



Left: A Coast Guardsman sets the detonating depth on a depth charge aboard the USS PC-556, Oct. 8, 1942.

165,000 miles and carrying more than 80,000 passengers.

The Coast Guard also provided crews for 16 of the Navy's cargo ships, all but one of which, the smaller *USS Enceladus*, were of the Liberty type built in large numbers during the war.

These 11-knot cargo carriers served in the Pacific.

The *USSs Alberio* and the *Eridanus* plied between San Francisco and the Southwest Pacific, while most of the others spent their entire wartime careers shuttling supplies and men among island bases.

Some took part in invasions despite their auxiliary designation.

The *USS Etamin* was part of the Alitape assault force in April 1944, and while anchored off the north coast of New Guinea on the night of April 27, it was struck by a Japanese aerial torpedo. Several men were burned in gasoline fires, and when the ship began to

settle, the cargo ship was abandoned, apparently without loss of life. Two bodies were found later in the hold that the torpedo had hit. Too badly damaged to justify repair, the *Etamin* was decommissioned to become a storage hulk at Cairns, Australia.

Its sister, the *USS Serpens*, veteran of 19 months of Southwest Pacific service, exploded and sank Jan. 29, 1945, while loading

The USS Serpens disaster, which was not attributed to enemy action, resulted in the Coast Guard's greatest loss of life in World War II.
