



## Woodbine, 1942

WAGL / WLB-289  
180-A Class



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A common North American woody vine (*Ampelopsis quinquefolia*), climbing extensively by means of tendrils. Also known as Virginia Creeper.

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Builder: Zenith Dredge Co., Duluth, MN

Keel Laid: 2 February 1942

Launched: 3 July 1942

Commissioned: 17 November 1942

Decommissioned: 15 February 1972

Donated: 19 June 1972 to Cleveland Public School System, through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare/CSA

Cost: \$1,156,000

Length: 180'

Beam 37'

Draft: 13' (1966)

Displacement: 1025 tons (1966)

Propulsion: 1 electric motor connected to 2 Westinghouse generators driven by 2 Cooper Bessemer-type diesels, SHP 1,000; single propeller.

Performance:

Max: 12 knots, 7,000-mile range (1942)

Economic: 10 knots, 11,000-mile range (1942)

Fluid Capacities (in gallons):

Diesel Oil: 69,650

Potable water: 65,770

Deck Gear: 20-ton boom with electric hoist

Anchors:

Armament: small arms only

Small Boats:

Complement: 53 (1966)

Electronics:

Radar:

Sonar:

Radio:

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### **Class History:**

When the US Coast Guard absorbed the Bureau of Lighthouses on 1 July 1939, *Juniper*, a 177-foot all welded steel buoy tender, was under construction and plans for a successor were on the drawing board. Plans initiated by the Bureau of Lighthouses called for the construction of several identical buoy tenders to replace existing coastal buoy tenders. The preliminary designs generated by the Bureau were for a vessel similar to *Juniper*. When the Aids to Navigation (ATON) system transferred to Coast Guard control, USCG planners reviewed the preliminary plans for the new class of buoy tenders and modified them to meet

the service's multi-mission role. To be an effective part of the Coast Guard, the new buoy tenders needed to be multi-purpose platforms. They had to be capable of conducting Search and Rescue (SAR) and Law Enforcement (LE) missions, as well as their primary mission tending ATON. On 20 January 1941 the US Coast Guard contracted Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Company of Duluth , Minnesota to build the design based on *Juniper* and modified to meet the service's requirements. On 31 March 1941 Marine Iron and Shipbuilding laid the keel for the first vessel of the new buoy tender class. The new vessel measured 180 feet overall and had a beam of 37 feet at the extreme. She had a displacement of 935 tons and drew 12 feet. The new design was similar to *Juniper* in appearance but did exhibit some important differences. Gone was the turtle back forecastle. A notched forefoot, ice-belt at the waterline, and reinforced bow gave the vessel icebreaking capabilities. Extending the superstructure to the ship's sides increased interior volume above the main deck. A single propeller, turned by an electric motor powered by twin diesel generators, replaced the twin-screw arrangement. The 30,000-gallon fuel capacity gave the new design a range of 12,000 miles at a 12-knot cruising speed; at 8.3 knots the cruising range increased to 17,000 miles. Finer lines at the bow and stern increased the new tender's sea keeping ability in rough weather; an increase in draft also promoted seaworthiness. Numerous minor alterations increased the vessel's utility as a SAR platform while deck-mounted guns and depth charge racks supported military duties. Marine Iron and Shipbuilding launched the prototype vessel on 25 November 1941, even as three more took shape. Preparations also went forward to begin a fifth vessel. By the time they commissioned the first 180, *Cactus*, on 1 September 1942 twelve vessels were under construction at the Marine Iron shipyard and at the Zenith Dredge Company shipyard, also in Duluth . The initial designation for the new buoy tenders was WAGL, which was a US Navy designation denoting an auxiliary vessel, lighthouse tender. The designation changed from WAGL to WLB in 1965. A few of the 180s have been designated as other types of vessels over the years; three became WMECs (medium endurance cutters), one of those, *Evergreen*, was a WAGO (oceanographic research vessel) before it became a WMEC. *Gentian* was a WMEC for a time and was then designated a WIX (Training Cutter) in 1999. Though designations have changed over time, each vessel's hull number has remained the same since commissioning.

## DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE 180' CLASS

Six "B" or *Mesquite* class tenders followed the initial production run of thirteen vessels in the "A" or *Cactus*-class. The first *Mesquite*-class tender hit the water on 14 November 1942. Marine Iron and Shipbuilding built all except one of the *Mesquite*-class. The USCG built the lone exception, *Ironwood*, at the service's shipyard in Curtis Bay, Maryland. Twenty *Iris* or "C" class vessels followed the *Mesquite*-class tenders. The first launch of an *Iris* class vessel took place on 18 June 1943, and the final addition to the class slipped off the ways on 18 May 1944. Differences among the three classes were minimal. Their basic

dimensions, length and beam were the same and draft varied based on loading. All were built of welded steel along the same framing pattern and with very similar internal and external layouts. All three classes could steam 8,000 miles at 13 knots, 12,000 miles at 12 knots, and 17,000 miles at 8.3 knots; though the “B” and “C” class vessels had engines with 20 percent more power than the “A” class. The “A” class vessels could carry the most fuel with a tank capacity of 30,000 gallons. The “C” class carried 29,335 gallons and the “B” class about 700 gallons less. The layout of the Commanding Officer’s cabin and the radio room was slightly different in the “A” class vessels. The bridge wing door on the “B” and “C” vessels opened to the side while the doors on the “A” vessels opened forward. The cargo holds as originally laid out in the “C” were larger, by a nominal amount, than those in the other vessels. To hoist buoys and cargo, the “A” vessels carried an A-frame structure that straddled the superstructure and supported the cargo boom. The other two classes were fitted with power vanggs that attached to the bridge wings and manipulated the cargo boom. The “A” vessels were originally fitted with manila line as part of the cargo handling system while the second and third generation vessels used wire rope. From the outside, other than the A-frame used in the first production run, the three classes were almost indistinguishable. Over the years their internal differences and variation in equipment were minimized by successive overhauls and improvements. Moreover, it does not appear that any one of the three classes was superior to the other two in the eyes of the US Coast Guard administration or the men who manned the buoy tender fleet. Tenders from each of the three classes remained in use past the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It usually took from two to four months between the time shipyard workers laid a keel and the day the vessel slipped off the ways. Once launched, however, the tenders were far from ready for service. The practice was to build the superstructure, finish the interior, and complete the machinery installation while the vessel was floating. Hence, on launch day the tenders were little more than finished hulls. As the shipyard workers neared the end of the building process, the Coast Guard would begin assigning officers and men to the vessels. Once each vessel was complete and ready to enter active service, the US Coast Guard commissioned her as part of the fleet. Often the commissioning ceremonies took place after the tender had departed from Duluth and arrived at an initial duty station. For the 180s as a whole, it took an average period of 308 days to go from the beginning of construction to commissioning. Divided according to sub-class, the elapsed time from keel laying to commissioning averaged 360 days for the *Cactus*-class; 323 days for the *Mesquite*-class; and 269 days for the *Iris*-class. The building process averaged 192,018 man-hours of labor per vessel. In keeping with the Lighthouse Service practice of naming tenders after foliage, all of the 180s were named after trees, shrubs, or flowers.

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## **Cutter History:**

*Woodbine*, a 180-foot Cactus or A-Class tender, was built in Duluth, Minnesota by the Zenith Dredge Company. Her keel was laid on 2 February 1942, and she was launched on 3 July 1942. She was commissioned on 17 November 1942. She was stationed at Norfolk, Virginia on 17 November 1942 for general aids-to-navigation (ATON) duties, but did not arrive at her post until 5 February 1943. She was involved in several unscheduled ice breaking operations on her way to Norfolk, which caused her delay.

On 20 September 1943, she was transferred to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Once there she was again engaged in ATON as well as law enforcement. While in this area, she routinely boarded vessel looking for drugs and other illegal substances. On 15 January 1944, she left Puerto Rican waters and headed to Portsmouth for standard alterations. From there she was sent to San Francisco, where she was stationed effective on 7 March 1944. It was at this time that the *Woodbine* was deployed to the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II. She took part in an amphibious assault on the Marians Island, where she served as a mobile service base for the Navy's Southern Attack force for Guam. Then in 1945 she took part in the Okinawan Campaign, where she again lent support to Navy vessels.

After her duty in World War II was finished, she was transferred back to the United States and on 19 September 1947, she was stationed in Grand Haven, Michigan. This post is where she was stationed for the rest of her military career. Her primary duties were ATON and ice breaking as well as SAR missions.

On 19 April 1964 she was slightly damaged in a collision with MV *Meteor* while breaking ice off Green Bay, Wisconsin. After undergoing some minor repairs she was back to duty.

From 18 to 20 August 1965, she was involved in a recovery mission in Lake Michigan, where a United Airlines plane crashed. Her primary duty for that mission was the salvaging of debris from the crash. On 6 January 1971, she had one of her most memorable missions in which she was deployed to search for the crew of an Air Force B-52 bomber that crashed in upper Lake Michigan. Unfortunately, there were no survivors of the crash.

On 15 February 1972, as part of a government wide savings plan, she was decommissioned and then donated to the Cleveland Public School System through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare/CSA. The intention of this donation was for the ship to be used to train marine engineering and electronics. She continued in this capacity until the early 1980s, when she was sold to a private owner at the cost of \$150,000.

Researched and written by Ms. Melissa M. Ashmore.

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No caption; 1962; Photo No. 032162-22; photographer unknown.



No caption; 1962; Photo No. 032162-26; photographer unknown.

**Sources:**

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

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