



White Sumac, 1947

WAGL / WLM-540; YF-416

Any of various shrubs or small trees of the genus *Rhus*, having compound leaves, clusters of small greenish flowers, and usually red, hairy fruit. Some species, such as the poison ivy and poison oak, cause an acute itching rash on contact.

Builder: Erie Concrete & Steel Supply Company, Erie, Pennsylvania

Commissioned: 1943 (USN); 19 September 1947 (USCG)

Decommissioned: 1 August 2002

Disposition: Transferred to the navy of the Dominican Republic.

Length: 132' 10"

Beam: 30'

Draft: 8' 9" max

Propulsion: Diesel electric; 2 x 600 bhp Union diesels with twin screws

Complement: 1 warrant, 20 crewmen (1948)

Armament: None

CLASS & DESIGN HISTORY:

The *White Sumac* was the former Navy lighter, YF-416. The Coast Guard acquired a total of eight of these former Navy YF-257-class lighters between 1947-1948 for conversion to coastal buoy tenders. They were needed to supplement the larger seagoing buoy tenders which were unable to service short-range-aids-to-navigation placed in coastal waters and harbors.

They were built entirely of steel and were originally designed to carry ammunition and cargo from shore to deep-draft vessels anchored off-shore. These lighters

were well suited for a variety of coastal tasks because their hull design incorporated a shallow draft with a solid engineering plant. All of these 133-foot lighters had sufficient cargo space for storing equipment and an open deck and boom for handling large objects. They proved to be capable and useful buoy tenders. Each was named for a plant, shrub or tree, prefixed by "White."

TENDER HISTORY:

YF-416 was built by the Niagara Shipbuilding Company in Buffalo, New York. She was commissioned by the Navy on 6 November 1943 and assigned to the 3rd Naval District. She served the Navy for four years before being taken out of service. In 1947 she was transferred to the Coast Guard, who converted her for use as a tender.

She was commissioned *White Sumac* (WAGL-540) on 19 September 1947 at Charleston, South Carolina, and was assigned to the 7th Coast Guard District. She was based out of Key West, Florida. Her assignment included tending aids to navigation, law enforcement and search and rescue. On 2 February 1954 she assisted the F/V *Elliot* near Key West. On 4 March 1954 she towed the disabled F/V *Vkelpie* to Key West. In the mid-1960s her designation was changed to WLM-540. On 10 July 1968 she rescued 47 Haitian migrants from a distressed sloop 40 miles east of Andros Island. She transferred to St. Petersburg, Florida in 1969. Here she was responsible for providing logistics support to Egmont Key State Park, Dry Tortugas Light Station and Fort Jefferson National Park as well as servicing 240 floating aids and light structures encompassing 650 miles of the entire west coast of Florida, from Appalachia Bay south to the Florida Keys, along the Keys from Dry Tortugas and Key West to Miami and Ft. Pierce Inlet on Florida's east coast. She underwent a major renovation at the Coast Yard in Baltimore, Maryland in 1972.

On 5 June 1978, while under the command of CWO Fred Hemmingway, she came upon the P/C *Joy Toy* which was underway without lights. After identifying itself as a cutter the cutter's crew witnessed the three persons on board the vessel jump overboard and the vessel catch fire. The *White Sumac's* crew then rescued three crewmen from the water and extinguished the fire. While extinguishing the fire one of the boarding party discovered marijuana on board and a thorough search of the *Joy Toy* uncovered 102 bales. Station Fort Lauderdale sent an MLB out to tow the *Joy Toy* back to port along with the three prisoners. One of the boarding team members, YN3 Bobby May, Jr., remembers the action thusly:

As I remember it the P/C was discovered underway without lights and we turned on our blue light and put a spot light on our emblem to identify ourselves. Upon approaching the vessel we saw three POB jump overboard and the vessel ablaze. I was at first on the bridge with a .45 on my hip and a M-16 in my hands. I turned my weapons over to the BMC and went down to help fight

the fire. First, I was laying on the deck of the White Sumac with a hose putting water through a window on the vessel and then I jumped on the bow of the vessel to fight the fire. I was standing by a bow hatch and the CWO told me to kick it open. When I opened the hatch I discovered the drugs. After the fire was out and the POB where on our mess deck I was assigned to guard the prisoners.

District Seven sent CWO Hemmingway the following message:

1. I NOTE WITH PRIDE THE PROFESSIONALISM DISPLAYED BY YOU AND YOUR CREW OFF FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA ON 4 JUNE 1978.
2. YOUR TIMELY RESPONSE WITH POSITIVE ACTION TO AN UNFAMILIAR SITUATION SPEAKS HIGHLY OF THE "CAN DO" SPIRIT OF THE ATON FLEET.
3. BY RESCUING THE THREE CREWMEN THAT JUMPED OVERBOARD AND EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE ON THE MARIJUANA LADEN CABIN CRUISER JOY TOY, SEIZING HER AND ARRESTING HER CREW, WHITE SUMAC LOGGED THE FIRST "NARCOTICS BUST" BY A BUOY TENDER IN THE SEVENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT.
4. I WOULD LIKE TO CONVEY MY PERSONAL "WELL DONE" TO YOU AND YOUR CREW.
5. SIGNED: RADM R. W. DURFEY, COMMANDER, SEVENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT.

She had the unhappy duty of acting as a working platform for divers during the salvage of the CGC *Blackthorn*, which had collided with a tanker in Tampa Bay in January of 1980. In May of that same year she responded after the M/V Summit Venture rammed into the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which caused 1,200 feet of the bridge to collapse into the water. For three weeks the White Sumac assisted with rescue efforts. Later that same year she returned a whale, named Byrdie, to the sea after the whale had beached itself earlier and was rescued and rehabilitated by Sea World. In November, 1980, she undertook a 10-day operation to recover a Coast Guard helicopter that had crashed and sunk 130 miles southwest of St. Petersburg. The operation was ultimately unsuccessful due to a hurricane that swept the area.

She was awarded a Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation for her preparation for and execution of "Operation Realignment," an aids to navigation project in the Gulfport Ship Channel from October to December, 1993. From 18 to 30 July 1997 she assisted after Hurricane Danny hit Florida for which she was awarded the Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation. On 23 July 1998 she was awarded a Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation for:

"For meritorious service from June 1996 to July 1 1998 having demonstrated exceptional multi-mission capabilities while providing outstanding aids to navigation support to Florida's West and Southeast Coasts. WHITE SUMAC expertly serviced over 600 aids to navigation along 770 nautical miles of Florida's Coast. Coordinating with the Army Corps of Engineers and Pilots' Associations, WHITE SUMAC safely realigned six waterways during dredging Operations. In partnership with the National Park Service. WHITE SUMAC provided critical logistical support for Fort Jefferson National Park and Dry Tortugas Light, delivering over 120,000 gallons of diesel fuel to the isolated islands. WHITE SUMAC distinguished itself as a law enforcement platform during Operation MONITOR national security evolutions in south Florida and port security

operations during the Popes visit to Cuba. WHITE SUMAC quickly replaced the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrations physical oceanographic real-time system beneath the Sunshine Skyway Bridge restoring vital current and tidal input for safe navigation to maintain Tampa's ten billion dollar waterborne commerce. Demonstrating superb versatility as a marine environmental protection resource. she skillfully deployed the Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System for oil spill recovery during an exercise in Bayboro Harbor. WHITE SUMAC underwent an extensive 52 day drydock where the dedicated workmanship of her crew resulted in her extended service life and a realized cost savings of over 500,000 dollars. WHITE SUMAC participated in the Eighth Coast Guard District's 1997 Annual Buoy fender Training Roundup. Taking top honors, she brought the championship trophy home to the Seventh District. In preparation for the arrival of CGC JOSHUA APPLEBY. the new 175 foot Keeper Class buoy tender. WHITE SUMAC accelerated her buoy servicing program effectively bridging the gap until the arrival of the new cutter. Their devotion to duty and outstanding performance are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

The Operational Distinguishing Device is authorized.

In 1998 she left Florida and sailed to her final homeport in New Orleans, Louisiana, to relieve the decommissioning *White Holly*. Here she maintained 176 buoys from Freshwater Bayou, Louisiana to Gulfport, Mississippi, including the Mississippi River from the Gulf of Mexico to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

She was decommissioned on 1 August 2002 and was transferred to navy of the Dominican Republic, which commissioned her as *BA-2 Capotillo*.

Commanding Officers:

CWO O. K. Carlsen: 1947-1950
CWO E. L. Masters: 1950-1955
CWO G. J. McKinlock: 1955-1956
CWO Fish: 1956-1959
CWO D. T. Cook: 1959-1961
CWO S. P. Creech: 1961-1966
CWO L. D. Mead: 1964-1966
CWO J. H. Dugram: 1966-1968
CWO R. Matheson: 1968-1971
CWO A. G. Villar: 1971-1974
CWO F. C. Hemingway: 1974-1978
CWO J. Webb: 1978-1982
CWO T. P. Ryan: 1982-1985
CWO M. W. Allen: 1985-1988
CWO J. M. Sitton: 1988-1991
CWO J. R. Maxson: 1991-1995

CWO B. A. Simokat: 1995-1996
CWO M. H. Shumate: 1996-
CWO E. L. Olson: 1998-

SOURCES:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

Robert Scheina. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

U. S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. *U.S. Coast Guard 133-Foot Buoy Tenders*. HAER booklet. Washington, DC: National Park Service, February, 2004. [HAER no. DC-57; Todd Croteau, HAER Industrial Archeologist (project leader); Jet Low, HAER Photographer; Mark Porter, NCSHPO Consultant (historian), and Candace Clifford, booklet design.]
