

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER *EAGLE*  
(WIX-327)  
(SSS *Horst Wessel*)  
New London  
New London County  
Connecticut

HAER CT-191  
*HAER CT-191*

PHOTOGRAPHS

COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER *EAGLE* (WIX-327) (SSS *Horst Wessel*)

HAER No. CT-191

**Location:** New London, New London County, Connecticut

**Rig/Type of Craft:** Barque

**Trade:** Training vessel

**Official Number:** IMO number: 6109973

**Principal Measurements:** Length (waterline): 231'  
Beam: 39.1'  
Draft (fully loaded): 16'  
Displacement: 1,824 tons  
Sail area: 22,300 square feet  
(The listed dimensions are current, but it should be noted that draft, displacement, and tonnages were subject to alteration over time as well as variations in measurements.<sup>1</sup>)

**Propulsion:** U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Eagle* is a three-masted barque with a speed under full sail of 17 knots. The ship is also equipped with a 1,000-horsepower diesel Caterpillar D399 engine and two 320-kilowatt Caterpillar 3406 generators. Its speed under power is 10 knots.<sup>2</sup>

**Date of Construction:** Laid down: February 15, 1936  
Launched: June 13, 1936  
Commissioned: September 20, 1936 (Germany)  
Commissioned: May 15, 1946 (United States)

**Original Owner:** Germany

**Present Owner:** U.S. Coast Guard

**Disposition:** Training vessel still in use by U.S. Coast Guard Academy, located in New London, Connecticut

---

<sup>1</sup> Dimensions from U.S. Coast Guard Academy website, available at <http://www.uscga.edu/eagle.aspx?id=689>, accessed December 2012.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Coast Guard Academy website.

**Significance:** The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Eagle* came to the United States as a war prize from Germany after World War II. A three-masted barque, this type was once ubiquitous in the nineteenth century. *Eagle* is significant as the largest operating square rigger in the United States.

**Description:** The U.S. Coast Guard *Eagle* has a steel hull that is 4/10" thick. As described in 2000, it "has two full-length steel decks with a platform deck below and a raised forecastle and quarterdeck. The weather decks are three-inch-thick teak over steel."<sup>3</sup> There are three masts: the mainmast and foremast each stand 147.3' tall and are comprised of a lower mast and separate top gallant mast, all of which are square rigged. The mizzenmast is 132' tall and has three fore and aft sails. There are no motorized winches for operating the sails. The barque also has a 3,500-pound anchor port and a 4,400-pound anchor starboard. The training complement is six officers, fifty-four crew, twenty temporary active-duty crew, and 140 cadets, with a maximum capacity of 239 people.<sup>4</sup>

The *Eagle* has undergone regular repairs while in U.S. Coast Guard service. A condition assessment of the vessel was undertaken in 1974, and wear and corrosion were noted on the steel bulkheads, as well as on the decking. As a result, the *Eagle* underwent a four-year refitting at Curtis Bay in Baltimore, Maryland. A new pilothouse was built in 1976, and a replacement mahogany eagle figurehead painted with gold leaf was installed the following year. The original steel decks were replaced with stainless steel and teak ones from 1981 to 1984. The German M.A.N. engine was removed, and a 1,000-horsepower one was installed, as well as new generators. With the admission of female cadets to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, the berthing area was divided to accommodate women, and a separate head was built.<sup>5</sup>

**History:** Built by Blohm & Voss Shipyard of Hamburg, Germany, in 1936, the ship was part of the *Gorch Fock* class of training ships. It was named for Horst Wessel, a radical Nazi Party and Sturmabteilung (a paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party) member, and author of the lyrics to the Nazi Party anthem *Horst-Wessel-Lied*. Wessel was killed shortly after this appointment in a lover's quarrel. His girlfriend, Erna Jänicke, had an ex-lover named Albrecht Höhler, a convicted murderer affiliated with the Communist party. Höhler shot Wessel in the mouth, perhaps in jealousy or for political reasons. Wessel succumbed to his injuries nine days later. Joseph Goebbels and the vast Nazi propaganda machine soon made Wessel a martyr, and Germany's newest training vessel was named after him. The *Horst Wessel* went into service on September 17, 1936, under Capt. August Thiele as one of three square riggers available for naval officer training.

---

<sup>3</sup> Capt. George E. Krietemeyer, *The Coast Guardsman's Manual*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2000), 45

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Coast Guard Academy website; Russell Drumm, *The Barque of Saviors: Eagle's Passage from the Nazi Navy to the U.S. Coast Guard* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2001), 22-26.

<sup>5</sup> "U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Eagle Receives Spa Treatment," News Release, December 30, 2011, available at <http://www.uscgnews.com/go/doc/4007/1463443/U-S-Coast-Guard-Cutter-Eagle-receives-spa-treatment>, accessed December 2012; Drumm, 71.

On May 15, 1946, the ship was turned over to the United States as a war prize. A crew made up of U.S. Coast Guard members and Germans readied the ship for sailing, traveling from Bremerhaven to Madeira, then Bermuda, and finally landing in New York in July. The ship was commissioned as the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Eagle*, one in a long line of ships dating back to 1792 and bearing that name. It remains in use as a training vessel by the U.S. Coast Guard Naval Academy in New London, Connecticut, with cadets generally spending five weeks onboard the vessel. *Eagle* has traveled to U.S. and foreign ports as part of both academy training cruises and for Tall Ship events.<sup>6</sup>

**Historian:** Justine Christianson, HAER, 2012

**Project**

**Information:** Documentation of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Eagle* was undertaken as 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 Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the HAER Program. Todd Croteau, HAER Maritime Program Coordinator, directed the project. Jet Lowe, HAER Photographer, produced the large-format photography while the ship was in dry dock.

**Sources:**

Drumm, Russell. *The Barque of Saviors: Eagle's Passage from the Nazi Navy to the U.S. Coast Guard*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2001.

Krietemeyer, Capt. George. *The Coast Guardsman's Manual*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2000.

U.S. Coast Guard Academy website. Available at <http://www.uscga.edu/eagle.aspx?id=689>, accessed December 2012.

"U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Eagle Receives Spa Treatment." News Release, December 30, 2011. Available at <http://www.uscgnews.com/go/doc/4007/1463443/U-S-Coast-Guard-Cutter-Eagle-receives-spa-treatment>, accessed December 2012.

---

<sup>6</sup> Krietemeyer, 44-45; Drumm, 40, 127, 199.