

The History of the USS WAKEFIELD

*“T*HE most luxurious ship ever built in America” emerged from Robins Drydock, Brooklyn, New York, a different vessel, with a new owner, captain, and name. The deluxe cabin liner SS MANHATTAN had become the troop transport USS WAKEFIELD.

Her costly furnishings had been removed and carefully stored away, awaiting the day when she would discard her heavy coat of grey and resume her status as a luxury liner—a plan that was never to mature.

The SS MANHATTAN was to share a fate similar to that of many of the brave men she transported. The hardships and casualties of war were to be her lot. The SS MANHATTAN became the USS WAKEFIELD in more than name. It was not long before the form that stately wore her luxurious treasure was reduced to ashes.

On June 15, 1941, the U. S. Navy, which had taken custody of the vessel, through Captain R. G. Reinicke, U.S.N. (Ret.), turned the command over to Commander Wilfred N. Derby, U.S.C.G. The operation of the ship, from that day on, became the responsibility and duty of the United States Coast Guard.

Under the vigilance of Commander Derby and the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Roy L. Raney, the vessel was organized in time to depart on July 13, 1941, for participation in the first joint amphibious training conducted by the United States Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard.

On August 17, 1941, Commander William K. Scammell, U.S.C.G., relieved Commander Derby as Commanding Officer. Under his command, the vessel was docked at Keppel Harbor, Singapore, on the morning of January 30, 1942, when a formation of Japanese bombers appeared overhead, flying at an altitude of 20,000 feet. They began dropping their destructive cargo in the vicinity of the ship. The firewatchers reported two near hits. One bomb landed approximately fifty yards off the port quarters; the other was closer, only fifty feet off the port beam. A direct hit was reported at 1105. A bomb landed port side forward, abreast of No. 2 hatch. It penetrated to C Deck, entered the Sick Bay, exploded, killing five men, injured nine others, and started destructive fires above the waterline. Thus in the second month of war the USS WAKEFIELD bore the scars of battle.