

## REAR ADMIRAL NORMAN C. MANYON, USCG: GOLD US LIFESAVING MEDAL RECIPIENT

by Glenn M. Stein FRGS, FRCGS

On 6 November 1925, the 75-foot (23-metre) wooden hulled Coast Guard Patrol Boat CG-245, under the command of Warrant Boatswain S.B. Natwig, was returning from patrol duty to the San Juan Coast Guard Base, Puerto Rico.



*U.S. Coast Guard Small Cutters and Patrol Boats, 1915-2012*

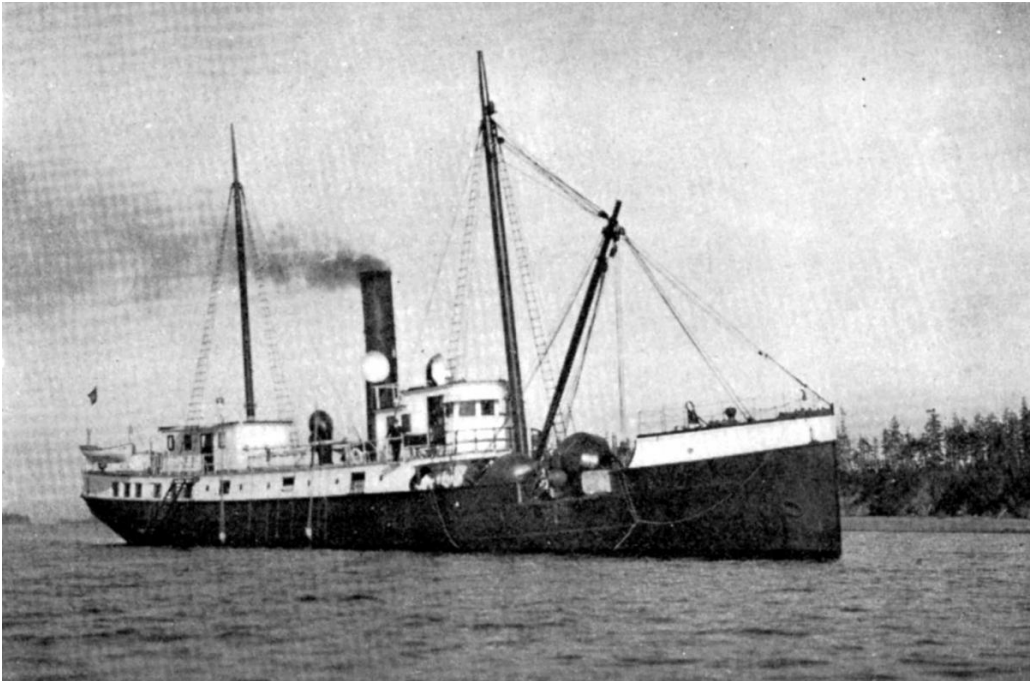
The 75-foot (23-meter) patrol boat CG-222, c.1925 – same class of vessel as CG-245

The calm morning along the island's northern coast gave way to ever-increasing stormy conditions in the afternoon. Dubbed the 'Belle of San Juan' by city residents, the eight-man crew of CG-245 was about to do a dance with Death in heavy rains and mounting seas. Increasing speed, Boatswain Natwig's craft reached the sea buoy marking the entrance to San Juan's channel by late afternoon.

Natwig decided to make a run for sanctuary in the harbour, and his crew manned their stations of the battened down craft – but nothing could prepare them for the monstrous wave that broke over her stern, and cascaded along the length of CG-245. The rushing water flung Ship's Cook O.A. Williams overboard from his exposed lookout post, and the boatswain feverishly attempted to manoeuvre his vessel to recover Williams. However, the unrelenting waves simply drove her out of the channel, and toward the shore near the well known landmark of El Morro Castle.

Crewmen threw life buoys and lines in futile attempts to rescue their shipmate, while others prepared to drop anchor, the only hope to save everyone onboard from destruction. As the heavy seas relentlessly smashed at the anchored patrol boat, her commander sent out a radio distress call.

Under the command of Captain Norman C. Manyon, the 121-foot (37-metre) U.S. Lighthouse Tender *Columbine* got under way, as did the Puerto Rico Company's tug, but the latter could not reach the harbour's entrance, and was forced to turn back. At this point, it's important to point out that sources disagree as to how events transpired on this day.



*United States Lighthouse Society*  
U.S. Lighthouse Tender *Columbine*, built 1892.

Coast Guard records regarding the award of the United States Gold Lifesaving Medal to Manyon state that, while attempts were being made to rescue the man overboard, the *CG-245*'s propeller became fouled, and she was driven onto a reef. Manyon made unsuccessful efforts to shoot a line across the patrol boat, so he manoeuvred his vessel alongside the wreckage, and picked up the remaining crewmen, who had jumped into the sea.

Other sources tell a different story. Due to worsening conditions, the *Columbine* failed several times to take the *CG-245* in tow. Manyon then put the *Columbine* alongside the patrol boat and took off her crew. *Columbine* pulled away, leaving *CG-245* still anchored in the storm. Sometime during the night, the patrol boat's anchor was torn loose, and she was swept out to sea, sinking in the heavy weather. The lessening storm of the following days allowed Williams' body to be recovered, and debris from the wrecked patrol boat was evident on the north shore.



*Kenrick A. Claflin & Son*

**Commerce Secretary (later President) Herbert Hoover awarding the U.S. Gold Lifesaving Medal to Captain Norman C. Manyon on 23 April 1927.**

Born in New York City, Norman C. Manyon joined the Navy at age 18. He entered the Department of Commerce's Lighthouse Service in 1911, and served as quartermaster on the tender *Larkspur* in January 1912. Being promoted to various officer positions on vessels, he then served as master of the lighthouse tenders *Lilac*, *Columbine*, and *Acacia*. In 1939 the U.S. Lighthouse Service became part of the U.S. Coast Guard, and Manyon was eventually posted as the Aids to Navigation Officer of the Fifth Coast Guard District, retiring with the rank and pay of rear admiral in 1949. In all, he was commended six times for saving lives and property.



Milwaukee Public Museum  
U.S. Gold Lifesaving Medal, as issued between 1882-1949.

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