

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER MESQUITE
(WLB 305
WAGL 305)
U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 180' Mesquite Class
Charlevoix vicinity
Charlevoix County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-327

HAER
MI-327

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER MESQUITE

HAER No. MI-327

RIG/TYPE
OF CRAFT: Cutter (Mesquite Class)

TRADE: Buoy tending (government)

OFFICIAL NUMBER: WLB-305 (Formerly WAGL-305)

PRINCIPAL
DIMENSIONS:
(As built)

Length:	180'
Beam:	37'
Depth:	12'
Displacement:	935 tons

LOCATION: Sunk in Keystone Bay, Lake Superior

DATES OF
CONSTRUCTION: August 20, 1942 - August 27, 1943

DESIGNER: The preliminary design work was done by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) based upon the design used for the CACTUS Class. Final design work was done by A.M. Deering of Chicago, Illinois.

BUILDER: Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Company of Duluth, Minnesota

PRESENT OWNER: None

PRESENT USE: Attraction in underwater dive preserve

SIGNIFICANCE: This vessel was built to serve as a 180' U.S. Coast Guard cutter. The federal government purchased or built thirty-nine of these vessels, built in three sub-classes, from 1942-1944. The U.S. Coast Guard designed the 180s to service Aids-to-Navigation (AtoN), perform Search and Rescue missions (SAR), carry out Law Enforcement duties (LE), and conduct ice-breaking operations. Members of the class have served in the U.S. Coast Guard from 1942 to the present. They have significantly contributed to safe navigation on inland and international waters in times of peace and war.

RESEARCHER: Marc Porter, 2002

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER MESQUITE

HAER No. MI-327

(Page 2)

PROJECT

INFORMATION: This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The HAER program is administered by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record Division (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, E. Blaine Cliver, Chief.

All remaining buoy tenders of this class in U.S. Coast Guard service are slated for decommissioning, with the last leaving service in 2005. As part of the surplusing process, the U.S. Coast Guard required that the vessels be documented to the standards of the Historic American Engineering Record.

The project was prepared under the direction of HAER Maritime Program Manager Todd Croteau. The historical report was produced by Marc Porter, and edited by Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, NCSHPO.

FOR ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION ON THE U.S. COAST GUARD BUOY TENDERS, 180' MESQUITE CLASS, SEE:

HAER No. DC-59	U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 180' Mesquite Class
HAER No. AK-44	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter IRONWOOD
HAER No. AL-198	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter SWEETGUM
HAER No. CA-293	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter BUTTONWOOD
HAER No. CA-294	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter PLANETREE
HAER No. MI-327	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter MESQUITE
HAER No. TX-106	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter PAWPAW

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER MESQUITE
HAER No. MI-327
(Page 3)

Marine Iron and Shipbuilding laid the keel for this tender, the first of the B Class 180s, on August 20, 1942. The vessel was launched on November 14, 1942 and commissioned on August 27, 1943. With a price tag of \$894,798, MESQUITE was the most expensive of her class, except for the U.S. Coast Guard-built IRONWOOD.

MESQUITE spent the first four months of her career servicing AtoN in the U.S. Coast Guard's Fifth District. She then left for duty with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific. During the last months of the war, MESQUITE serviced AtoN in the Philippines.

After World War II, MESQUITE returned to the Great Lakes and took up AtoN, SAR, and icebreaking duties. MESQUITE's SAR duties over the years varied. MESQUITE used her icebreaking abilities to free trapped ships, and her lifting capacity for salvage work. The tender helped pull grounded ships off shoals, and medevaced injured crewmen from ships to the safety of shore-based hospitals. In one instance, MESQUITE rescued a pleasure boat with a five man crew that had been drifting for four days. MESQUITE's crane plucked the 26' cabin cruiser from the water, placing it on her deck.¹ The tender was even pressed into service on at least one occasion as a firefighting boat.

The numerous SAR calls in the tender's log testify to the dangers braved by mariners on the Great Lakes. Even the rescuers were not immune to danger. In April 1964 MESQUITE ran aground on a shoal. The tender survived the grounding but the incident was a foreshadowing of her eventual demise.

MESQUITE spent her entire peacetime career on the Great Lakes. Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan was her homeport from 1947 to 1959. She operated out of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin from 1959 to 1977. From Sturgeon Bay, she moved to Charlevoix, Michigan. Due to her area of operations, smuggling interdiction was a minor part of her normal activities. In March 1985, however, MESQUITE did seize a vessel carrying three pounds of marijuana.

Unlike most 180s MESQUITE did not arrive at a peaceful end to her Coast Guard service. Fate had something in store other than decommissioning and sale to another government or some private individual. On December 4, 1989, MESQUITE was underway off Keweenaw Point, Michigan. At 2:30 A.M. the tender ran aground on a rock ledge in about 12' of water. The outcropping tore the tender's hull open and lake water poured into the vessel. Several U.S. Coast Guard and commercial vessels went to MESQUITE's aid but little could be done in the hours after the accident other than evacuate the crew from their partially flooded and listing vessel. The crew suffered a few minor injuries but there were no fatalities. Typical winter weather on Lake Superior hampered salvage operations at the site of the grounding; ten days after the

¹ *Door County Advocate*, no publication data. (Article on file at USCG Historian's Office, Washington, D.C.)

accident the tender's stock of fuel oil was pumped off but nothing more could be done without an extended stretch of good weather. The U.S. Coast Guard called off salvage efforts until the spring and the wreck site was placed under surveillance. Salvors managed to remove some equipment but the vessel itself was a total loss and was decommissioned shortly after the accident. Coast Guard investigators assigned blame for the accident to MESQUITE's commanding officer and the Officer of the Deck (OOD), both of whom failed to ensure the ship was on a safe course.²

After analyzing several alternatives, U.S. Coast Guard officials elected to have the vessel scuttled in Keystone Bay, Lake Superior. A commercial salvage firm lowered the battered vessel to its final resting place on July 13, 1990, where it became part of the Keweenaw Underwater Preserve and serves as an attraction for sport divers. The salvors stripped all valuable fittings from the wrecked hull before it was lowered to the bottom. They also reinforced several bulkheads to ensure the hull would not fall apart rapidly and pose a threat to divers visiting the wreck where it rests in 100' of water.³

² Frank Jennings, "Grounded — Lake Superior claims CGC Mesquite — Crew safely evacuated," *Commandant's Bulletin* (n.d.): 1-3.

³ "Cutter 'Mesquite' finally scuttled," *The Milwaukee Journal*, 16 July 1990, A4.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Cutter ‘Mesquite’ finally scuttled.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, 16 July 1990, A4.

Jennings, Frank. “Grounded — Lake Superior claims CGC Mesquite — Crew safely evacuated.” *Commandant’s Bulletin* (n.d.): 1-3.