersey, along with her sister 255-foot cutters *Androscoggin* and *Winona* in 1978 for scrapping.

Sources:

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 1-3.

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), pp. 18-26.

255' Cutter Sailors' Page, hosted by 255' cutter historian Doak Walker, RMC, USCG (Ret.):

Cutter File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Ship's Characteristics Card.

