NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: USS *Escape* (ARS-6) USCGC *Escape* (WMEC-6)

USS *Escape* (ARS-6) underway in 1946. www.nafts.net/ars6.htm. Contributed by Craig Rothhammer.

USCGC *Escape* (WMEC-6) U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Vessel History

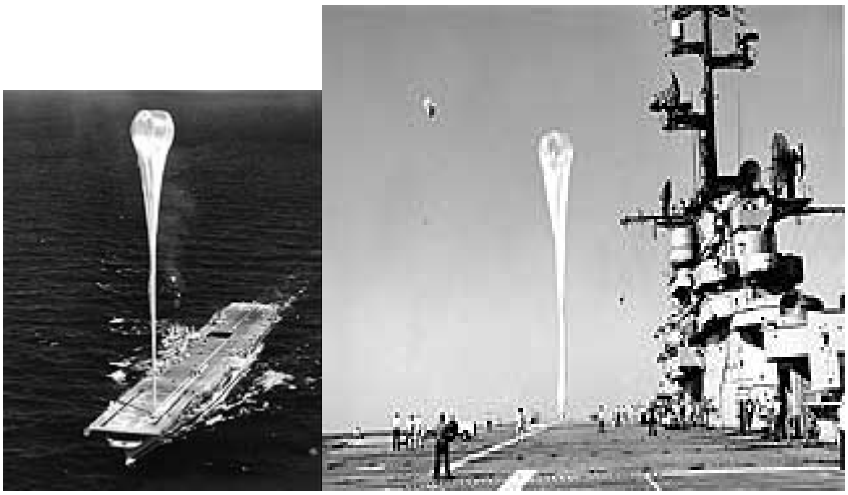
USS *Escape* (ARS-6) was a *Diver*-class Rescue Salvage Ship built for the U.S. Navy in 1942. *Escape* was launched November 22, 1942 and commissioned November 20, 1943. In December of 1943 *Escape* sailed from San Diego to Norfolk, Virginia, where it provided towing and salvage services. Between July and mid-September of 1944, *Escape* performed similar duties in Bermuda. After returning to Norfolk in September, *Escape* rescued the cargo ship *George Ade*, which was damaged and disabled in the Atlantic during a fierce hurricane. *Escape* was able to tow the vessel safely into port despite passing through another violent storm.

Escape operated out of Bermuda for the first five months of 1945, during which time it towed three ships damaged by heavy seas safely into port. After returning to Norfolk, *Escape* sailed for the Pacific on August 11. However, when the war ended, its orders were changed and *Escape* returned from the Panama Canal Zone towing scows to Tampa, Florida. From there *Escape* proceeded to Davisville, Rhode Island to transport mooring buoys to Jacksonville, Florida, where the crew installed them in 1945. On November 8, *Escape* sailed from Key West escorting, and later towing, the Italian submarine *Mameli*. It delivered the submarine to Taranto, Italy and returned to Norfolk January 22, 1946.

Escape was decommissioned July 20, 1946 and placed in the Reserve Fleet at Orange, Texas. It was removed from the Reserve Fleet and re-commissioned July 12, 1951, and was again stationed at Norfolk to perform salvage and towing operations, this time alternating between Norfolk and San Juan, Puerto Rico. In November 1952 it rendezvoused with the submarine USS *Sea Dog* (SS-401) off Jacksonville to pick up 11 survivors from the crash of the blimp *K-119*. That December it was one of the vessels involved in removing the wreck of the gunboat USS *Erie* (PG-50) from the inner harbor of Willemstad, Curacao. *Erie* had been brought into Willemstad in 1942 and grounded there after being torpedoed by a German U-boat. Refloating the ship and scuttling it at sea both aided the Dutch Government in clearing the harbor and provided a useful training exercise for the Navy's salvage crews.

On July 17, 1958 *Escape* recovered a full-scale Jupiter IRBM (Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile) nose cone of a returning Jupiter-C rocket from the waters near Antigua. *Escape* brought the nose cone to the Naval Base at San Juan, Puerto Rico, where it was later flown to the Army's Redstone Arsenal in Alabama. This was the second recovery of a Jupiter IRBM nose cone. The Army Ballistic Missile Agency successfully launched a Jupiter IRBM in May of 1958.

Escape also served as one of the recovery vessels for Operation Sky Hook in January 1960, a mission that employed balloons to gather information regarding the upper atmosphere. During this mission, the Navy diverted *Escape* to Culebra Island east of Puerto Rico to assist in refloating the destroyer USS *Jonas Ingram* (DD-938) that had run aground there.



Left: The ten-million cubic foot "Winzen" research balloon on the flight deck of the USS *Valley Forge* (CVS-45) just prior to launching, during Operation "Skyhook" January 30, 1960. The balloon carried scientific devices to measure and record primary cosmic rays at 18-to-22 miles altitude. *Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval Historical Center. Right:* Tracer balloons are launched from the carrier to test upper atmosphere wind conditions, during Operation "Skyhook". A ten-million cubic foot research balloon is being prepared for flight at the forward end of the flight deck. *Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval Historical Center.*

Escape was one of many naval vessels that served as part of the official naval recovery force during the following NASA flight operations: Project Mercury January 30, 1960, and November and December 1960; Apollo-Saturn 12 (AS-12), November 14-24, 1969; Skylab-2 (SL-2), May 25-June 22, 1973; and Skylab-3 (SL-3), July 28-September 25, 1973.

Escape was one of many naval vessels that participated in the Cuban Missile Crisis blockade from October 24 to December 5, 1962, for which it received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. Between May and December 1974 its salvage capabilities were put to use in clearing wrecks blocking the Suez Canal.

U.S. Coast Guard

On September 1, 1978 *Escape* was decommissioned and transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard, where it was commissioned the USCGC *Escape* (WMEC-6). The Coast Guard had acquired two of its sister ships, the *Shackle* (ARS-9) and *Seize* (ARS-26) in 1946, which, unlike *Escape*, were later renamed. The CGC *Escape* was based at Charleston, South Carolina to carry out search and rescue and law enforcement operations. It was involved in intercepting boat loads of refugees attempting to reach the U.S. from Cuba and Haiti, and between 1982 and 1988, *Escape* seized eight vessels transporting a total of 61 tons of marijuana. It was decommissioned on June 29, 1995 and transferred to the U.S. Maritime Administration's National Defense Reserve Fleet in the James River off Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Escape had a long active career. Several of the salvage ships of the *Diver* Class compiled long and impressive records of service. Some were transferred late in their careers to the navies of Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey where they may still be active. In 1946 the Navy transferred the USS *Seize* (ARS-26) to the Coast Guard, where it was renamed the CGC

Yocona (WAT-168). In 1965 *Yocona* was re-designated as a medium endurance cutter (WMEC-168). *Yocano* was sunk as a target off Guam in 2006. The CGC *Acushnet* (WMEC-167), formerly the USS *Shackle*, is the oldest commissioned cutter currently serving in the Coast Guard. Its homeport is Ketchikan, Alaska.

Above: USCGC *Acushnet* (WMEC-167) underway in the Pacific. *Acushnet* is the oldest commissioned cutter serving in the U.S. Coast Guard. *http://tech.military.com*. *Below:* USCGC *Yocona*. *www.uscg.mil/history.*

Historic Context

The Navy was already experienced in marine salvage prior to World War II. Several major operations involved the recovery of three submarines: the *S-51* in 1925; the *S-4* in 1927; and the *Squalus* in 1939. However, the Navy did not have ships specifically designed and built for salvage work when it entered WWII, and it was not until the start of the war that salvage ships become a distinct vessel type.

During the first two years of the war, Great Britain had already lost a large number of ships. It was far more expedient to refloat or tow them back to port versus expending the time and resources necessary to build replacements. To this end, the British and Americans collaborated on the design of a series of steel-hulled salvage ships. Before the U.S. entered the war, the first four under construction were intended for the Royal Navy; however, after the U.S. entered the war, the number was cut to two. The first vessel, USS *Diver* (ARS-5), was completed in 1943 and delivered to Great Britain. *Diver* participated in salvage operations at Utah and Omaha beaches during WWII. *Escape* was the sixth vessel of the *Diver*-class.

The *Diver*-class was the second class of vessels built for the Navy specifically designated for salvage work and *Escape* was the sixth vessel of that class. Five general types served during the war that included the following classes: conversions from *Bird*-class minesweepers (seven); wooden-hulled, *Anchor*-class 183- foot ships (nine); two classes of steel-hulled, 213-foot ships, *Diver* class (16 ships); the slightly wider-beamed and faster *Bolster* class (six ships); and four miscellaneous ships.

The *Diver*-class vessels were built at the Basalt Rock Company, a shipyard in Napa, California, originally founded in 1920 as a local rock quarry. The company became involved in shipbuilding in 1938 when it began constructing barges for its own use. In addition to the salvage ships, its World War II Navy contracts also included two coastal tankers, two coastal freighters, and a number of barges.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Type: Submarine Rescue Vessel
Hull Number: ARS-6
Builder: Basalt Rock Company, a shipyard in Napa, California
Length: 213.6'
Beam: 39'
Draft: 14.8'
Displacement: 1,530 tons standard; 1,970 tons full load
Propulsion system: twin screw powered by Diesel-electric engines producing 3,000 horsepower
Speed: 15 knots
Complement: 69
Armament: two 44 mm guns

Diver-class vessels were extremely durable steel-hulled vessels. Initially, the ships were designed without an automatic towing winch. Winches were later diverted from ocean-going tugs for use on the ASRs.

The ships were fitted with 20-ton capacity booms forward and 10-ton capacity booms aft. They were also fitted with bow lift rollers, port and starboard, rated at 75 tons each, which were useful in harbor clearing operations. The ships had automatic towing machines with 2,100 feet of two-inch towing wire. In addition to assisting disabled vessels at sea, the towing capacity proved particularly valuable during the many amphibious landings in both the Pacific and European theaters. Landing craft and landing ships were in constant danger of broaching to in the surf and becoming embedded in the sand. Destroyers providing close in gunfire support often ran the risk of grounding in shallow poorly-charted waters.

Additional salvage equipment included two fixed fire pumps rated at 1,000 gallons per minute each, four portable fire pumps, multi-point mooring gear for stationing the ship over a wreck, and eight sets of "beach gear," pre-rigged anchors, chains and cables for use in refloating grounded vessels. Quick release stowage for the beach gear anchors was provided forward and aft on both sides of the ship. Diver support equipment included one double re-compression chamber and two complete diving stations aft for air diving. The ships carried two 35-foot work boats designed to support salvage operations.

Statement of Significance

The *Diver*-class was the second class of vessels built for the Navy specifically designated for salvage work and *Escape* was the sixth vessel of that class. The class does not represent a revolutionary design, nor is *Escape* the last remaining example of the class. Its sistership, the CGC *Acushnet* is currently an active ship in the U.S. Coast Guard. The USS *Clamp* (ARS-33) is currently in the Maritime Administration's National Defense Reserve Fleet in Suisun Bay, California. While *Escape* had a very long, active, and successful career in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, and participated in many note-worthy events, it was one of many vessels involved and one of many vessels that performed salvage work during and after WWII.

Integrity of Characteristics/Features

The vessel is in poor condition and has been in the NDRF for approximately 13 years. After the Navy transferred *Escape* to the Coast Guard, it was designated as a Medium Endurance Cutter (WMEC), a class often referred to as the "workhorse" of that service. After the transfer, the ship received extensive repairs and rehabilitation. As part of the transfer, the Coast Guard agreed to maintain all equipment related to *Escape*'s diving and salvage capability in the event that the Navy needed to recall the vessel. However, in 1984 *Escape*'s blisters or sponsons[1] were removed because they had deteriorated and were impairing the vessel's stability. *Escape*'s recompression chamber was later removed and transferred to a Navy diving school in Little Creek, Virginia. Additional salvage equipment was also removed and placed in storage. In 1987, the Navy removed

[1] Sponsons are projections from the sides of a watercraft, for protection, stability, or the mounting of equipment such as armaments or lifeboats, etc. They extend a hull dimension at or below the waterline and serve to increase flotation or add lift when underway.

Escape's towing machine, which had become inoperable. Without the blisters and towing machine, *Escape* was not in a condition suitable for recall and re-use by the Navy as a salvage vessel.

National Register Eligibility Statement

The *Escape* does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing.

Date: 4 December 2008
Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

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