



Winnebago, 1945

WPG / WHEC-40
Call sign: NRUB



The *Winnebago* was named for Winnebago Lake, Minnesota.

Builder: Western Pipe & Steel Co., San Pedro, CA

Commissioned: 21 June 1945

Decommissioned: 27 February 1973; sold 7 October 1974

Length: 254'oa; 245'bp

Navigation Draft: 17'3" max (1966)

Beam: 43'1" max

Displacement: 1,978 fl (1966); 1,342 light (1966)

Main Engines: 1 Westinghouse electric motor driven by a turbine.

SHP: 4,000 total (1945)

Performance, Maximum Sustained: 17.0 kts, 6,157-mi radius (1966)

Performance, Economic: 10.0 kts., 10,376-mi radius (1966)

Fuel Capacity: 141,755 gal (Oil, 95%)

Complement: 10 officers, 3 warrants, 130 men (1966)

Electronics:

Detection Radar: SPS-23, SPS-29, Mk 26, Mk 27 (1966)

Sonar: SQS-1 (1966)

Armament: 1 5"/38; Hedgehog; 2 Mk 32 ASW TT (*Winnebago*, 1966 – most units without TTs)

Class History:

"The bow and the stern for each other yearn, and the lack of interval shows..." Myths have long shadowed the design history of the 255-foot class. These cutters were to have been much larger ships, and two theories persist as to why they were shortened. The first is that these cutters were built to replace the ships given to Great Britain under lend lease, and Congress stipulated that the Coast Guard had to build these replacement cutters to the same size and character as those provided to the British. The second is that their length was determined by the maximum length that could pass through the locks of the Welland Canal from the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River. The Great Lakes shipbuilding industry brought pressure on Congress to ensure that it had the potential to bid on the contract. The first theory seems to be correct, but the second cannot be ruled out. The Coast Guard had prepared a design for a 316-foot cutter that was to have been an austere 327. This design was cut down into the 255-foot ship. To accomplish this, everything was squeezed down and automated to a degree not before achieved in a turbo-electric-driven ship.

The machinery design of the 255s was compact and innovative, but overly complex. It had pilothouse control, variable-rate (10 to 1) burners, and automatic synchronizing between the turbo-generator and the motor. Westinghouse engineers developed a system of synchronization and a variable-frequency drive

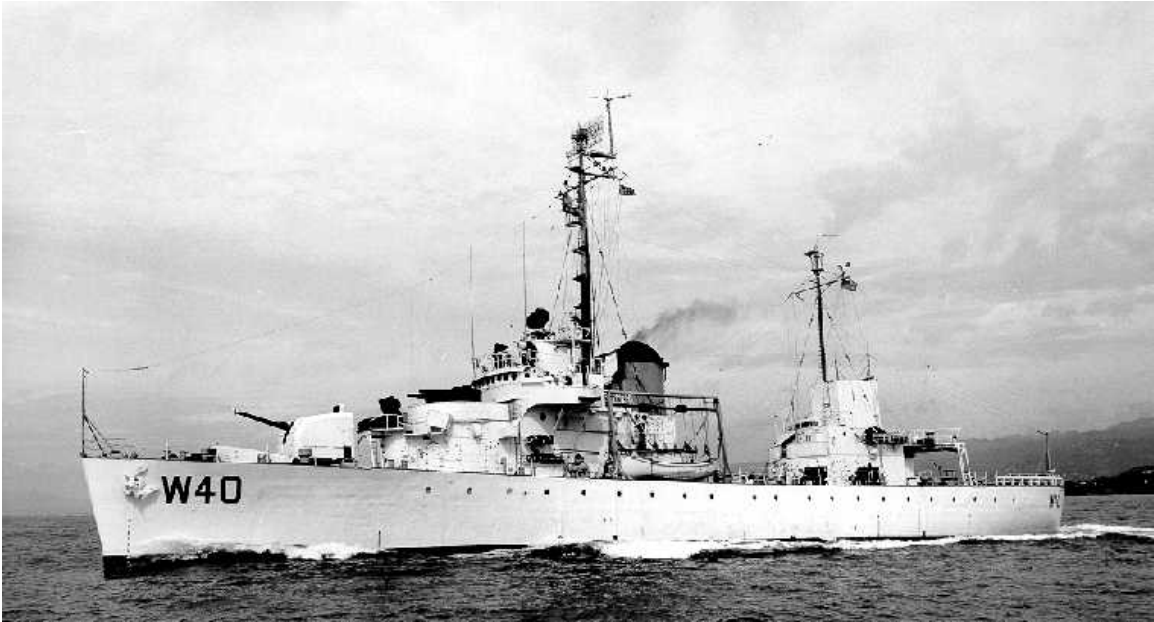
for main-propulsion auxiliary equipment, which kept the pumps and other items at about two-thirds the power required for constant-frequency operation. The combined boiler room/engine room was a break with tradition. The turbo-alternators for ship-service power exhausted at 20 psi gauge pressure instead of into a condenser. This steam was used all over the ship before finally going to a condenser. Space, heating, galley, cooking, laundry, freshwater evaporation, fuel, and feed-water heating were all taken from the 20 psi backpressure line.

The 255-foot class was an ice-going design. Ice operations had been assigned to the Coast Guard early in the war, and almost all new construction was either ice-going or ice-breaking. The hull was designed with constant flare at the waterline for ice-going. The structure was longitudinally framed with heavy web frames and an ice belt of heavy plating, and it had extra transverse framing above and below the design waterline. Enormous amounts of weight were removed through the use of electric welding. The 250-foot cutters' weights were used for estimating purposes. Tapered bulkhead stiffeners cut from 12" I-beams went from the main deck (4' depth of web) to the bottom (8" depth of web). As weight was cut out of the hull structure, electronics and ordnance were increased, but at much greater heights. This top weight required ballasting the fuel tanks with seawater to maintain stability both for wind and damaged conditions.

The superstructure of the 255s was originally divided into two islands in order to accommodate an aircraft amidships, but this requirement was dropped before any of the units became operational. Construction of this class received a low priority, and none of the cutters served in the war. Following completion of the preliminary design by the Coast Guard, the work was assigned to George G, Sharp of New York to prepare the contract design.

The number of units – 13 of them – had an interesting origin. Three were to have been replacements for over-aged cutters, the *Ossipee*, *Tallapoosa*, and *Unalaga*; ten units were to be replacements for the 250-foot class transferred to Great Britain under lend-lease. For economy, all 13 units were built to the same design.

Photographs:



Winnebago, 1 December 1960. Photo No. 120160-01. Caption states: "Coast Guard Cutter Winnebago (WPG-40) based at Coast Guard Base, Sand Island, Honolulu."; photographer unknown.



Winnebago at sea (no official caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown).



"W O WThe initials of these three high endurance cutters spell out that expression of surprise as the nest alongside Riviera Pier at the U.S. Naval Base, Subic Bay, R.P. The three, *Winnebago*, *Owasco*, and *Winona*, along with a fourth unit of Coast Guard Squadron Three, the *Bibb*, were in Subic Bay for inchop, outchop, and upkeep, marking the first time that this many ships of the five-cutter squadron had visited there since it was formed 18 months ago. The squadron is a part of the Seventh Fleet's Cruiser Destroyer Group and the cutters serve on the Coastal Surveillance Force's Operation Market Time in Vietnam."

COMCOGARDRONTHREE PHOTO NO. 101068-01; 18 October 1968; Dale Cross,JOC, USCG, photographer.



Winnebago, 24 January 1970. Photo No. 14CGD-012470-18. No official caption/photographer unknown.

Cutter History:

The *Winnebago* was home ported in Miami, Florida, from 1945 to April 1946 and used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations. From April 1946 to February 1948 she was performing similar duties from her new base at Boston, Massachusetts. She was subsequently laid up at the Coast Guard Yard, Curtis Bay, Maryland, until September of 1948. She was then stationed at Honolulu, Hawaii, from November 1949 to March 1972. She was again used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations. While on ocean station duty, the cutter's crew took hourly weather observations, provided communications, air navigation and meteorological information to commercial and military aircraft and merchant ships. She stood ready to respond to any requests for assistance from aircraft or ships in distress. Ocean Station Victor, her primary station, was located about half-way between Midway Island and Japan and covered 210-square miles. Typically Ocean Station patrols lasted 72 days. Three cutters alternated duty on the station. It took seven days to reach the station from Honolulu. After a 21-day patrol the cutter was relieved and then steamed to Yokosuka, Japan, for two weeks of rest and replenishment. She then returned to the ocean station for another 21-day patrol before returning to Honolulu.

On 26 March 1962 while making the entrance to Pearl Harbor *Winnebago* ran aground and became stranded on Tripod Reef. The cutter was extricated within a few days by Navy tugboats. In November 1963, while serving on Ocean Station Victor, the *Winnebago* steamed to the assistance of the disabled M/V

Green Mountain State. The cutter rendezvoused with the flooding merchantman and removed her crew. The *Winnebago's* crew managed to stop the flooding and got the merchantman under tow. The cutter then towed the merchantman 810 miles to Midway Island. For this rescue the crew was awarded the Coast Guard Unit Commendation Ribbon. On 26 December 1964 the British M/V *Southbank* was tossed by a 40-foot wave onto a reef 400 yards off Washington Island in the South Pacific. On board were two women, 57 crewmen, and 49 Gilbertese laborers bound for Fanning Island, 60 miles distant. Using lifeboats the shipwrecked women and men escaped safely to the beach where the Washington Island natives cared for them until they were rescued by the *Winnebago*.

On 27 May 1965, she medevaced a disabled seaman from the Japanese F/V *Tsuru Maru No. 8* 650 miles south of Honolulu. In May 1966, her medical officer, a U.S. Public Health Service officer, performed an appendectomy on a *Winnebago* crewman. *Winnebago* then rendezvoused with the USS *Navasota* (AO-106) where *Winnebago's* medical officer performed another appendectomy on a *Navasota* crewman. Later in the same month, the *Winnebago* rendezvoused with the Japanese M/V *Shoei Maru* where the doctor amputated the foot of a 17-year old seaman. In May 1967, she medevaced an injured crewman from the *Shoou Maru* and transferred him to the *Texas Maru*.

The *Winnebago* was assigned to Coast Guard Squadron Three, Vietnam, from 20 September 1968 to 19 July 1969 as part of Operation Market Time. Her commanding officer during the deployment was CDR Bruce W. Dewing. While serving in Vietnamese waters, *Winnebago's* gun crews destroyed or damaged 42 enemy bunkers, two observation towers, and a large base and several staging areas. In addition, her gunners hit an enemy "infiltration trail and a complex of enemy tunneling that connected underground storage facilities," that also caused heavy secondary explosions and fires. The cutter "investigated more than 1,500 vessels for infiltrators and enemy arms shipments." Her medical staff also treated over 50 South Vietnamese "for a variety of ailments." She participated in four search-and-rescue operations as well, including rescuing "eight Vietnamese, 17 Greeks, and 35 Filipinos" who were rescued from their "sinking ships" during the cutter's deployment.

On 25 February 1970, she transferred a medical team to assist M/V *Sylvia Lykes* near Midway Island. Eventually, the *Winnebago* was stationed at Wilmington, North Carolina, from March 1972 to 27 February 1973 and was used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue. She visited Curacao from 6 to 8 March 1972 "for the purpose of goodwill and rest and recreation" while she was shifting her home ports. She was decommissioned on 27 February 1973 and was sold for scrap the following year.

Sources:

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 1-3.

Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), pp. 18-26.

Cutter File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Ship's Characteristics Card.

