

The Legacy of the ERIE-Class gunboats: The U.S. Coast Guard Treasury-Class Cutters (the "327s")

The blueprints for the construction of the two ERIE-Class gunboats (ERIE and CHARLESTON) were still being drawn, when (on January 31, 1934) the Treasury Department announced that it was authorizing the construction of 7 new Coast Guard revenue cutters. These vessels were to be constructed at the estimated cost of \$11,520,000 by the Navy Department, using funds from the Public Works Administration. Treasury Department officials indicated that the 7 "gunboat cruising vessels" would be modified versions of the ERIE and the CHARLESTON.

The new cutters were intended to meet the changing mission of the Coast Guard, as it took on responsibilities beyond the suppression of rum running. Because the number of passenger flights was increasing at home and overseas, the Coast Guard believed that cutter-based aircraft would be essential for future high-seas search-and-rescue efforts. Also, during the mid-1930's, narcotics smuggling was on the increase, and fairly fast cutters were needed to curtail it. And, finally, although a second world war was not yet inevitable, these vessels were also seen as sort of an "auxiliary navy" which could also be used for patrol, escort and anti-submarine screening duties in wartime.

Thirty-two preliminary designs of a modified ERIE-class gunboat were drawn up before settling on the final plans for the 7 vessels in the spring of 1934. While a number of modifications above the main deck were made, the machinery plant and the hull below the waterline were identical to those found on the ERIE and the CHARLESTON. Constructed of steel (but with no armor plating), the cutters displaced 2,350 tons and measured 327 ft. by 41 ft., with a 12-foot draft. (Hence, they were commonly referred to as "327s.") Two geared-turbines provided propulsion. With total shaft horsepower of 5,250, the ships could achieve a maximum speed of 19.5 knots. At cruising speed of 13 knots, their radius was 7,000 miles; at maximum speed, it was 4,200 miles. Their construction cost was about \$2,500,000 each.

The 327s carried a single-engine floatplane, and they were initially armed with two, single, 5-inch (51-caliber) guns, two 6-pounders, and one 1-pounder. Sixteen officers and 107 enlisted men in peacetime, and 21 officers and 215 enlisted men during wartime, manned them.

The "revenue cutters" were formally classified as Treasury-Class cutters, because they were all named for U.S. Secretaries of the Treasury. They were the:

Name	Hull No.	Constructed at:	Launched
BIBB	WPG-31	Charleston Navy Yard	01/14/37
CAMPBELL	WPG-32	Philadelphia Navy Yard	06/03/36
DUANE	WPG-33	Philadelphia Navy Yard	06/03/36
HAMILTON	WPG-34	New York Navy Yard	11/10/36
INGHAM	WPG-35	Philadelphia Navy Yard	06/03/36
SPENCER	WPG-36	New York Navy Yard	01/06/37
TANEY	WPG-37	Philadelphia Navy Yard	06/03/36

U.S. Navy destroyer escorts obtained a kill-rate of 0.1 U-boat per ship. The 327s achieved a rate of .57 per ship, the highest kill-rate of any anti-submarine warfare ship type in World War II.

The 327s proved to be long-lived ships, with the exception of the HAMILTON, which was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Iceland on January 29, 1942. The BIBB and the DUANE were sunk as artificial reefs off the coast of Florida in 1987. The U.S. Navy sank the CAMPBELL as a "dummy ship" on November 29, 1984. The SPENCER was sold for scrap on October 8, 1981. The TANEY is currently a museum ship at the Baltimore Maritime Museum, and the INGHAM is part of the Key West Maritime Museum.