U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *McCulloch*

Photo: Robert Schwemmer Maritime Library

U.S. Revenue Cutter *McCulloch* off Mare Island Navy Shipyard, San Francisco Bay, California, circa 1900.

Photo: USCG Historian's Office

U.S. Revenue Cutter *McCulloch*'s crew, date unknown.

Photos: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Photos: (top) Passenger steamship SS *Governor*.
(bottom): USCG Cutter *McCulloch* sinking by the bow after the collision with the SS *Governor*.

Early History

The U.S. Revenue Cutter *McCulloch* was named in honor of Hugh McCulloch, the 27th and 36th Secretary of the Treasury, under Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and later, Chester A. Arthur and Grover Cleveland.

USRC *McCulloch* was constructed by William Cramp and Sons in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Launched in 1896, it was the largest cutter built to date at a cost of over $200,000. The hull was composition construction, where wood planks were mounted over steel framing. The cutter was commission into the Revenue Cutter Service on December 12, 1897, under the command of Captain D.B. Hogsdon, RCS. A single triple-expansion marine steam engine provided a cruising speed of 17 knots and to extend its range, *McCulloch* was barkentine rigged with three masts. *McCulloch*'s length was 219 feet, with a beam of 33.4 feet, depth of hold 17.1 feet, and displacement of 1,280 tons. The cutter's armament included four 6-pounder 3-inch guns and one 15-inch torpedo tube molded in the bow stem. During war time *McCulloch*'s complement was 130 crewmen.

In 1898, the cutter saw action at the Battle of Manila Bay under the command of Commodore George Dewey.

Commodore Dewey would later, in a message to the Secretary of the Navy, commend Captain Hogsdon for the efficiency and readiness of his ship.

In January 1899, *McCulloch* arrived at San Francisco, California, and operated on patrol duty out of that port, cruising from the Mexican border to Cape Blanco, Oregon. The cutter later operated near the Pribilof Islands to enforce fur seal regulations. During these years in the Bering Sea Patrol, *McCulloch* became well known because of its services as a floating courtroom for far-flung Alaskan towns. *McCulloch* returned to San Francisco and resumed patrol duties off the west coast in 1912. In 1914, *McCulloch* was ordered to Mare Island Navy Shipyard where the cutter's boilers were replaced, the mainmast was removed and the bowsprit shortened.

In March 1917, *McCulloch* returned to Mare Island Navy Shipyard and went through overhauls that included removing 800 pounds of copper sheathing, and re-caulking the wooden hull. On April 6, 1917, *McCulloch* was put under U.S. Navy operational command for patrol duties at the onset of World War I. *McCulloch* maintained the distinction as the largest Revenue, and later Coast Guard cutter during its 20-year career, and was decommissioned on June 13, 1917.

USCG Cutter *McCulloch* Collision with the Passenger Steamship SS *Governor*

On June 13, 1917, the cutter was proceeding cautiously through dense fog on its trip from San Pedro, California to San Francisco. At 7:30 that morning, the cutter was four miles west-northwest of Point Conception when Captain John C. Cantwell, Commanding, and Ensign William Mayne, officer of the deck in charge of navigation, heard a steamer's fog signal off the starboard bow. Nearby, the passenger steamship *Governor* was southbound from San Francisco to San Pedro. Captain Howard C. Thomas, master of the *Governor*, heard *McCulloch*'s fog signal and gave the order "full speed astern" and to blow three whistles to indicate the vessel's movement full speed astern. *McCulloch* was off the *Governor*'s port bow when the two ships collided, striking the *McCulloch*'s starboard side forward of the pilot house, holing the cutter. All of *McCulloch*'s crew were taken safely aboard *Governor* before the cutter sank to the sea floor 35 minutes later. John Arvid Johansson, *McCulloch*'s acting water tender, was in his bunk and was severely injured during the collision. He died 3 days later in a San Pedro hospital and was buried on June 19th at the nearby Harbor View Cemetery.

Photo: Color Lithograph by Rand McNally, Courtesy Library of Congress

Photo: Courtesy Library of Congress

Photo: Harper's Weekly

Photos: (left) Battle of Manila Bay, May 1, 1898. Manila, Philippines, in the top center, and the Spanish fleet in the upper right. Ships listed descending on the left to bottom: cutter USRC *McCulloch*; gunboats USS *Petrel* and USS *Concord*; protected cruisers USS *Boston*, USS *Raleigh*, USS *Baltimore*, and USS *Olympia* flagship – signaling "Remember the Maine"; (center) Commodore George Dewey on the bridge of the USS *Olympia* during the battle; (right) *McCulloch*'s Chief Engineer Frank B. Randall.

McCulloch – Battle of Manila Bay

On the eve of the Spanish American War, the U.S. Revenue Cutter *McCulloch* was steaming via the Suez Canal and Far East to its first duty station at San Francisco. Upon its arrival at Singapore on April 8, 1898, two weeks before war was declared, *McCulloch* was ordered to report to Commodore George Dewey at the Asiatic station. Dewey's squadron entered Manila Bay on April 30 under the cover of darkness.

Just as *McCulloch* was passing El Fraile Rock, soot in the cutter's stack caught fire and sent up a column of fire. The battery at El Fraile fired at *McCulloch*. The USS *Boston* and *McCulloch* responded, silencing the Spanish guns. Chief Engineer Frank B. Randall died

from heat and overexertion while trying to extinguish the smokestack fire, the only American death at the battle. The U.S. squadron destroyed the Spanish warships, killing 381 Spanish seamen. Because of its speed, Dewey ordered *McCulloch* to the nearest cable station located at Hong Kong to dispatch the news of the great naval victory.

USCG Cutter *McCulloch* Expedition 2016

During a joint NOAA – USCG remotely operated vehicle (ROV) training mission in October 2016, the science team confirmed the historic remains of the *McCulloch* off Point Conception, known at the "Cape Horn of the Pacific." Working off the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary's R/V *Shearwater*, a

VideoRay *Mission Specialist* ROV was deployed to survey and characterize the archaeological remains of this historically significant shipwreck in America's U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy's military history. A team from NOAA, NPS, USCG Dive Locker Alameda and San Diego, with vessel support from USCG District 11 cutters *Halibut* and *Blacktip*, seven successful ROV dives were completed at the shipwreck site. Additional logistical support for the training mission included NOAA's Office of National Sanctuaries (ONMS): Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, ONMS Maritime Heritage Program, ONMS West Coast Region Office, USCG District 11, USCG Historian's Office DC and USCG Historian Atlantic Region, VideoRay, and Bathymetric Research.

Photo: Robert V. Schwemmer ONMS NOAA

Underwater Photos: NOAA USCG VideoRay

Photos: (left) NOAA R/V *Shearwater* and USCG Cutter *Halibut* over the *McCulloch* shipwreck site during ROV operations; (center) The helm or steering station was located on the upper-deck of the flying bridge of the USCG Cutter *McCulloch*. The helm is constructed of a nonferrous metal and the wooden handles have succumbed to wood boring organisms; (right) A 6-pounder gun mounted in the sponson located at the starboard bow. The cutter was equipped with four 6-pounder, 3-inch rapid firing guns arranged in sponsons and located in the bow and stern quarters of the ship. The 6-pounder gun was a key diagnostic artifact to identify the shipwreck.

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