

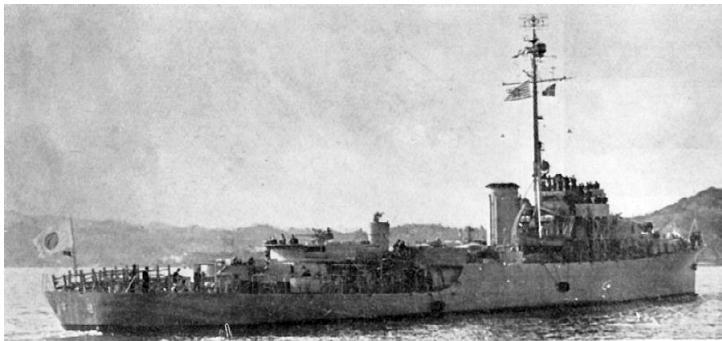
## Field Guide to Coronado History:

### The First USS Coronado

By Bruce Linder

With the commissioning of USS Coronado (LCS-4) this spring, small-town Coronado now has provided yet another warship to the Navy's register with the Crown City's name – the third.

But what of the very first USS Coronado?



Surprisingly, this original USS Coronado probably holds the most interesting history of the three, but walls of secrecy and anonymity still largely conceal its saga. We know a little of this history today but we may never

know the whole story.

Patrol Frigate Coronado (PF-38) was launched 17 June 1943 at the Consolidated Steel Corporation in Los Angeles. She was proudly commissioned just five months later under the command of Coast Guard Lieutenant Commander N. W. Sprow. She was a Navy ship manned by a 190-member Coast Guard crew.

Coronado was a member of the Tacoma-class of patrol frigates. She measured 304 feet long, displaced 2,230 tons, was rated for 20 knots, and held three 3-inch guns. The class was huge, 96 mass-produced ships named for small American cities. Tacomas had been designed primarily for anti-submarine duties and were near copies of the British River-class frigate built to repulse German U-boats.

*Coronado* sailed to war from San Diego Bay, within clear sight of her namesake city, in February 1944. Once in the South Pacific

she became quickly involved in an intense series of amphibious landings for General Douglas MacArthur from the Bismarcks to New Guinea and the southern Philippines.

Coronado was engaged in the thick of the tumultuous Battle of Leyte Gulf providing amphibious groups with anti-aircraft defense and was credited with one aircraft shot down. After Leyte Gulf, Coronado returned to the States for repairs. In ten months of nonstop fighting, the ship earned a noteworthy four battle stars.

After a short yard period, Coronado sailed for Cold Bay, Alaska in June 1945 to participate in the top-secret Project HULA. There, she almost completely disappeared from view and much of her story would take nearly thirty years to be declassified.

Project HULA was conceived after the Yalta Conference in February 1945 when the Allies pushed the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan and join in the invasion of the Japanese home islands. America promised to provide the necessary ships.

What followed was one of the war's largest lend-lease efforts. Shortly after Coronado's arrival in Alaska, a full Soviet crew of officers and men reported aboard. After intensive gunnery, engineering, and underway refueling drills to acquaint Russian seaman with the ship's functions, Coronado was decommissioned on 12 July 1945 and formally transferred to the Soviet Navy. She was redesignated a "storozhevoi korabi" (escort ship) and renamed "EK-8."

Three days later, Coronado led the first ten patrol frigates – the largest, most heavily armed, and most expensive ships transferred to Russia – on their voyage across the Pacific to Petropavlovsk. Twenty-seven patrol frigates were transferred to the Soviet Navy that summer.

Three days after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the Soviet Union made good on its promise to attack Japan. The Soviet Navy swung into action against the Japanese in Korea, Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands. Fighting was heavy against surprisingly stiff Japanese resistance. Former American patrol frigates, undoubtedly including

Coronado (said to be in excellent shape), took active part in these amphibious operations and later conducted relentless patrols throughout the new Soviet Pacific territories.

Lend-lease ships were to be returned immediately after the war but Soviet cooperation lagged. It was not until 16 October 1949 that the Soviet Union finally returned Coronado to American custody but the US Navy had no use for her. For three years, Coronado lay forlornly tied to a remote finger pier at the American naval base in Yokosuka, Japan; abandoned, unappreciated, and slowly rusting away.

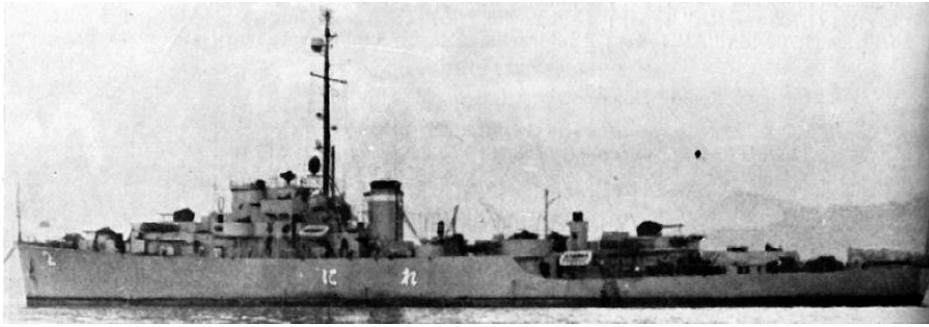
The Japanese, though, had their eye on Coronado. Although Japan had foresworn military force after World War II and disestablished her navy, many believed that the nation's safety depended on a reconstituted fleet.

In January 1953, Coronado and other Tacoma sister ships were transferred to Japan, first for the Maritime Safety Agency (the Japanese Coast Guard) and then as the first units of Destroyer Squadron 2 of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (Japan's new navy).

Coronado was renamed Sugi (PF-285), a name with a great legacy among Japanese destroyers stretching back to before World War I. Sugi is Japanese for "cedar" and two Japanese Sugis served in World War II.

For seven years, the former Coronado patrolled East Asia waters and shouldered training duties for the expanding Japanese fleet while stationed in Yokosuka and Kure. As Japan added new warships to its fleet there was less need for cast-offs from World War II and Coronado was returned with thanks to the United States in 1962 and finally scrapped in 1970.

Stout, well designed, and resilient, patrol frigate Coronado witnessed over twenty-five years of service while flying three different flags. Through episodes of violent combat and sustained duty on both sides of the Cold War, Coronado persevered and certainly earned the kind of reputation that is a worthy example for a community with a crown.



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