



# *Itasca*, 1930

## Later-HMS *Gorleston*, Y-92

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The cutter *Itasca* was named for a lake located in central Minnesota.

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Builder: General Engineering and Drydock Company, Oakland, CA

Launched: 16 November 1929

Commissioned: 12 July 1930

Decommissioned: 30 May 1941 (transferred to Great Britain under Lend Lease; returned to USCG on 23 April 1946)

Disposition: Sold for scrap to the Patapsco Scrap Corporation of Baltimore, Maryland on 28 September 1950.

Displacement: 2,075 tons

Dimensions: 250' oa (236' bp) x 42' x 12' 11" draft (mean)

Machinery: 1 turbine-driven electric motor (General Electric), 2 boilers, 3,350 shp, 14.8 knots (cruising), 17.5 knots max

Propellers: single, 4 blades

Complement: 97 (1940)

Armament: 1 x 5"/51; 1 x 3"/50; 2 x 6-pdrs (1929)

Cost: \$900,000 each (hull & machinery)

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### "LAKE"-CLASS DESIGN

The 250-foot class cutters were designed by the Coast Guard and were, in many respects, modernized 240-footers. Captain Q.B. Newman, USCG, designed its innovative turbine-electric-drive power plant, which developed an amazing 3,350 shp. These were the first to have alternating current, and a synchronous motor for propulsion. The whole ship ran off the main turbine. The auxiliary generators were tied into the main generator electrically, after sufficient speed was attained. At that point, no steam was required to drive the turbines on the auxiliary generators. The propulsion plant achieved remarkable efficiency. The counter stern and plumb bow of the older class had given way to the flared stem and cruiser stern. These features were an attempt to improve sea qualities over the 240-foot class, particularly to eliminate the heavy shocks common in the North Atlantic Ice Patrol.

Initially this class was made up of ten cutters, all of which were transferred to Great Britain under Lend-Lease in 1941. They were to be replaced in the USCG inventory by the 255-foot Owasco-class vessels, laid down in 1943. Three vessels were lost while in British service, one was not returned, and the remainder turned back to the Coast Guard in 1946. Initially, the Coast Guard planned to renovate the *Champlain*, *Itasca*, *Mocoma*, and *Tampa* and return them to service. The remaining two vessels, the *Chelan* and *Tahoe*, were stripped of parts for use in the restoration of the other four ships. Due to economic constraints following the war, however, only the *Mocoma* and *Tampa* were placed in commission.

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### TYPES OF WORK DONE BY THE LAKE-CLASS CUTTERS

It was only during the last five years that a detailed statistical record had been kept of various types of work performed by the ten transferred cutters. Most of the cutters performed an equal amount of boarding work during this period, with the exception of *Tahoe*, whose record of 809 vessels boarded was over twice the group average for the period, and of *Itasca*, whose 528 boarding were 50 percent above the average. *Shoshone* reported two and a half times the average number of vessels reported by the group for infractions of navigation laws, and *Tahoe* twice the average.

*Sebago* led in derelicts destroyed, and *Chelan* in regattas patrolled. *Cayuga* and *Mendota* did the greatest amount of anti-smuggling patrol work, while *Itasca* and *Mendota* led in time devoted to assistance work. *Mendota* and *Pontchartrain* spent over twice the average number of hours in winter cruising, while *Shoshone*, *Itasca*, and *Chelan* did all of the Bering Sea Patrol work done by the group. *Champlain* and *Chelan* led in the International Ice Patrol activity, and *Cayuga* devoted more time than any of the rest to USCG Academy cadet practice cruises. *Tahoe* gave the greatest amount of time of any in the group to icebreaking.

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#### **CUTTER HISTORY:**

The new Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* was commissioned on 12 July 1930. Her most famous claim to notoriety began in June, 1937. On 10 June 1937, *Itasca* was ordered to proceed from Los Angeles to Honolulu for duty in connection with a cruise to the Equatorial Islands. She arrived in Honolulu on the 15th and made arrangements for guard duty, in connection with the projected flight across the Pacific of Amelia Earhart from Lae, New Guinea to Honolulu. On June 18th the cutter left Honolulu en route to Howland Island with a large number of temporary personnel, including Army and Navy officers, Department of the Interior employees, and two journalists. On the 24th she completed landing stores and equipment at Howland Island and proceeded to Baker Island, where she landed Interior Department personnel and stores. From 26-30 June she held a position off and on the lee side of Howland Island awaiting the arrival of the Earhart plane. During this period Interior Department personnel and technical aides were at work on runways and other precautionary work connected with the flight.

On 1 July verification was received from San Francisco that Amelia Earhart Putnam had departed Lae, New Guinea, at noon, Lae time, and was en route for Howland. On 2 July the cutter was in contact with the Earhart plane at 2:45 a.m. and intermittently thereafter. The early radio reception was poor. At 6:14 a.m., 2 July, the plane reported its position as 200 miles out of Howland. At daylight *Itasca* commenced laying a heavy smokescreen. At 6:45 a.m. the plane reported its position 100 miles out and at 7:42 a.m., it reported apparently over the island with gas running low, but as yet not sighting land. At 7:58 a.m. the plane reported circling and requested transmission on 7500 kcs for bearings. At 8:00 a.m. the plane reported reception of the cutter's signals, but was unable to obtain a minimum for a bearing. At 8:43 a.m. the plane reported being on line 157-337 and running north and south with no reference point given. The reception was excellent. At 9:00 a.m., there being no sign of the plane, the shore party returned to the ship, and at 10:40 a.m., it was assumed the plane was down and the cutter got under way at full speed to search the area.

The flying conditions within a radius of 40 miles of Howland Island were excellent with an east wind of 8 to 13 miles per hour, the sea smooth and ceiling unlimited as far as could be observed. The sun was rising clear and bright, with the island, the ship and the smoke screen in its glare. Visibility to the north and west was excellent to the horizon, but beyond that continuous banks of heavy cumulus clouds were visible. The plane's transmissions had indicated a flight through cloudy and overcast skies throughout the night and morning, and that dead reckoning distance had been accomplished. The plane's signal strength had been high and unchanged during the last hour of transmission, and its line of position had indicated that the dead reckoning had run correct. Throughout the proceeding night stellar navigating possibilities south and east of Howland and close to Howland had been excellent.

Due to the conditions which existed north and west of Howland and due to the fact that the plane obtained no fix during the latter part of its flight due to cloudy weather, it was assumed that the plane may have missed the smoke screen, ship or island visually due to their lying in the glare of the rising sun, and passed north of Howland some two hundred miles. It was further assumed that the line of position obtained was a sun" line, obtained when the plane emerged from the cloudy area north and west of Howland, and that it may have carried the line of position found along its line of flight for the period necessary for the navigator to work and plot his line of position not in excess of one hundred miles. From these assumptions it was deduced that the plane did not come down within a radius of

forty miles of Howland Island. The most logical area of search, therefore, lay in a sector of a circle between forty and two hundred miles off the island and between bearings 337° and 45° true from it. Five of the personnel and a radio operator were left on the island in charge of high frequency radio direction apparatus to obtain bearings, if possible, on the plane. *Itasca* searched throughout the day to the northward of Howland Island and during the night of 2-3 July with searchlights, extra lookouts posted and all hands on the alert. Information received from San Francisco indicated that there was a possibility that the plane might use radio while on the water. It might also keep afloat a considerable time. It had an emergency rubber boat and plenty of emergency rations. *Itasca* had suggested to the Commander of the Hawaiian Section the desirability of a Navy seaplane assisting in the search from Pearl Harbor.

At 9:45 p.m. on 2 July, definite instructions were received from the Commandant of the 14th Naval District that *Itasca* be at Howland Island at daybreak on 3 July, to provide tender service for a plane which had left Pearl Harbor at 7:23 p.m. As the Navy plane was already in the air en route to Howland the search had to be abandoned temporarily. Arriving at Howland at 7:10 a.m., *Itasca* was informed nine minutes later that the Navy plane was turning back to base on account of extremely bad flying weather. The cutter, consequently, resumed its search northward of Howland throughout the 3rd. During the day San Francisco reported that four different radio stations at Los Angeles had reported receiving the Earhart position as 179° W with 1.6° N in doubt. Consequently, the cutter stood west to this position for the purpose of proving or disproving these reports.

From 4-16 July *Itasca* conducted a search for the missing plane which took her as far west as Tarawa Island (173° E 1.6° N), as far north as 5.6° N, and as far south as Arorai Island (177° E 2.6° S). At 2:42 a.m. on 5 July the Naval Radio Station at Wailupe intercepted a message that read: "281 North Howland Call KHAQQ Beyond North Don't Hold With Us Much Longer Above Water Shut Off."

The cutter stood north to the position indicated and advised all steamers in the vicinity. At 9:00 p.m. that night lights which had the appearance of flares were sighted to the northward and the cutter stood up to investigate. These lights had every indication of a bursting green rocket, but were finally attributed to a meteorological shower which was reported both by the Howland Island Station and USS *Swan*. On the 6th the cutter proceeded south and east to effect rendezvous with USS *Colorado* for refueling. This was accomplished at 6:38 a.m. on 7 July and, after conferring with the commanding officer of the Navy vessel, *Itasca* searched south and west of Baker Island from 8-10 July. On the 11th she proceeded under orders to Arorai (Hurd) Island in the Gilbert Group, where she arrived at 6:00 a.m. on 13 July. Officers who landed there failed to get any information regarding the plane from the natives, and the cutter then proceeded to Tamana (Rotcher) Island, where natives were also questioned with negative results. During the 14th the cutter visited Nauuki (Henderville) Island and Kuria (Woodle) Island, and on the 15th at 6:50 a.m. raised Tarawa Island, where no information of the Earhart plane was to be had nor had any wreckage been seen, although a definite lookout had been kept. On the 16th *Itasca* was relieved of further search duty while en route for Howland Island, where she stopped on the 18th, returning to Honolulu on the 24th.

The Coast Guard "Good Will Cruise" to Mexico, Panama, and the countries of Central America in 1940 was undertaken by *Itasca* and *Pandora*. The cruise was the outcome of a recommendation of the Interdepartmental Committee on Cooperation with the American Republics, and the itinerary, approved by the Department of State, included Mazatlan and Acapulco, Mexico; San Jose, Guatemala; La Libertad, El Salvador; Amapala, Honduras; Corinto, Nicaragua; Puntarenas, Costa Rica; Colon, Panama; Puerto Limon, Costa Rica; Cieba, Tela, and Puerto Cortes, Honduras; Puerto Barrios, Guatemala; and Vera Cruz, Mexico. The cruise began at Mazatlan, Mexico, on 15 January 1940, and was completed in Vera Cruz, Mexico, on 8 March 1940.

In ample time, before the scheduled arrival in each country, a letter was addressed to the head of the United States Mission, going into detail regarding the ships' entertaining facilities, the drills that could be held, and requesting assistance in arranging for rifle and pistol matches and baseball games. Visits in ports averaged only three days, but, due to the preparatory work conducted by Commander (E) Ellis Reed-Hill on a preliminary trip in August and September 1939 and the careful selection of

competent officer personnel, the cruise was deemed a great success. Upon arrival in each port salutes were fired and calls were exchanged, and then, following plans already made, commissioned officers, baseball and rifle teams, and, where practicable, liberty parties were transported to the capitals by various means of transport, always furnished gratis by the government or other owners. Following calls by the cutters' officers on the higher government officials, our chiefs of missions held receptions and later the various governments entertained the officers, always in a handsome and most friendly manner. Baseball games were played at practically every stop, with a string of defeats going down the West Coast and wins coming up the East. Drills were held at each place with the breeches buoy, rigging the portable drill mast to the best advantage for spectacular effect, as in San Salvador where the drill was held at the athletic stadium and a man was "rescued" by the buoy from the top of the grandstand. When the shark danger was not too great, capsize drills were held, often alongside the ships while guests were being entertained aboard. At every place visited the cruise was well received and hospitably entertained with the most friendly spirit apparent, except possibly at Vera Cruz, where, amongst the older people, resentment for 1914 still seemed to exist. The officers and crew were imbued with the desire of demonstrating the friendly feeling of our Government and people for our Latin neighbors, and no unpleasant event occurred at any time to mar the visit. On 5 April 1941, President Roosevelt authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to transfer ten 250-foot cutters of the United States Coast Guard to the United Kingdom. This action was taken in accordance with the terms of the Act of 11 March 1941, (an Act to Promote the Defense of the United States). The President, having consulted with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Coast Guard, had found that the defense of the United Kingdom was vital to the defense of the United States, and that it would be in the interests of our national defense to transfer the ten cutters as defense articles under an agreement which had been duly concluded with His Majesty's Government.

The cutters in question had been built between the years 1928 and 1932. They were all 42-foot beam, 16-foot maximum draft and 1979 tons displacement. Five of them, the *Cayuga*, *Itasca*, *Saranac*, *Sebago*, and *Shoshone* were 3200 horsepower, and five of them, the *Champlain*, *Mendota*, *Chelan*, *Pontchartrain*, and *Tahoe*, were 3000 horsepower. They were all fuel oil burners of single screw, steel-hull construction, each with a speed of 16 knots per hour, driven by turbine electric power, and with a capacity of 90,500 gallons of fuel oil each. The *Cayuga* had a cruising radius at economical speed of 6,050 miles and all the others of 7,542 miles. At the maximum speed all but the *Itasca*, *Shoshone*, and *Mendota* had a cruising radius at maximum speed of 3,600 miles. These three had a cruising radius at maximum speed of 4,500 miles.

The ten cutters each had a complement under the Coast Guard of eight commissioned officers, four warrant officers and 85 enlisted men. During the fiscal year 1940 they had cruised an average of 20,705 miles each at an average annual cost of operation for each of \$186,029.00.

On 5 April 1941, the Commandant sent identical instructions to the commanding officers of each of the ten vessels that, when all armament had been installed and their vessels degaussed and calibrated, they were to report to the Commander of the New York District. Each vessel was to be prepared for delivery to the British following detailed instructions, and the actual transfer of command and delivery of each vessel was to be on a date designated by the Commander of the New York District. The delivery of the ten vessels was to be made at the Navy Yard, Brooklyn, NY and was to be as early as practicable, consistent with the readiness of the vessels and the availability of the relieving personnel. The vessels and equipment were to be delivered "as is" except as modified by Headquarters' orders or the following detailed instructions.

Prior to transfer of command and delivery of vessels, certain action was outlined. In these instructions each commander was to obliterate the ship's name from the hull by the removal of the letters and, also, the ship's name and service designation on all equipment, carefully repainting over surfaces after such removal. Records of public property and all other ship's records were to be complete as of delivery date. Quintuplicate priced invoices were to be prepared on all equipment; stores, including commissary stores and supplies, including ammunition, to be transferred with the vessel.

After the arrival of each vessel in New York, the personnel was to be reduced to the minimum required under prevailing conditions, with surplus personnel to be transferred as directed by the Commander of the New York District. The commander of each vessel, however, was required to furnish competent details of men for the instruction and indoctrination of the British personnel relieving them. Personnel records, pay accounts and muster rolls were to be brought up to date and, together with publications and equipment, transferred as subsequently directed. Each vessel was to be fueled to capacity, with an adequate supply of lubricants taken on board, and fresh water tanks filled to capacity. All ship's accounts, including allotments, mess accounts, clothing and ship's service store were to be closed out.

During the period of transfer, the crews were to be mixed--Coast Guard and British, but all Coast Guard personnel were to be removed from the cutters prior to their final departure from a United States port. The Commander of the New York District was to designate in advance a date of transfer agreeable to the relieving British commanding officer. On that date the vessel and her equipment were to be delivered to the new British commanding officer, he was to be supplied with the priced invoices of equipment, stores and supplies to be transferred with the vessel, and his receipt obtained. All keys, including magazine keys, were to be turned over and receipted for.

There would follow the transfer of all Coast Guard personnel, except the special details required for instruction or indoctrination, such personnel to remain on board while in a United States port only as observers and without responsibility. A roster of such observers was to be submitted by each commanding officer to the Commander of the New York District. Each commanding officer was to report to the New York District Commander the time and date the transfer was affected, together with a statement that all instructions had been complied with. He was also to submit copies of all receipted invoices in triplicate for transmission to Headquarters.

Publications to be removed and forwarded to the issuing officer at Headquarters included *Coast Guard Regulations* with changes and circular letters, *Pay and Supply Instructions* with amendments, *Courts and Boards*, *Ordnance*, *Manual of Engineering Instructions*, *Bulletin of Engineering Information*, *U.S. Navy (Restricted)*, and *Communications and Uniform Regulations*. The same treatment was to be accorded all ship's files and records, except those necessary for the operation of the ship by the new command, including all engineering log books subsequent to June, 1940; the engineering letter file except letter DG-RR; all secret, confidential and restricted letters, publications, charts and devices, registered or non-registered; and boat number plates. To be forwarded to the district to which the vessel was permanently attached were all records and files pertaining to allotment ledger and pay accounts, after closure, including rough rolls, file copies of vouchers, allotment ledgers, schedules, etc.

To the Depot were to be shipped the bronze Coast Guard plaque that was located in the wardroom of each vessel, metal identifying letters on bows of boats and cast letters forming names of cutters located on the stern. To the New York Store, for issue upon Headquarters' authorization, were to go all uniform clothing, athletic equipment, broadcast receivers and spare parts, fictional and professional libraries, motion picture projectors, accessories and spare parts, motion picture cameras and accessories, photographic equipment and supplies, portable public address systems anti spare parts. Personnel instructions were to be destroyed. All articles transferred out of the ship were to be invoiced to the units to which they were forwarded.

By 9 April 1941, all machinery for the transfer had been set in motion, and the transfers were expected to take place in an orderly manner with Captain H. W. Dempwolf, USCG Commander at New York representing the Coast Guard, and Captain A.F.E. Palliser, RN, HMS *Malaya*, representing the British. Four cutters were on that date being painted the British war color by the United States Navy Yard, in accordance with the request of the British authorities, and, upon completion of the painting, these vessels would be in all respects ready for transfer.

The other six would follow along in accordance with the schedule as planned. Instruction and indoctrination of the British crew were to be made in Long Island Sound over a period of two weeks, after which it was expected that the British could take over the cutters and navigate them satisfactorily alone. Two Coast Guard officers, Lieutenant Commander H.E. Grogan and Lieutenant J. P. German,

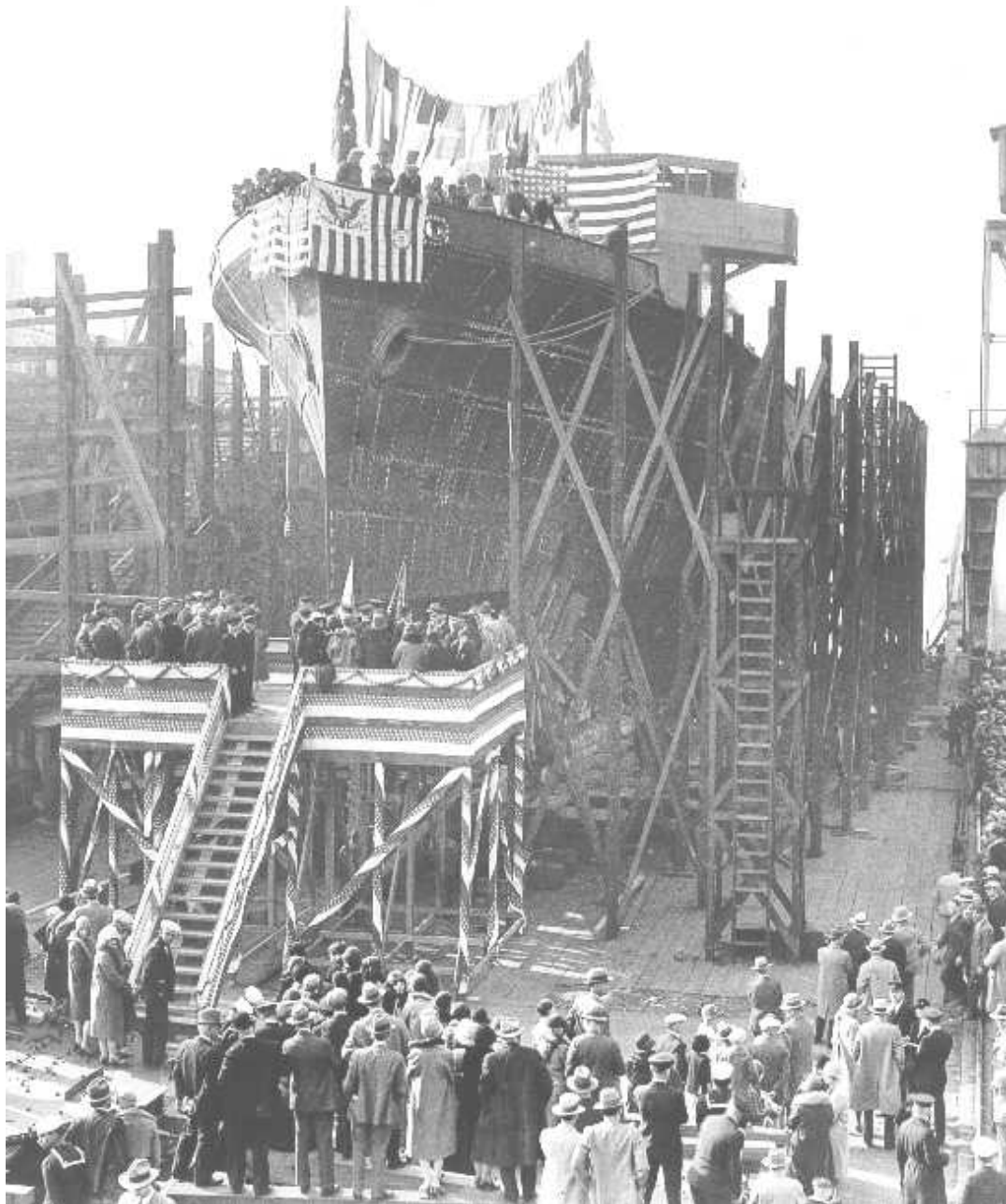


Commanding Officer and Engineer Officer, respectively, of the *Pontchartrain*, were designated to act as liaison between commanding officers of the Coast Guard vessels and the relieving British commanding officers. On May 31, 1941, the last of the ten cutters, USCGC *Itasca* was turned over to the British and renamed HMS *Gorleston*.

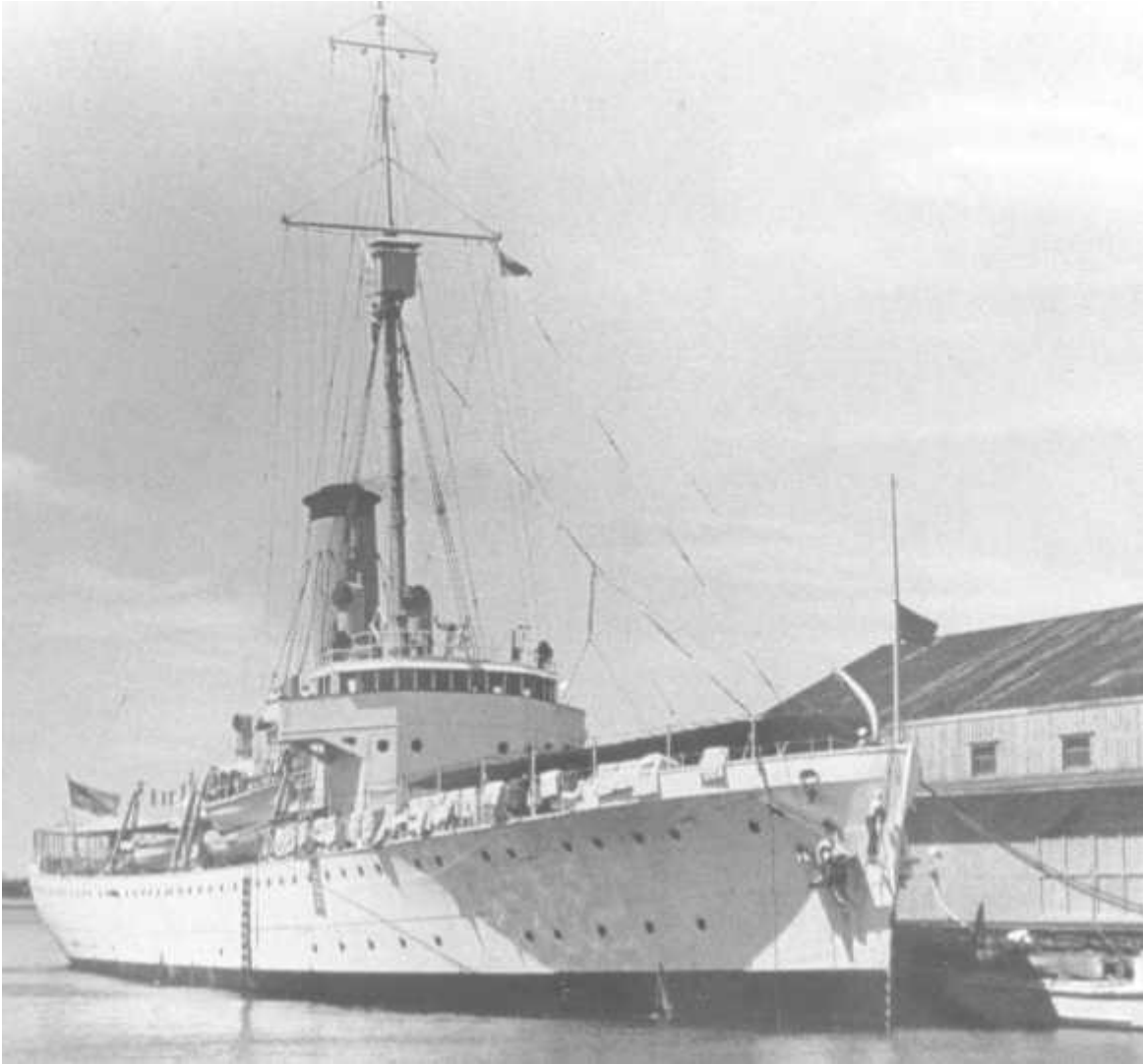
She was returned to the United States on 23 April 1946. Her re-commissioning, however, was cancelled and she was sold 4 October 1950.

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**



**USCGC *Itasca*; launching; 16 November 1929**



**USCGC *Itasca*; tied up, view from forward, pre-World War II**

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**SOURCES:**

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