Coast Guard Documents Historic Shipwreck for National Register of Historic Places

Coast Guard crews document the historic shipwreck of the Coast Guard Cutter McCulloch off the Coast of California, June 3, 2021. The service's partnership with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration personnel recently resulted in the ship being added to the National Register of Historic Places. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

ALAMEDA, Calif. – Coast Guard crews recently continued their efforts to document the historic shipwreck of the Coast Guard Cutter McCulloch June 3, after the service's partnership with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration personnel recently resulted in the ship being added to the National Register of Historic Places, the Coast Guard 11th District said in a June 13 release.

The Coast Guard Cutter Blackfin crew transported members of Regional Dive Locker West and Maritime Safety and Security Team Los Angeles/Long Beach to the wreckage site where remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) were deployed to depths greater than 200 feet.

Despite the challenging offshore conditions, Coast Guard ROV operators were able to survey the sunken cutter and surrounding area. These dive operations honor the Coast Guard's heritage and provide valuable training opportunities to enhance mission readiness.

The Coast Guard Cutter McCulloch, located near Point Conception, was lost in a collision with the passenger steamship SS Governor on June 13, 1917 and remains within

waters of the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

Scott Price and Daniel Koski-Karell, Coast Guard historians, and Robert Schwemmer, a NOAA maritime archaeologist and chief scientist for the mission that led to the McCulloch's discovery, worked together to draft and submit the National Register of Historic Places nomination.

"McCulloch had a remarkable career as both a U.S. Revenue Cutter Service vessel and U.S. Coast Guard cutter," said Koski-Karell. "Its participation in the Spanish-American War's 1898 Battle of Manila Bay victory is memorialized by the trophy cannon the McCulloch brought to the U.S. that stands today in front of the Coast Guard Academy's Hamilton Hall."

The McCulloch shipwreck was officially listed in the federal government's National Register of Historic Places on April 22, meeting the criteria to be considered a site of "national significance."

"The listing to the National Register of Historic Places, as well as California's Register of Historical Resources, demonstrates the spirit of cooperation between NOAA and the Coast Guard, enhances public awareness of McCulloch's important role in America's history, while honoring its crew," said Schwemmer, the West Coast regional maritime heritage coordinator for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

In October 2016, a joint NOAA and Coast Guard training mission confirmed the location of the McCulloch's final resting place. Working off the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary's research vessel Shearwater, the multi-agency science team from NOAA, National Park Service, and Coast Guard Dive Lockers Alameda and San Diego, deployed a ROV to survey and characterize the shipwreck while Eleventh Coast Guard District cutters Halibut and Blacktip provided vessel support.

“I’m pleased we are making progress to preserve this piece of U.S. and Coast Guard history, as well as honoring the service member lost because of this tragedy,” said Rear Adm. Brian Penoyer, the 11th Coast Guard District commander. “I look forward to our continued partnership with NOAA, because without these relationships and incredible teamwork, discoveries such as these would not be uncovered.”

Listing the shipwreck site on the National Register of Historic Places provides a wealth of public research information and could unlock incentives to help preserve the shipwreck, including federal tax and grant benefits and easements.