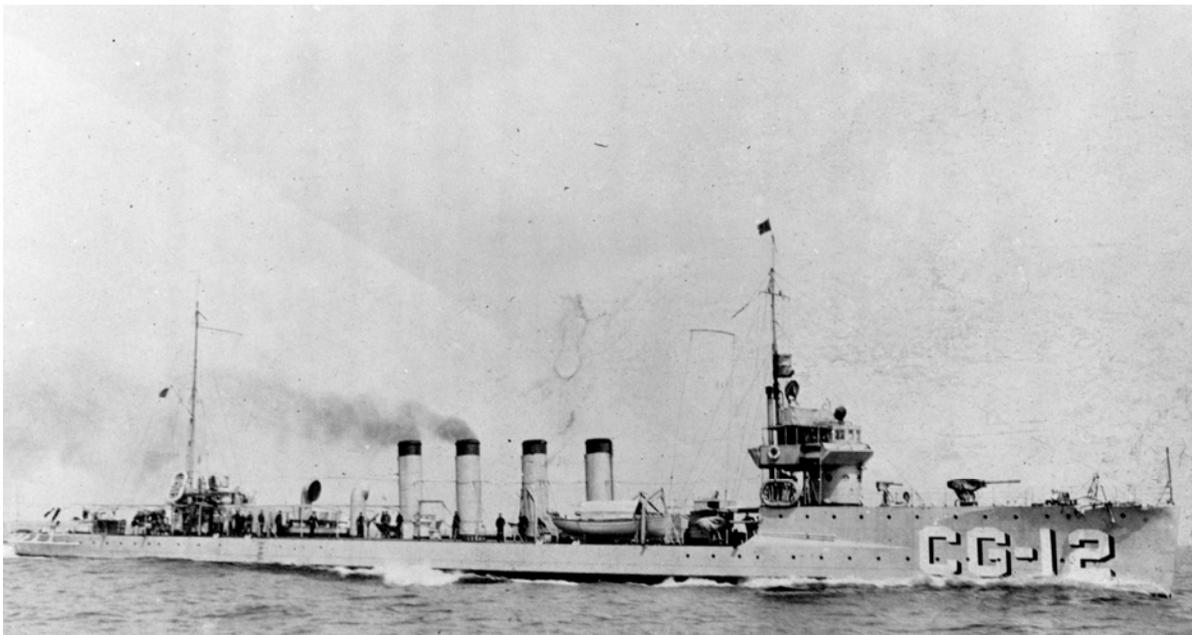


# USCGC Destroyers in Prohibition

On 17 January 1920, “the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes” was declared illegal by Constitutional amendment. The era generally known as Prohibition had begun.

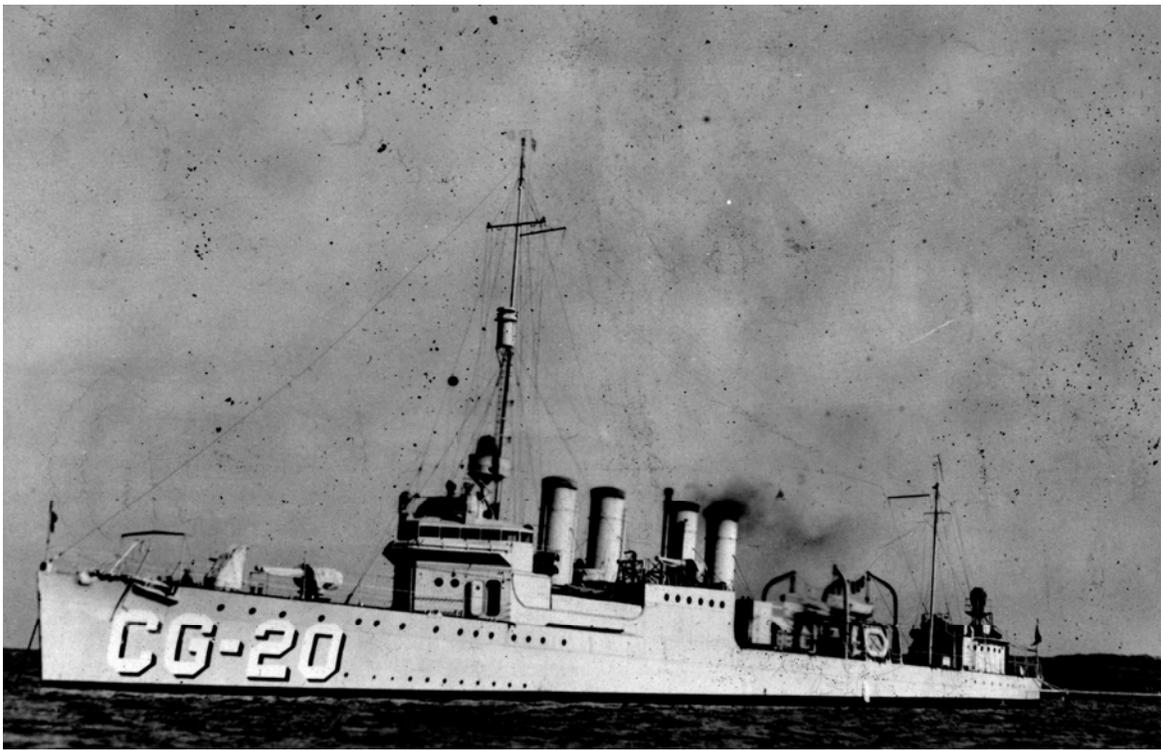
The Coast Guard was to become one of the foremost means by which Prohibition would be enforced. Having just been returned to the control of the Treasury Department on 1 January 1920 after its service under the Navy Department in World War I, the Coast Guard was not adequately prepared for this new mission. It lacked the manpower and, most glaringly, the ships and patrol craft to conduct enforcement on a national level.



*Henley (CG-12) –“Flivver- class”*



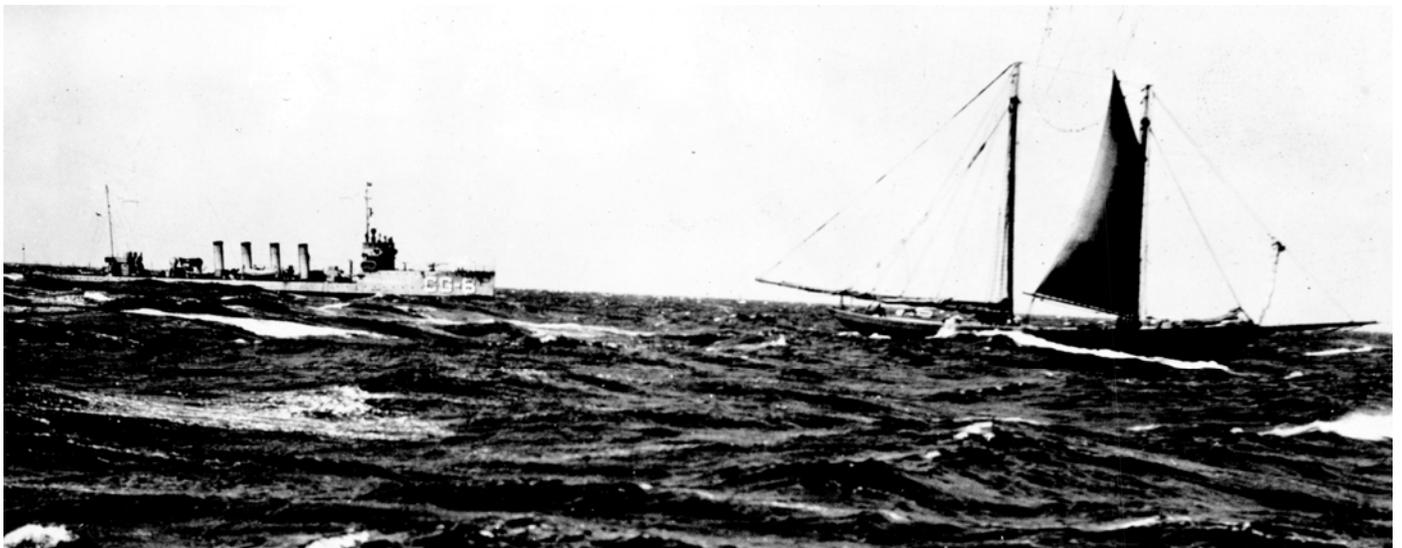
*Wainwright (CG-24)- “1,000-tonner”*



*Semmes (CG-20)- "flush-decker"*

In order to meet the demands of this new mission, it was initially determined that it would be faster and more cost-effective to borrow destroyers from the US Navy and adapt them for the law enforcement mission, than to build new ships. In the end the rehabilitation of the vessels became a saga in itself because of the exceedingly poor condition of many of these war-weary ships. In many instances it took nearly a year to bring the vessels up to seaworthiness. Additionally, these were by far the largest and most sophisticated vessels ever operated by the service and trained personnel were nearly nonexistent. As a result, Congress authorized hundreds of new enlistees. It was these inexperienced men that made up the destroyer crews and contributed to the service's greatest growth prior to World War II.

A total of 31 destroyers served with the Coast Guard's Destroyer Force. These included three different classes, the 742-ton "flivver-class," "1,000-ton class", and the 1,190-ton "Clemson-class" flush-deckers. Capable of over 25 knots, the destroyers had an advantage in chasing large rumrunners. They were, however, easily outmaneuvered by smaller vessels. The destroyers' mission, therefore, was to picket the larger supply ships ("mother ships") and prevent them from off-loading their cargo onto smaller, speedier contact boats that ran the liquor into shore.



*USCGD Ammen (CG-8) in pursuit of a rumrunner*

The destroyers were primarily stationed at bases in Boston, New London, and New York with the largest number of the ships being homeported at New London. As a result, the ships primarily operated off the northeast coast of the U.S., though a number of them were detailed for overseas duty. In 1933 eight of the destroyers were part of a US Navy task force responding to political unrest in Cuba. The ships returned after only a short deployment.



Coast Guard destroyers at Brooklyn Navy Yard



USCGD *Badger* on the Cuban deployment



USCGD Paulding (CG-17)

One of the most noteworthy of the destroyers was USCGD *Paulding* (CG-17). In February 1927 *Paulding*, under the command of LCDR (later CAPT) John S. Baylis, was dispatched in a gale to assist the 75-foot patrol boat CG-238. In the unsuccessful attempt to locate the “six-bitter” (it had already foundered), the ship took a horrific beating. Despite losing much of her topside equipment and one of her four stacks, the ship was able to return to her base in Boston. For their effort several of the officers received commendations from the Commandant and six of the enlisted were advanced. Later that same year on 17 December, *Paulding* accidentally rammed and sank the US Navy submarine, *S-4*, while it was surfacing off Cape Cod. The result was the loss of all hands on board. An inquiry into the collision absolved Baylis of all blame.



Views of the damage after collision with *S-4*

Late in 1933 the states ratified the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment repealing Prohibition. The end of Prohibition saw a scaling back the service's law enforcement mission requirements. That along with the construction of the 250' Lake-class cutters resulted in the decommissioning of the Destroyer Force. Those that were sufficiently modern and could be put to good use were returned to the Navy. The others were sent to the breakers and scrapped.

Despite existing for only a small part of its total history, the Destroyer Force left an indelible mark on the Coast Guard. After all many of the junior officers and enlisted men who served on these vessels in the 1920s and 1930s would later become the commanders and senior NCOs on cutters and Coast Guard-manned US Navy vessels in World War II. The Destroyer Force also helped shape the service's most senior command as every Commandant from Hamlet to Roland had served with the Destroyer Force at sometime during his career.

Other Images:



Destroyers in drydock



*Conyngham* (CG-2) conducting a rescue



*Conyngham's Baseball Team*



*Henley's Baseball Team- note the two African-American Players- 2<sup>nd</sup> from left front row; 2<sup>nd</sup> from right back row. Baseball was still segregated at this time.*



Leopard Mascot of *Hunt* (CG-18)