



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Sebago, 1945



WPG / WHEC-42
Call Sign: NRUF

Sebago was named for Sebago Lake, Maine.

Builder: Western Pipe & Steel Co., San Pedro, CA

Commissioned: 20 September 1945

Decommissioned: 29 February 1972

Disposition: Transferred to Maritime Administration 14 April 1972

Length: 254'oa; 245'bp

Navigation Draft: 17'3" max (1966)

Beam: 43'max

Displacement: 1,978 fl (1966); 1,342 light (1966)

Main Engines: 1 Westinghouse turbo-electric motor driven by a turbine.

SHP: 4,000 total (1945)

Performance, Maximum Sustained: 17.0 kts, 6,157-mi radius (1966)

Performance, Economic: 10.0 kts., 10,376-mi radius (1966)

Fuel Capacity: 141,755 gal (Oil, 95%)

Complement: 10 officers, 3 warrants, 130 men (1966)

Electronics:

Detection Radar: SPS-23 (1965)

Sonar: AN-SOS-1 (1965)

Armament: 1 x 5"/38; 1 x Mk 10 Mod 1 A/S Projectors; 2 x Mk 32 Mod 5 Torpedo Mounts; 1 x 81mm mortar; 2 x .50 caliber MGs.

Misc. Ordnance Equipment: 1 x FXR-TMk 4

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 *Unalaga*; 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.

Cutter History:

Sebago was originally named *Wachusett*. She was built by the Western Pipe & Steel Company in San Pedro, California. Her keel was laid on 7 June 1943 and she was launched on 28 May 1944 and was sponsored by Mrs. Margaret P. Steinmetz. She was commissioned on 20 September 1945. She was initially stationed at San Francisco, California but was transferred soon thereafter to Norfolk, Virginia where she served out of from 1 November 1945 to 1 June 1946. Here she was used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations. She was then stationed at Boston, Massachusetts, from 1 June 1946 to 15 August 1947 and at Staten Island, New York, from 15 August 1947 to 31 October 1949. Her duties remained similar to those she had while stationed at Norfolk and included weather patrols. From 10 January to 31 January 1948 she served at Weather Station Able. In April of that same year she was serving on Weather Station Dog, some 380 miles off Newfoundland. On the night of 27 April a C-47, MATS flight 6396, ditched near the cutter and the *Sebago* rescued the C-47s crew of four. The *Sebago* was decommissioned on 31 October 1949 and stored at the Coast Guard Yard, Curtis Bay, Maryland. She was recommissioned on 17 December 1952 and stationed at Boston until 1 July 1954.

She was subsequently moved to Mobile, Alabama, where she was used for law enforcement, search and rescue, and Campeche Patrol until July 1964. This patrol was off the Campeche Banks near Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, where Mexican and U.S. fishing vessels fished for shrimp. A Coast Guard press release noted that "On patrol, the SEBAGO is ever ready to render medical aid, assist disabled boats through effecting repairs or provide a tow into port. An active boarding program is executed while on Campeche Patrol, evidenced by the 236 vessels [boarded] during fiscal year 1958." On 7 July 1959 the *Sebago* collided with the USNS *Croatan* at the U.S. Naval Station at Algiers, Louisiana. During fiscal year 1959, she:

. . . cruised some 20,000 miles on twelve patrols. She has completed twenty-two assistance missions, saved a half-million dollars worth of shipping and obtained medical care for four sick or injured seaman. In addition to two training cruises for Coast Guard Reserve personnel with visits to Nassau and Jamaica, BWI, on a visit to Texas for a shrimp festival, and the completion of one hundred forty-six

vessel boardings during the fiscal year 1959. The cutter also completed her annual overhaul in the Coast Guard Yard at Curtis Bay, Maryland, in February 1959.

In January, 1960, she completed underway refresher training at the Navy Fleet Training Group at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, training undertaken by most cutters every two years. On 2 January 1962, she towed the disabled M/V *Catalina* 310 miles off New Orleans, Louisiana. From July 1964 to 29 February 1972, she was stationed at Pensacola, Florida, and again added ocean station duties to her agenda but she no longer served on Campeche Patrol. Her ocean station assignments included patrolling at stations Hotel, Bravo, Echo, and Delta. On 15 October 1964 a fire broke out in her engine room that caused \$50,000 worth of damage. The fire was put out by *Sebago* crewmen with assistance from the Pensacola Naval Air Station Fire Department, personnel from the USS *Tweedy*, the Sherman Field crash trucks, and the Air Station harbor tugs. In late 1964, the *Sebago* repaired the F/V *Robbie Dale* near Cayos Acras. On 18 December 1966, she helped fight the fire at Frisco Pier, Pensacola.

She was refurbished at a cost of \$179,000 at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company from 29 September to 31 October 1968 in preparation for assignment to Vietnam. She was assigned to Coast Guard Squadron Three, Vietnam, serving in theatre from 2 March to 16 November 1969, while under the command of CDR Dudley C. Goodwin, USCG. She was assigned to support Operation Market Time, including the interdiction of enemy supplies heading south by water and naval gunfire support [NGS] of units ashore. By July, 1968, she had conducted 12 NGS missions, destroying 31 structures, 15 bunkers, 2 sampans and 3 enemy "huts." Combat duties were not all the cutter did. The *Sebago's* medical staff, including the cutter's doctor, Public Health Service LT Lewis J. Wyatt, conducted humanitarian missions in Vietnam, treating over 400 villagers "for a variety of ills." The crew visited the village of Co Luy, 80 miles south of Da Nang, and built an 18-foot extension to a waterfront pier for the villagers. She also served as a supply ship for Coast Guard and Navy patrol boats serving in Vietnamese coastal waters.

On 18 and 19 December 1969, she placed a damage-control party onboard M/V *Jody Re*, brought the flooding under control, and stood by until a commercial tug arrived. On 20 December 1969, she stood by the grounded Danish M/V *Helle* 25 miles northeast of Cabo Falso until a commercial tug arrived. On 21 June 1970, while adjusting compasses, she grounded during a squall.

She was decommissioned on 29 February 1972 at Pensacola. Her commanding officer at that time, CDR James G. Wilcox, also retired that day. The cutter was turned over to the U.S. Maritime Administration in April of that same year.

Commanding Officers:

CDR E. S. Kerr, Jr., 1945-1947
CDR Oscar C. Rohnke, 1947-1948
CDR Loren E. Brunner, 1948-?
CDR E. B. Coffin, ?-?
CDR S. M. Hay, ?-1954
CDR Claude G. Winstead, 1954
CDR Harry F. Frazer, 1954
CDR E. C. Allen, Jr., 1954-1955
CDR Harry F. Frazer, 1955-1957
CDR Clarence H. Waring, 1957-1959

LCDR Paul W. Welker, 1959
CAPT D. O. Reed, 1959-1961
CDR Stanley H. Rice, 1961
CAPT Raymond G. Miller, 1961-1963
CAPT Stephen G. Carkeek, 1963-1965
CDR John D. McCann, 1965-1967
CAPT Dudley. C. Goodwin, 1967-1970
CDR J. G. Wilcox, 1970-1972

Photographs:



Seago, 28 November 1947. No caption. Photo No. CG 112847-1.



Seago, color photo. No caption/date [Photo taken on Ocean Station Echo, from the relief cutter, date about 1965].

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.):
255wpg.11.net.com/

Cutter File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Ship's Characteristics Card.

