

# NOAA Ship *Gordon Gunter*



The ship is named after Dr. Gordon Gunter, a marine biologist and leader in marine research and education for over 60 years. Dr. Gunter was director of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, the predecessor to today's National Marine Fisheries Mississippi Laboratory, from 1955 to 1971. Dr. Gunter continued his association with the laboratory as professor of zoology and director emeritus until his retirement in 1979. Much of the early marine research of the northern Gulf of Mexico occurred under Dr. Gunter's leadership.

NOAA Ship *Gordon Gunter*, commissioned on August 28, 1998, is one of the modern additions to the NOAA fishery research fleet. Operating throughout the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean, and Caribbean Sea, *Gordon Gunter*, is a multi-use platform that primarily serves the National Marine Fisheries Service Pascagoula Laboratory in Mississippi.

The ship conducts scientific surveys of the health and abundance of adult and larval commercial and recreational fish, health and distribution of marine mammals, oceanographic studies and habitat investigations. *Gordon Gunter* is outfitted with sophisticated data acquisition equipment such as a thermosalinograph, conductivity-temperature-depth instrument (CTD), fluorometer, and Scientific Computer System which are used to monitor the atmospheric and oceanic environment wherever the vessel travels. An acoustically quieted research vessel, it serves as an excellent platform for the study and observation of marine mammals. Fishing operations done onboard include stern trawling, longlining, plankton tows, and dredging. The vessel is also capable of trap fishing.

*Gordon Gunter's* ability to support a variety of NOAA line office missions has been

successfully demonstrated since the ship's commissioning. The following are a few examples:

The ship was in the Caribbean Sea for its first international project, the Windwards Humpback Cruise. The primary objective of this cruise was to obtain scientific information on humpback whales that was used in a comprehensive assessment by the International Whaling Commission in June 2001, and to support U.S. management requirements for these endangered whales under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The scientists used both visual and acoustic techniques to locate humpback whales and other marine mammal species. Many whales were located by tracking their songs with sonar buoys.

The vessel was able to quickly reconfigure the after working deck and deploy a weather buoy 160 miles off the coast of Louisiana, ending a critical gap in weather data coverage for an area heavily used by the petroleum industry, commercial fishermen, and recreational boaters.

The ship supported the Sustainable Seas Expedition at several of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuaries. Sustainable Seas Expedition was a 5-year project with the National Marine Sanctuaries and the National Geographic Society which featured underwater exploration of the sanctuaries with manned submersible units.



Observers search for whales



Ship deploys a weather buoy in the Gulf of Mexico

## Ship Specifications

Length(LOA): 224 ft.  
Breadth: 45 ft.  
Draft: 15 ft.  
Hull: Welded steel/Ice strengthened  
Displacement: 2,300 tons  
Gross tonnage: 2,014 tons  
Cruising Speed: 9.5 knots  
Range: 8,000 nm  
Endurance: 45 days  
Hull Number: R336  
Call Letters: WTEO  
Commissioned  
Officers: 5  
Licensed Engineers: 3  
Crew: 11  
Scientists: 15  
Launched: May 12, 1989  
Delivered to Military Sealift Command: January 12, 1990  
Transferred to NOAA: March 17, 1993  
Commissioned by NOAA: August 28, 1998  
Builder: Halter Marine, Inc. Moss Point, Mississippi



Bongo net is deployed to collect plankton



CTD is deployed to take oceanographic measurements

## Office of Marine and Aviation Operations

Since NOAA's beginning, NOAA ships and aircraft have played a critical role in the collection of its oceanographic, atmospheric, hydrographic, fisheries and coastal data. This fleet of platforms is managed and operated by NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO), an office composed of civilians and officers of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps, one of the Nation's seven uniformed services.

NOAA's fleet of research and survey ships is the largest fleet of federal research ships in the Nation. The fleet ranges from large oceanographic research vessels capable of exploring the world's deepest ocean, to smaller ships responsible for charting the shallow bays and inlets of the United States. The fleet supports a wide range of marine activities, including fisheries research, nautical charting and mapping, and ocean and climate studies. Many of NOAA's research vessels are unique in their ability to conduct scientific research.

NOAA's fleet of aircraft operates throughout the world providing a wide range of capabilities including hurricane prediction research, marine mammal and fisheries assessment, and coastal mapping. NOAA aircraft are modified to carry scientists and specialized instrument packages to conduct research for NOAA's missions.

In addition to research and monitoring activities critical to NOAA's mission, NOAA ships and aircraft provide immediate response capabilities for unpredictable events. NOAA survey ships found the wreckage of EgyptAir Flight 990, TWA Flight 800 and John F. Kennedy Jr.'s aircraft. Our ships, aircraft and personnel have also conducted damage assessments after major oil spills, such as the Exxon Valdez and Persian Gulf War, and after land-falling hurricanes. Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, NOAA ships conducted emergency surveys for navigation hazards that helped Gulf ports reopen quickly, and tested the waters for contamination to ensure seafood safety. Aerial images of disaster-torn areas taken by a NOAA aircraft were posted on the Web with a Google interface, enabling residents and emergency workers to see if houses, bridges and roads were still standing.

## NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps

The NOAA Corps is one of the seven uniformed services of the United States. It is composed of commissioned officers who provide NOAA with an important blend of operational, management, and technical skills that support the agency's science and surveying programs at sea, in the air, and ashore. NOAA Corps officers, in addition to managing and operating ships and aircraft, are also scientists and engineers. Corps officers serve in NOAA's research laboratories and program offices throughout the Nation and in remote locations around the world. For example, an officer serves as station chief at the South Pole, Antarctica.

## About NOAA

NOAA conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.

NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment that sustains us all.

A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major divisions: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program offices. More information about NOAA can be found at <http://www.noaa.gov>.

Visit the ship's Web site at [www.moc.noaa.gov/gu/](http://www.moc.noaa.gov/gu/)  
For more information, contact OMAO at 301-713-1045  
or visit our Web site at [www.oma.noaa.gov](http://www.oma.noaa.gov)