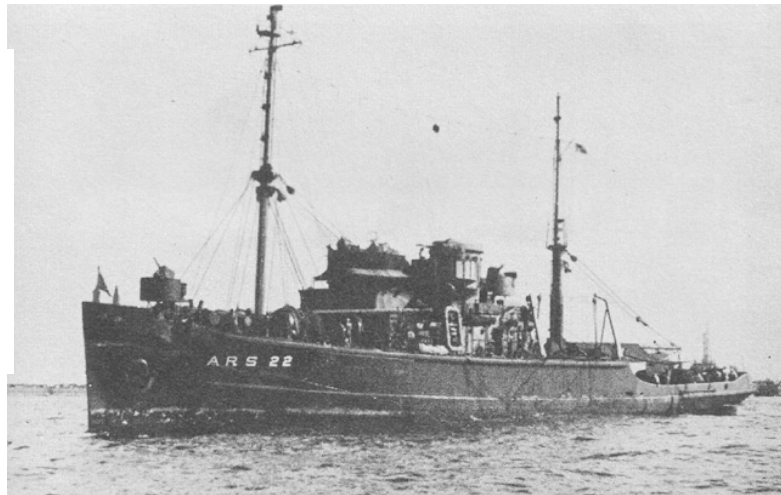


## NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT VESSEL: USS *Clamp* (ARS-33)



Left: USS *Clamp* arrives at San Francisco Bay in October of 1946. [www.nafts.net/clamp.htm](http://www.nafts.net/clamp.htm). Contributed by Eugene Raborn. Right: USS *Current*, a sistership of *Clamp*. <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/BBBO/BBBO-A.html>



### Vessel History

The USS *Clamp* (ARS-33) was an auxiliary salvage and rescue ship built for the U.S. Navy during World War II under a Maritime Commission<sup>1</sup> contract. *Clamp*'s keel was laid March 2, 1942 and the ship was launched October 24, 1942. *Clamp* was commissioned in San Francisco August 23, 1943.

After its shakedown cruise, *Clamp* sailed from San Pedro, California to Pearl Harbor, and later to the Pacific war zone. *Clamp* arrived at Funafuti Atoll, Ellice Islands<sup>2</sup> on November 8 where it was based to support salvage operations during the Gilbert Islands campaign.<sup>3</sup> On November 10, on its way to the Gilbert Islands, enemy aircraft attacked *Clamp* on five separate occasions; amazingly the vessel sustained no damage. In December *Clamp* salvaged USS *LST-34* and assisted the damaged destroyer USS *Hoel* (DD-533), which was stuck on Betio Point, Tarawa.

*Clamp* left Funafuti Atoll on January 12, 1944 for Midway Island to aid the USS *Macaw* (ASR-11), which had grounded while salvaging the USS *Flier* (SS-250). *Clamp* labored for three weeks to free the *Macaw*; unfortunately *Macaw* sank while being towed into port taking some of *Clamp*'s salvage gear with it. The wreck was subsequently demolished by USS *Shackle* (ARS-9) because it was a hazard to navigation. After its work on the *Macaw*, *Clamp* proceeded to Pearl Harbor for a period of overhaul.

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<sup>1</sup> The Maritime Commission was the predecessor agency of the Maritime Administration.

<sup>2</sup> Now known as Tuvalu, a small Polynesian island nation located midway between Hawaii and Australia. Funafuti Atoll is the capital of Tuvalu.

<sup>3</sup> The Gilbert and Marshall Islands campaigns began in November 1943 and continued through February 1944. The islands served as the outer perimeter of eastern defenses for the Japanese after the Pearl Harbor attack. While the U.S. suffered significant losses, this campaign was a turning point that put the U.S. on the offensive in the Pacific Theater.

*Clamp* returned to the western Pacific in April of 1944 to conduct salvage work in the Marshall Islands. In July the crew investigated several sunken Japanese vessels off Saipan to determine if they could be salvaged. During this period, the *Clamp's* crew captured ten Japanese prisoners. The following month it refloated USS *LST-340*, which had grounded at Tinian. That November it returned to Pearl Harbor for another period of overhaul. On January 10, 1945 *Clamp* provided damage control assistance to the transport USS *War Hawk* (AP-168) at Lingayen Gulf after that ship was struck by a small boat carrying an explosive charge.

Between February 19 and March 2, 1945, *Clamp* conducted salvage operations during the landings on Iwo Jima. The vessel served as flagship of a salvage force that was heavily engaged in refloating landing craft due to the nature of the island's black sand beach. The seagoing tug USS *Zuni* (ATF-95) also had to be refloated after going ashore during the salvage of USS *LST-727*. The *Zuni* would later become the Coast Guard Cutter *Tamaroa*, involved in the incident that inspired the movie "The Perfect Storm," and now slated to become a floating museum in Baltimore, Maryland.

From Iwo Jima the *Clamp* proceeded to Leyte Gulf in the Philippines where it joined the salvage group formed to support the invasion of Okinawa. The ship left Leyte on March 21 arriving in the vicinity of Okinawa four days before the landings. While the salvage vessels continued to assist grounded landing craft, they were now also heavily engaged in assisting ships damaged by kamikaze attacks. From March 31 to April 5 *Clamp* made emergency repairs to the ill-fated cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), which had been damaged during a kamikaze attack. It also refloated the USS *Tolman* (DM-28), extinguished fires on USS *LST-559*, and made repairs to the destroyer USS *Laffey* (DD-724), which had been hit by five Japanese planes. The *Laffey*, the worst damaged destroyer to survive the war, is now a museum at Patriot's Point, in Charleston, South Carolina. *Clamp* came to the aid of numerous other vessels during the month of April 1945. During this period of intense fighting, *Clamp's* crew went to general quarters for air attacks 72 times, which totaled three days, 17 hours, and 32 minutes spent at Battle Stations.

The *Clamp* received four battle stars on the World War II Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal for participating in the following campaigns: Gilbert Islands Operations, November 27-December 8, 1943; Marianas Operation, Capture and Occupation of Saipan, July 4, 1944; Iwo Jima Operation, Assault and Occupation of Iwo Jima, February 19-March 2, 1945; Okinawa Gunto Operation, Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto, March 26, 1945.

Following the Okinawa campaign, *Clamp* went to the Commercial Iron Works in Portland, Oregon for repairs. It was then stationed at Pearl Harbor from November 1945 to March 1946.

On March 6, *Clamp* sailed for Bikini Atoll to assist at the atomic bomb tests of Operation

Crossroads<sup>4</sup>. One of the vessels to be used in the tests was the former Japanese battleship *Nagato*. A U.S. Navy skeleton crew was sailing the ship from Yokosuka, Japan but broke down enroute and had to radio for assistance. The *Clamp* took the *Nagato* in tow on March 30 and brought it into Eniwitok four days later. Following the first “ABLE” air burst the salvage force led by *Clamp* went into the lagoon to extinguish fires and control damage to the target vessels. The intent was to keep as many afloat as possible for use in the “BAKER” underwater blast a month later. After the July 30 test the *Clamp* placed monitors on board the cruiser USS *Salt Lake City* (CA-25) and surveyed damage to the submarine USS *Skate* (SS-305).

The *Clamp* subsequently salvaged the *Skate* and towed it to “a remote berth” at Mare Island, California with a stop at Pearl Harbor. The *Skate* was eventually scuttled off the California Coast. The *Clamp* was decommissioned at San Pedro, California on May 6, 1947 and placed in the Maritime Administration’s Reserve Fleet where it remains today.

The USS *Clamp* had a short but very active career. In general, salvage ships of the *Diver* class compiled a long and impressive record of service. Several were transferred late in their careers to the navies of Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey, where they may still be active. 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.

## 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. The USS *Clamp* was the third vessel in the series, and was to have been HMS *Atlantic Salvor*

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<sup>4</sup> Operation Crossroads was an atmospheric nuclear weapon test series conducted in the summer of 1946 at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The series consisted of two detonations, a low altitude test and a shallow water test. The devices, each with a yield of 21 kilotons, were named shots ABLE and BAKER. A planned third test, a deep underwater detonation, was canceled after the second test.

(BARS-3). Its transfer to the United States Navy while still under construction made it this country's first steel-hulled Navy salvage vessel designed and built as such.

The *Diver*-class was the second class of vessels built for the Navy specifically designated for salvage work. 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:** Salvage and Rescue ship

**Hull Number:** ARS-33

**Builder:** Basalt Rock Company, a shipyard in Napa, California

**Length:** 213.6'

**Beam:** 39'

**Draft:** 13'

**Displacement:** 1,530 tons standard; 1,970 tons full load

**Propulsion system:** Diesel-electric, four engines, twin screw. Cooper-Bessemer engines replaced by Caterpillars in 1960s and 1970s.

**Horsepower:** 3,000

**Speed:** 14.8 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 (submarine rescue ship).

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, to which *Clamp* belonged, was the second class of vessels built for the U.S. Navy specifically designated for salvage work. The first vessel, USS *Diver* (ARS-5), was completed in 1943 and delivered to Great Britain. *Clamp* was the third vessel in the series, and was to have been HMS *Atlantic Salvor* (BARS-3). Its transfer to the United States Navy while still under construction made it this country’s first steel-hulled Navy salvage vessel designed and built as such. The steel-hulled salvage ships proved to be a very successful design with at least one still in operation, the USCGC *Acushnet* (WMEC-167). The *Acushnet*, formerly the USS *Shackle* (ARS-9), is the oldest commissioned cutter currently serving in the Coast Guard. Its homeport is Ketchikan, Alaska

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### **Integrity of Characteristics/Features**

The vessel is in very poor condition and has been out of operation for more than 60 years. Much of *Clamp*’s equipment has been removed over the years to support several memorial ships located around the country such as the USS *Slater* (DE-766), a museum ship in Albany, N.Y.



Several views of the deck of the USS *Clamp* in the Maritime Administration’s Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet in Benicia, CA. Maritime Administration photos.

## National Register Eligibility Statement

Although the steel-hulled salvage ships proved to be a very successful design, the *Clamp* does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing. The class does not represent a revolutionary design, nor is *Clamp* the last remaining example of the class. Its sistership, the CGC *Acushnet* is currently an active ship in the U.S. Coast Guard. While *Clamp* participated in many noteworthy events, it was one of many vessels involved and one of many vessels that performed salvage work during WWII.

**Date:** 12 May 2009

**Determination:** NOT ELIGIBLE

### Sources

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### Internet Sites

U.S. Navy, Naval Historical Center website: <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq90-3.htm#anchor156376>

Maritime Administration's Property Management and Archive Record System Website: <http://www.pmars.imgs.com/detail.asp?Ship=982>