

COLUMBIA'S GHOSTLY WARRIOR

ABANDONED ON A REMOTE STRETCH OF AN OREGON RIVER,
THIS VIETNAM VETERAN LST FACES A VERY BLEAK FUTURE

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The strange sight of the abandoned USS *Washtenaw County* on a remote stretch of the Columbia River in Oregon. Restoration plans have been abandoned and the US Coast Guard refuses to have the LST towed to sea where it could be sunk because of environmental concerns.



Jacket patch for
USS *Washtenaw County*.

Recent issues of *Sea Classics* have noted the loss of historic ships that had been slated for preservation. Unfortunately, a vessel that can be included in that group is the USS *Washtenaw County* (LST-1166). Since 2003, the massive LST has been moored on a remote portion of the Columbia River near Rainier, Oregon. How did the LST come to be in this position?

A *Terrebonne Parish*-class Landing Ship Tank, USS *Washtenaw County* was laid down at Christy Shipbuilding Corporation in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on 29 November 1951. She was launched on 22 November 1952 and commissioned on 29 October 1953 as USS LST-1166, being renamed USS *Washtenaw County* on 1 July 1955.

After shakedown, she operated with LST Squadron 4 out of Vieques

Island near Puerto Rico. On 9 January 1956, the LST departed Norfolk on her first overseas deployment. The ship visited numerous ports along the Mediterranean before heading back to Norfolk, where she arrived on 4 June.

With the Suez Crisis of November 1956, the LST was put on alert status meaning she would be capable of leaving port on 24-hours-notice. However, the crisis abated by January

1957 and she headed to Staten Island, New York, for overhaul followed by a month of refresher training. That fall, the ship took part in various NATO exercises.

In the first week of January 1958, she departed Little Creek for transfer to the Pacific Fleet Amphibious Force as a unit of PhibRon 1. On the 15th of the month, she transited the Panama Canal with fellow ships *Vernon County*

(LST-1161), *Washoe County* (LST-1165), *Westchester County* (LST-1167), and *Windham County* (LST-1170). Passing through NAS San Diego for upkeep and local operations, she participated in US Marine Corps exercises out of Camp Pendleton.

With problems in Taiwan and Lebanon, she was again called on alert. In August 1958, she went on emergency deployment to the Far East.

When the LST got to Pearl Harbor, the situation at Taiwan had cooled off and she headed back to San Diego before going to Mare Island for a two-month overhaul. When that was finished, it was back to North Island prior to deployment to the Far East.

In April, the LST joined up with other ships of PhibRon 1 for exercises off the coast of British North Borneo. She stayed in the western Pacific