

## *U.S. Coast Guard History Program*

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### *Winona, 1946*



WPG / WHEC 65  
Call sign: NRUN

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The *Winona* was named for Winona Lake, Indiana.

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

Commissioned: 19 April 1946

Decommissioned: 31 May 1974; sold for scrap.

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 (!966)

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

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

Complement: 19 officers; 132 enlisted (1970)

Electronics:

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

Sonar: SQS-1 (1966)

Armament: 1 x 5"/38; 6 x .50 caliber machine guns; 2 x 81mm mortars; 2 x MK 32 Mod 5 ASW Torpedo Mounts; 1 x Mk 10 Mod 1 A/S Projectors (1966)

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**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.

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### **Cutter History:**

The USCGC *Winona* (WPG-65) was built by the Western Pipe & Steel Company in San Pedro, California. She was commissioned on 19 April 1946 under the command of CAPT A. F. Werner. From 15 August 1946 to 11 September 1947, the *Winona* was stationed at San Pedro, California, and used for law enforcement, ocean station, and search and rescue operations. She was subsequently home-ported at Port Angeles, Washington, until 31 May 1974. While in service she was assigned to ocean station patrols, Bering Sea patrols, fisheries patrols and other law enforcement operations as well as search and rescue duties when needed. She typically served on Ocean Station November, mid-way between San Francisco and Hawaii, and Ocean Station Victor, midway between Hawaii and Japan.

On 17 November 1948, she towed the disabled M/V *Herald of Morning*. On 10 June 1949, she assisted F/V *Alice B* 2 miles off South Amphitrite Point. In January, 1949, her twin mount 5"/38 gun turret was removed in the Bremerton Naval Shipyard and replaced with a single mount 5"/38 gun turret. On 13 February 1950, she towed the disabled M/V *Edgcombe* to Seattle, Washington. On 16 June 1951, she escorted F/V *Sea Lark* to Ketchikan, Alaska. On 18 and 19 March 1952, she assisted the disabled M/V *Darton* until relieved by a commercial tug. From 23 to 25 December 1952, she assisted M/V *Maple Cove* at 48°22'N, 134°26'W. On 13 February 1954, she assisted F/V *Western Fisherman*. On 20 December 1954, she medevaced a crewman from M/V *General Pope*. She patrolled the Gold Cup Races at Seattle, on 7 August 1955. The *Winona* served on Bering Sea Patrol from July to September 1956. She was back performing that same task from 20 July to 21 September 1963. She was under the command of CAPT Sam Guill from 1959-1960.

In April, 1967, while under the command of CAPT Herbert J. Lynch, she received word that she was scheduled to serve a tour of duty with Coast Guard Squadron Three in Vietnamese waters in support of Operation Market Time. Prior to her departure, *Winona's* facilities were upgraded, including overhauling her deck hardware for better capability to refuel and resupply while underway, a new air conditioning system was installed, her sickbay was enlarged and she received armament for nighttime illumination of the sea. She departed Pearl Harbor for Vietnam on 16 January 1968 and she arrived in theatre on 25 January. Her service with Squadron Three lasted through 17 October 1968. While in service in Vietnam, she visited Subic Bay, Philippines, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Yokosuka, Japan, and Hong Kong, where she served as the administration ship for the Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOPA) for 21 days. While engaged in patrol duties off

the coast of Vietnam, her boarding crews boarded suspect craft, resupplied inshore patrol craft and Coast Guard patrol boats, provided medical assistance to villages on the mainland, and conducted naval gunfire support missions to ground units. On 1 March 1968 she engaged a North Vietnamese trawler, becoming "the first High Endurance Coast Guard Cutter to singly engage and destroy an enemy vessel since World War II." Offshore from the CuBoDe River, a waterway south of Saigon, a 125-foot North Vietnamese trawler was detected infiltrating arms and ammunition to the Viet Cong. The action was described in *Winona's* Vietnam cruise book:

"We shadowed the trawler for six long hours into the night before it finally turned for the beach, our cue to intercept. Closing to 700 yards we illuminated and challenged them to stop when a running gun battle ensued. The effect in the night outfourthed the 4th of July. .50 cal. tracers, fiery red in the black, streaked both ways, punctuated by 5" gun flashes, white with the intensity of burning magnesium. The ricochets whined off into the distance, or metal piercing rounds thwacked through steel. For seven minutes we fought until a 5" round found home at the base of the trawler's deckhouse, and the night was day, and our ship rocked from the explosion that rained debris on our decks. For meritorious achievement that night, Captain Lynch was awarded the Bronze Star. Lt. Commander [J.A.] Atkinson, conning officer, Lt. [M.J.] Bujarski, gunnery officer, and BM3 "Audie" Slawson, director operator were awarded Navy Accommodation Medals. All four were authorized a Combat "V"."

There were no enemy survivors. Enemy fire pierced *Winona's* hull and deckhouse six times and also left a number of dents but she sustained no personnel casualties. On the 29th of June, 1968, CDR Robert A. Moss relieved CAPT Lynch as Commanding Officer while at Subic Bay. Returning home to Port Angeles On 4 November 1968, she had accumulated a number of impressive statistics while serving in Vietnam. She steamed 50,727 miles, spent 203 days at sea, treated 437 Vietnamese, sunk one enemy trawler, destroyed 50 sampans and damaged 44 more, destroyed 137 structures and damaged 254, destroyed 39 bunkers and damaged 27, destroyed two bridges and damaged another, destroyed 3 gun positions and killed 128 enemy personnel, expending a total of 3,291 five-inch shells.

On 31 January 1969, she stood by M/V *Belmona* following a fire 15 miles southwest of Cape Flattery until commercial tugs arrived. On 20 July 1969, she assisted in the operations following the sinking of a barge loaded with diesel fuel near Admiralty Inlet. CDR Warren W. Waggett relieved CDR Moss as Commanding Officer on 12 September 1970. On 28 October 1970, she provided medical assistance to *Urea Maru* 300 miles off San Francisco.

On 29 February 1972, due to budget constraints, the Coast Guard decommissioned *Winona* temporarily. Congress restored funding in May of 1972 and she returned to duty primarily as a fisheries patrol vessel. She was recommissioned at Port Angeles on 27 July 1972 under the command of CDR Neal Nelson. She escorted the damaged CGC *Jarvis* after the latter had run aground on a reef near Dutch Harbor, Alaska. in December, 1972.

She was decommissioned on 31 May 1974 and was sold for scrap. *Winona's* awards included: World War II Victory Medal, Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal (one battle star), and the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation (Gallantry Cross).

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No official caption/date/photo number; photo by Howard Wood "Harbor Air Views" 6528 4th Ave. N. E., Seattle 5, Washington.

Note her twin-mount 5"/38 turret, it was removed in January, 1949 and replaced with a single mount 5"/38 turret.



No official caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown.



No official caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown.

Note the early version of the Coast Guard racing stripe painted on her hull (no shield) and the font of the "Coast Guard" lettering.



No caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown.

Taken from Winona's Vietnam cruise book: *United States Coast Guard Cutter Winona; January-November 1968*, page 37.



"Hong Kong, gateway to the Orient, called the WINONA to duty. She was the administration ship for the Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOPA) for a period of twenty-one days."

Taken from Winona's Vietnam cruise book: *United States Coast Guard Cutter Winona; January-November 1968*, page 43.



"Last Stop: 'Will eleven o'clock ever come?' Yes, eleven o'clock did come and with it came the WINONA--home after ten tedious months, having completed her overseas tour. Helicopters and seaplanes buzzing overhead while tugs spewed water from their fire monitors went all but unnoticed as families and friends anxiously awaited reunions. On her third approach lines were put out, drawn up taut, secured and a six-gun salute finalized her 'Welcome Home.'"

Taken from Winona's Vietnam cruise book: *United States Coast Guard Cutter Winona; January-November 1968*, page 64.



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#### **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.

255' Cutter Sailors' Page, hosted by 255' cutter historian Doak Walker, RMC, USCG (Ret.):  
[255wpg.11.net.com/](http://255wpg.11.net.com/)

Cutter File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Ship's Characteristics Card.

