



# The Last Full Measure of Devotion<sup>1</sup>

## Captain Charles Satterlee, Class of 1898, Last commanding officer of the USCGC Tampa sunk over 94 years ago this September

By Robert M. Pendleton

Charles Satterlee's naval career began upon successfully completing the Revenue Cutter Service's candidate entrance examination and taking the subscribed oath. On 15 November 1895 he was appointed a cadet in the School of Instruction of the Revenue Cutter Service and reported on board the training ship *Salmon P. Chase* at New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Senior Cadet Charles Satterlee, of Essex, CT, graduated first in his class on 17 January 1898 and upon being commissioned a 3rd Lieutenant, line officer, was assigned to serve on board the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Woodbury* at Portland, Maine. On 25 April 1898 Congress declared war with Spain and not long after President William McKinley directed the temporary transfer of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service to cooperative operations with the U.S. Navy as part of the Auxiliary Naval Force. The Navy designated the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Woodbury* as U.S.S. *Woodbury* and assigned the vessel to conduct operations with Admiral Sampson's North Atlantic Squadron on blockade off the port of Havana, Cuba. With the cessation of hostilities on 13 August the U.S.S. *Woodbury* was returned to the Treasury Department by executive order.

During the interwar years 1899 through 1917, Satterlee served on numerous Revenue Service and Coast Guard cutters, including one tour of duty ashore as Assistant Inspector of Life-Saving Stations. On January 28, 1915 the United States Revenue Service and United States Lifesaving Service were combined to form the United States Coast Guard, our nation's third (and smallest) service branch under mandate of the US Department of the Treasury.



*The last formal portrait of Captain Charles Satterlee taken in London during the War, ca. 1918. Courtesy of Judge Gertrude Smith.*

### Declaration of War

Shortly after the United States declared war with Imperial Germany (Central Powers) on 6 April 1917, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutters *Algonquin*, *Ossipee*, *Manning*, *Seneca*, and *Tampa*, were directed by President Woodrow Wilson to serve in cooperation with the U.S. Navy. *Tampa* was under the command of CAPT Charles Satterlee.

The vessels were refitted and assigned to duty operating from U.S. Naval Base Nine Gibraltar, as Ocean Escorts to allied merchant and military convoys from between Gibraltar and England.

On 4 November 1917, shortly after *Tampa's* arrival at Gibraltar, she

commenced the first of her Ocean Escort duties with Convoy H.G. 27.<sup>2</sup> Over the following ten months and 22 days she served as Ocean Escort to nineteen convoys comprising 420 merchant vessels and losing only two ships to an Imperial German submarine attack (remarkably, the crews of both vessels were rescued). After completing her eighteenth Convoy O.M. 89 she was dry docked at Gibraltar for much needed repairs from 12 August to 15 September 1918. On the 16th she was awarded a pennant by the U.S. Navy for outstanding Ocean Escort work.

The following day, having been assigned as Ocean Escort to her nineteenth Convoy H.G. 107 comprising 32 merchant vessels, she sailed at 1300 from Catalan Bay, bound for Liverpool, U.K.

On this particular voyage, the *Tampa's* crew consisted of 11 Coast Guard officers, 100 Coast Guard ratings, 3 US Navy officers and 1 US Navy rating. Returning as passengers bound for Plymouth, England, were 10 Royal Navy ratings and 5 Admiralty Dockyard workers, bringing the grand total aboard to 130 (two Coast Guard ratings having been previously transferred for medical treatment to the U.S. Naval Dispensary at Base Nine Gibraltar, missed the deployment).

During the second day of the voyage the Commodore of the convoy,

Commander Gordon L. Simner, R.N.R., received a SECRET Wireless Transmission message from Admiralty, S.W. 1 which stated that ... "I am to acquaint you that Convoy H. G. 107 consisting of [merchant] ships left Gibraltar on 17 September, escorted by U.S.S. "TAMPA" ... [and closed with the following two sentences]: "The destination of USS "TAMPA" is Milford [Haven] and she should be so informed. She should detach herself from the Convoy when in the vicinity of Milford [at Captain Satterlee's discretion]." At Milford Haven, Wales, an Outward Milford convoy was nearing assembly for a return voyage to Gibraltar with *Tampa* scheduled as its Ocean Escort.

On Thursday, September 26 Captain Satterlee officially requested and received permission from Commander Simner to detach *Tampa* when the vessel was abeam the Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, U.K. Captain Satterlee announced *Tampa's* departure position at 1615, and proceeded alone on a course for Milford Haven [Pembroke Dockyards], Wales.

According to the Purple Heart citation for the officers and crew of USCGC *Tampa*, "a short time later, the shock of an explosion was felt by several of those remaining in the convoy. U.S. destroyers and British patrol craft conducted a three-day search of the TAMPA's last known position, but found



The refitted U.S.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Tampa* having been shifted by tug back to Charlestown Navy Yard's Dock No.3 on September 15, 1917. Photographer unknown.

only two unidentified bodies and a small amount of wreckage identified as belonging to the TAMPA."

## *A Fatal Encounter*

KaptLt. Wolf Hans Hertwig, commanding UB.91, a Type III, Class UB Coastal Torpedo Attack boat, was on his second war patrol when, after sinking the armed British merchant vessel S.S. HEBBURN on 25 September 1918, he was forced to set a surface course toward the Southwestern coast of Cornwall, England. He had found that repair work on the starboard water cooling pipe was necessary and would necessitate stopping the submarine in order to affect the repair.

By midmorning of the 26th, UB.91 was navigating in the North Atlantic at a distance of approximately 13 nautical miles from the coast of Cornwall. The weather had become hazy with poor visibility. When the visibility was reduced to 500 meters, Captain Hertwig ordered the submarine submerged to a depth of 25 meters. At 1300 repairs to the pipe were started. After completing the repairs during the late afternoon UB.91 surfaced with the weather and visibility having greatly improved.

In an extract from the War Diary of UB.91, KaptLt. Wolf Hans Hertwig wrote the following account of the *Tampa's* sinking:

At 1930 Captain Hertwig, sighted the single, small steamer just as dusk was setting in. At 1940 he writes: "I dived for the attack. Steamer is in a favorable position for a bow approach, then she makes a small change of course and comes in line with stern tube, so that from time of sighting to firing I did not have to change course."

At 2015: "Stern tube fire. G6AV [torpedo] with special attachment. Depth setting 5 m.; estimated range 550 m., estimated speed 10 knots, estimated track angle 90 degrees. After a run of 496 m. hit amidships.

At the time of firing, the vessel was visible in the periscope only as a dark shadow. Upon detonation, a black smoke cloud 2 min. after the torpedo explosion a second detonation, perhaps occasioned by depth charges of the sinking vessel, which throws up a high luminous water column. Then nothing more was to be seen."

At 2025: "Surfaced to the place of sinking in order to search for wreckage or men. Nothing found. The vessel was apparently a large patrol craft of about 800 tons; 1 stack, 2 very high masts, on each side a life boat swung out. Position of sinking 50° 40' N., 6° 19' W (signed) Hertwig."

## *Worst Loss Suffered*

The sinking of the U.S.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Tampa* was fated to be the worst loss suffered by United States naval forces in action during the Great War of 1914-1918.

Only two Coast Guardsmen's bodies were recovered; one washed ashore on the beach at Freshwater East, a seaside village located near Milford Haven, Wales. In searching his body a late liberty ticket and the name on it was found. He was given a Royal Navy military funeral and interred at Lamphey Churchyard. After the war his remains were repatriated to his family.

The second body was recovered by a British patrol boat near Helwick Light Ship on Sunday, 13 October 1918. He was

positively identified through his "dog tag." However due to the state of the body it was committed, on the same day, to the deep between Carmarthen and Swansea, Wales. His "dog tag" was returned to his sister by Coast Guard Commandant Captain Ellsworth Price Bertholf.

## *Posthumous Purple Heart Presentations*

On April 22, 1999, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral James M. Loy, approved the unanimous recommendation of the Coast Guard Headquarters Military Board of Awards, that authorized the posthumous award of the Purple Heart Medal to Captain Satterlee and his crew of Coast Guard officers and ratings who perished in the sinking of the USS Coast Guard Cutter *Tampa* in European waters on Thursday 26 September, 1918 (the U.S. Navy officers and one rating also received Purple Heart Medals).

On Memorial Day, November 11, 1999, at the Coast Guard World War I Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia, after the wreath laying ceremony to honor veterans, the Honorable Rodney E. Slater, Secretary of Transportation, and Admiral James M. Loy, Commandant, United States Coast Guard, presented posthumous Purple Heart Medals to the lost crew and to next of kin that were present. However, no living relatives could be found for Captain Satterlee at that time. Consequently, his Purple Heart Medal was held in abeyance until a bona fide relative could be located. That person was Lyn Morgan Lawson, a second cousin.

In October of 2011 Commandant Admiral Robert J. Papp approved the presentation of Captain Satterlee's posthumous Purple Heart Medal to Lawson.

The ceremony was held Saturday, 12 May 2012, at the newly reopened Coast Guard Academy Museum. Four relatives of CAPT Satterlee were present when Superintendent of the Academy RADM Sandra L. Stotz (representing Commandant Admiral Robert J. Papp) opened the ceremony with the reading of the Citation, the Certificate of the Award, followed by the presentation of Captain

Satterlee's posthumous Purple Heart Medal to Lawson.

Lawson told the Admiral that it was her and her family's wish to honor the memory of Captain Charles Satterlee by presenting his Purple Heart Medal to the Admiral for perpetual safe-keeping and exhibition at the Academy Museum.

"It was a proud moment for me, to be related to such a man," said Lawson. She explained that, for herself and the family, it had been a perfect ceremony, especially as her niece LT Chelsea Smith Kalil '10, was able to attend the ceremony as the family's singular Coast Guard Academy graduate. She is currently a Coast Guard H-60 helicopter pilot stationed at U.S.C.G Air Station, Clearwater, Florida.

1. I extracted "The Last Full Measure of Devotion" from President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. I consider the phrase as being particularly applicable to all recipients of a posthumous Purple Heart Medal who have perished in combat against the enemies of the United States of America.

2. The acronyms H.G. and O.M. stand for Homeward bound Gibraltar convoys and Outward bound Milford Convoys respectively.

Sources: *A Naval Story of the Great War (1914-1918)*, unpublished book-length manuscript by Robert M. Pendleton.

Robert M. Pendleton was born in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, and is a graduate of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. He is a published professional cartographer and is enjoying retirement as a freelance military researcher and writer. Also by the author, TRAVELLER: General Robert E. Lee's Favorite Greenbrier War Horse and 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Battalion, Spanish-American War of 1898.

### ***U.S.C.G. Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery Restoration Project***

The Washington, DC Chapter of the U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association took on the project of restoring the memorial that commemorates the shipmates who lost their lives in WWI from the sinking of the Tampa (and the action involving the Cutter Seneca and the steamship Wellington).

The goal for completing the project is next spring when a re-dedication ceremony is planned on May 23, 2013, the 85th anniversary of its initial dedication.

If you'd like to contribute to this restoration project, please visit <http://wdccpoa.org> for more information.



(L to R) Mr. Russell Smith, Lieutenant Chelsea Smith Kalil '10, (daughter of Mr. Smith), RADM Sandra Stosz, U.S.C.G., Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Ms. Lyn Lawson, recipient of Captain Charles Satterlee's posthumous Purple Heart Medal, Judge Gertrude Smith (mother of Lyn Lawson and Russell Smith).  
Photographer: Chief Petty Officer Nixolino Cangemj, U.S.C.G.

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