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**Sinking of the SS I’m Alone**

Bootlegging, speakeasies, and the infamous Al Capone are all common elements of thrilling prohibition-era tales. But, have you ever heard the haunting account of the United States Coast Guard's fierce confrontation and sinking of the notorious rum-running ship, the *SS I'm Alone*?

The United States was nearly a decade into prohibition when the USCG spotted the 125ft schooner, *I'm Alone* in the waters off the coast of Louisiana in February 1929. Captain A.W. Powell of the USCG vessel *Dexter* was determined to capture the I'm Alone and end their illicit liquor smuggling trade.

What

happened next would turn into an international incident between the United States and Canada. This incident would change maritime law and the doctrine of hot pursuit forever.

One morning a month later, on March 20, 1929, the USCG cutter *Wolcott* spotted the *I'm Alone* less than 11 miles off the US coast. An important and vehemently argued point of contention, with *I'm Alone's* Captain Jack Randell contending they were no less than 14 miles off coastal US waters.

As such, *Wolcott* began its hot pursuit of *I'm Alone*. The *I'm Alone*, with a hold full of liquor from Belize destined for the thirsty New Orleans and US markets, was determined to evade her would-be captors. I’m Alone’s Captain, Jack Randell, a decorated Canadian WWI naval captain, defiantly headed for open waters. The *I'm Alone* was a fast-moving ship, well-powered but in some distance, the Wolcott caught up.

The *Wolcott'*s commander, Captain Paul Frank, fired 3 blank rounds at *I'm Alone* and ordered the *I'm Alone* to stop, to which Randell fearlessly replied "I'll see you in hell first. I'm on the high seas and you have no jurisdiction over me." A statement that Frank dismissed out of hand.

The 2 ships continued their cat-and-mouse chase for another few hours. After which, Randell allowed Frank to board the *I'm Alone* to discuss the situation man-to-man. The negotiations proved fruitless, with neither Frank nor Randell changing their stance. At a stalemate, Frank rowed back to the *Wolcott*. And again, the ships sailed south. After more hours of pursuit, Captain Frank, losing patience, fired a warning shot over the bow of the *I'm Alone* and then through her sails and riggings, all while ordering the *I'm Alone* to halt. Unfortunately for the *Wolcott*, the deck gun jammed at this point. The *Wolcott* then requested additional assistance and was joined by the USCG cutter *Dexter*.

By March 22, *I’m Alone* was well over two hundred miles off the U.S. coast, fully in international waters. But Captain Powell, eager to capture the *I'm Alone*, wasted no time in opening fire. In an unthinkable show of force, the *Dexte*r unleashed a barrage of gunfire on *I'm Alone*. The *I'm Alone* was finished. Water filled the hold. Captain Randell ordered the crew who had gathered at the stern to abandon ship. One crewman, Leon Mainguy, drowned. The Coast Guard rescued Captain Randell and the remaining crew.

The sinking of an unarmed vessel by the United States Coast Guard in international waters caused significant public outrage at home and abroad, particularly in Canada. The subsequent trial and court case, The I’m Alone Case and the Doctrine of Hot Pursuit, is still studied today. The United States government lost the case and paid reparations to the crew.

Nearly 100 years later, Busch Marine is launching a search mission to locate its wreck, which is deeper than the Titanic. Although the wreck has no monetary value, Busch Marine will use this project to test and develop proprietary deep ocean remote technology. This work will be conducted off our state-of-the-art research vessel, Christina Busch, which is outfitted with a certified 3-man submersible, side scan sonars, magnetometers, ROVs, camera sleds, and other marine search equipment.

This project presents a unique opportunity to witness the wreckage's current state and add a worthy final chapter to its remarkable story.