



## *Washington, 1837*

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George Washington was born 22 February 1732 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. He was commissioned in the Virginia militia in 1753, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel the next year, and fought in the French and Indian War. Entering the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1750, Washington was a strong champion of colonial rights. In 1775 he was appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army, and demonstrated a profound appreciation of sea power as well as great military genius. After years of hardship and arduous struggle, he finally gained the decisive victory of Yorktown.

The Treaty of Paris recognized American independence 20 January 1783. After attending the Annapolis Convention of 1786 and presiding over the Continental Convention of 1787, Washington was unanimously elected first president under the new Constitution, and was inaugurated 30 April 1789. His two terms in office laid the foundations for strong government under the Constitution. Returning to his home at Mount Vernon in 1797, Washington was recalled briefly to command the American army when war with France threatened in 1798. He died at Mount Vernon 14 December 1799.

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Builder: McCully, Baltimore, Maryland

Length: 91' 2"

Beam: 21' 2"

Draft:

Displacement: 190 tons

Rig: Topsail schooner; re-rigged as a brig in 1838

Cost: \$

Commissioned: 1837

Decommissioned: N/A

Disposition: Seized

Performance & Endurance:

Max:

Cruising:

Complement:

Armament: 1 x 42-pound pivot (1860)

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### **Cutter History:**

Authorized on 6 July and named on 1 August of 1837, *Washington* was built in Baltimore, Maryland, by "McCully," under the supervision of Revenue Captain H. D. Hunter. She was apparently built quickly, as orders were issued on 11 November for the ship to conduct "winter cruising" off the eastern seaboard between New York and the Virginia capes. She sailed on 18 December on her first cruise. In ensuing years, the ship cruised that stretch of sea in the winters and was transferred to the Coast Survey during the summer where she conducted sounding and surveying operations off the coast in the summers of 1838 and 1839. She was rerigged from a schooner to a brig during that period, apparently at Baltimore.

While sounding between Gardiner's Point and Montauk Point, New York, in the summer of 1839, the cutter encountered evidence of a grim event at sea. On 26 August, *Washington* sighted a "suspicious-looking vessel" at anchor. The brig's commander, Lieutenant Thomas R. Gedney, USN, sent an armed party to board the craft. The men found the suspicious ship to be the schooner *Armistad*, of and from Havana, Cuba. She had set sail from the coast of Africa two months or so before, carrying two white passengers and 54 slaves, bound for Guanaja, Cuba. Four days out of port, the slaves rose and murdered the captain and his crew, saving the two passengers to navigate the ship back to Africa. During the next two months, in which *Armistad* had drifted at sea, nine of the slaves had died.

*Washington* apparently never encountered a similar event again. She was permanently transferred to the Coast Survey on 23 April 1840. For the next 12 years, the brig operated under the aegis of the Navy, off the eastern seaboard of the United States on surveying and sounding duties. All was not entirely tranquil, however, for there were storms to be contended with. While stationed in Chesapeake Bay in 1846, *Washington* was dismasted in a severe gale.

Battered and worn but still afloat, the cutter limped to port. She had lost 11 men overboard in the tempest, including Lieutenant George M. Bache, USN, the ship's commanding officer.

When the United States went to war in Mexico, *Washington* served with Commodore Matthew C. Perry's forces. Under the command of Lieutenant Commander S. P. Lee, USN, *Washington* took part in the capture of Tobasco on 16 June 1847 and contributed six officers and 30 men to a force under the command of Captain S. L. Breese, USN that formed part of the 1,173-man landing force that attacked and captured the Mexican stronghold at Tuxpan.

Returned to the Treasury Department on 18 May 1852, *Washington* underwent extensive repairs at New York which lasted into the early winter. Alterations were completed on 9 December 1852, but *Washington* remained in the New York area where she operated locally for the next six years. The cutter participated in the search for the foundering steamer *San Francisco* in the second week of January 1854. *Washington*, along with five other revenue cutters, sailed almost simultaneously from their home ports—ranging from New London, Connecticut, to Wilmington, Delaware, and from Norfolk to New York; but, unfortunately, none of the ships fell in with *San Francisco*.

Ordered to the Gulf of Mexico in the spring of 1859 to relieve *Robert McClelland*, *Washington* apparently arrived at Southwest Pass, Louisiana, soon thereafter. She apparently remained there into 1861; and—although slated to be relieved, in turn, by *Robert McClelland*—the outbreak of the Civil War caught the brig at New Orleans undergoing repairs. At that time she was under the command of Revenue Captain Robert K. Hudgins. She was taken over by state authorities of Louisiana soon after that state seceded from the Union on 31 January 1861 and commissioned in the Confederate Navy as CSS *Washington*. Little is known of the ship thereafter. In June 1861, Commander David Dixon Porter reported that the ship was being fitted out at New Orleans and was almost ready for sea, but no clues to the ship's subsequent career thereafter have been found.

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### Sources:

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