

## “USCGC ESCANABA HISTORY”

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Escanaba*, named for the city and river in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan at the top of Green Bay, was built at the Defoe Shipbuilding Company in Bay City, Michigan in 1932. The six cutters of her class were designed primarily for light icebreaking, rescue, and law enforcement duties. She was commissioned on November 23, 1932 in Grand Haven, Michigan and quickly became well known throughout the region and a beloved part of her home port's community.

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941, *Escanaba's* home port was shifted to Boston, and she was assigned to the Greenland Patrol performing combat escort duty and search and rescue operations in the North Atlantic. In June of 1942 *Escanaba* was credited with the sinking of two enemy submarines in a single day.

On February 3, 1943, *Escanaba* gained national notoriety for her participation in the rescue of the survivors of the USAT *Dorchester*, which had been torpedoed by a German submarine. The rescue was marked by the *Escanaba's* historic first use of rescue swimmers clad in survival suits to aid survivors who were too weakened by shock or hypothermia in the icy water to pull themselves up cargo nets or sea ladders to safety.

By way of the lines the rescue swimmers tied around those who were having trouble helping themselves, many struggling survivors who, debilitated by the cold, would have otherwise been consigned to a watery grave were able to be hauled aboard the *Escanaba* by crewmen on deck. In all, *Escanaba* plucked 133 living souls from the water that day.

On June 10, 1943, *Escanaba* began escorting her last convoy from Narsarsuak, Greenland to St. John's, Newfoundland. At 0510 on June 13 a large sheet of flame and dense smoke were seen rising from the *Escanaba*. She sank at 0513, going down so quickly that she did not have time to send any distress signals. Rescue vessels arrived within ten minutes but found only two survivors and one body. The entire crew of 13 officers and 92 men was lost to the explosion or to rapid hypothermia in the 39° F (4° C) water. The exact cause of the explosion could not be determined at the time, but was commonly attributed to a torpedo fired by one of several U-Boats which were in the area at the time.

105 Brave Coast Guardsmen perished with the *Escanaba* including four crewmen from Door County. They were:

**Chief Boatswain Mate George Larson**  
**Radioman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Leonard Delsart**  
**Utilitiesman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Victor Londo**  
**Boatswain Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Clarence Christianson**

(Taken from the “*Coast Guard City Official Proclamation Ceremony*” held at Sawyer Park on 10 May 2014 in Sturgeon Bay, Door County, Wisconsin)