



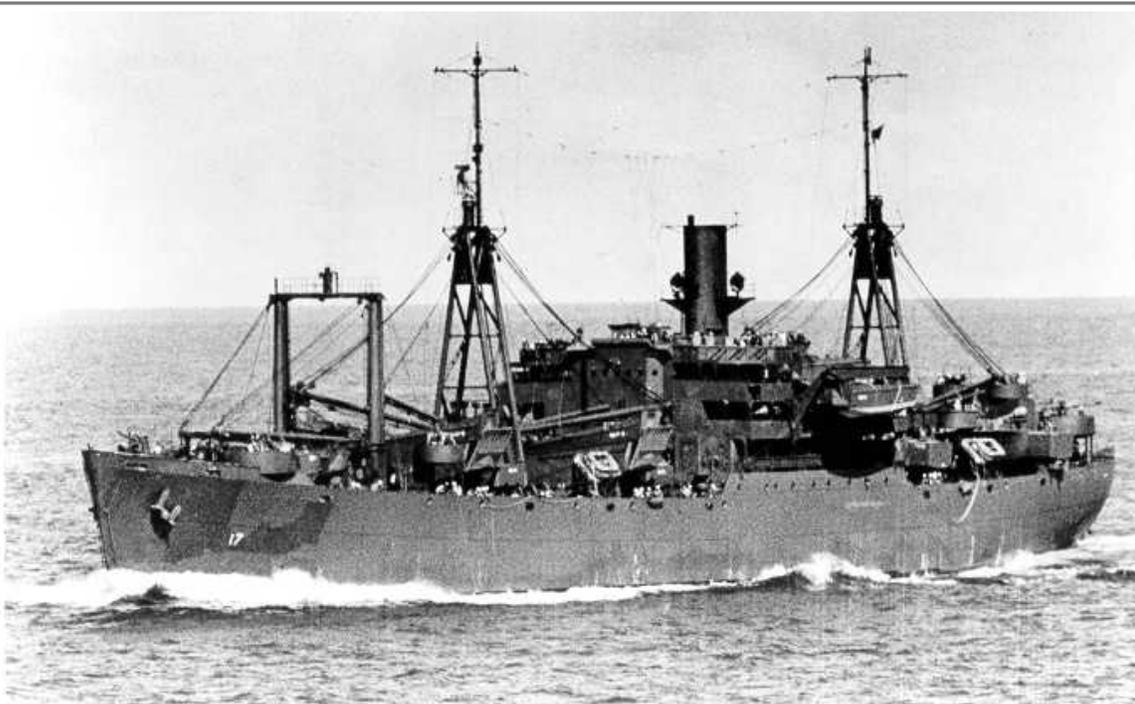
# USS Centaurus

AKA-17

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A southern constellation.

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Builder: Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co., Kearny, N.J.

Length: 459' 3"

Beam: 63'

Draft: 26' 4"

Displacement: 6,556 tons

Top speed: 16 knots

Complement: 247

Armament: 1 x 5"

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The Coast Guard-manned USS *Centaurus* (AKA-17), and Andromeda-class attack cargo ship, was launched 3 September 1943 by Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co., Kearny, N.J., under a Maritime Commission contract. She was sponsored by Mrs. J. L. Wilson and was acquired by the Navy 20 October 1943. She was commissioned the next day under the command of CAPT George E. McCabe, USCG.

*Centaurus* put to sea from Norfolk, Virginia on 11 December 1943 with cargo for Pearl Harbor, where she arrived 30 December. On 22 January 1944, she cleared with the Southern Attack Force, bound for Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, off which she arrived 31 January. During the initial assault, she landed four waves of cargo-laden craft under the protective fire of the USS *Pennsylvania* (BB-38) with a smoothness belying her newness at amphibious warfare, and until 5 February she remained off the atoll landing combat cargo to support troops ashore as they encountered stiffening opposition.

She returned to Noumea for training and cargo duty until 31 March, when she sailed from Tulagi to carry men and cargo to Manus and proceeded to Langemak Bay, New Guinea. Here she loaded for the landings on northern New Guinea, and on 15 April put to sea in the second assault echelon for Aitape. While her landings here on 23 April were unopposed, difficult surf and beach conditions challenged her skill. After several brief voyages to other New Guinea ports to transport reinforcements to the Hollandia area, *Centaurus* sailed for amphibious exercises in the Solomon Islands.

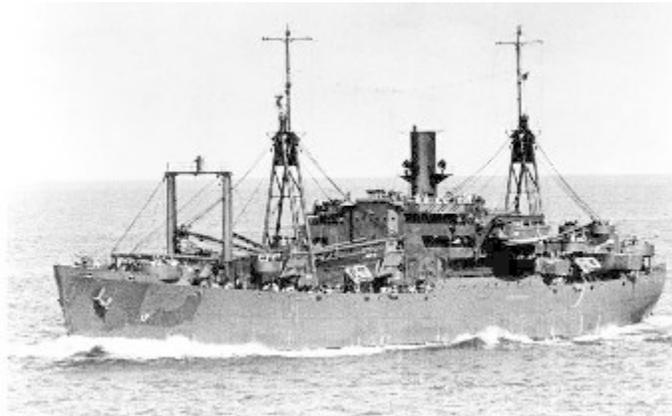
From 3 June to 30 June 1944, the attack cargo ship was at sea as part of the reserve force standing by during the invasion of the Marianas, and then returned to Eniwetok to prepare for the return of U.S. forces to Guam. She sailed in the Southern Attack Force for this assault 17 July, and on 21 July, day of the initial attack, began landing combat cargo on the difficult beaches near Agat, where Japanese forces offered stiff resistance. She completed offloading cargo and vehicles, and embarking casualties, a week later when she cleared for Eniwetok.

After brief overhaul at Espiritu Santo, *Centaurus* sailed to Guadalcanal to embark cargo and vehicles for the assault on the Palau Islands, for which she cleared 8 September. At Peleliu on 15 September 1944 she began landing her cargo as heavy opposition developed from the Japanese defenses, cleverly concealed. A fierce fight developed for the marines ashore, and *Centaurus* remained off the island pouring ashore the equipment essential to the maintenance of the offensive. Taking on board casualties and prisoners of war, the attack cargo ship also carried marines when she cleared on 4 October for the Russells, where all

passengers were disembarked. She herself continued on to San Francisco, where from 25 October to 22 December she was in overhaul.

*Centaurus* returned to the Pacific by way of Guam, and after rehearsal landings in the Solomons, joined the Northern Attack Force for the invasion of Okinawa, with which she sailed from Ulithi 27 March. Arriving off the island for the assault on 1 April, *Centaurus* began to discharge cargo at an ever-quickening pace, as she supported the first rapid advances of the 6th Marines across the island. Operations went smoothly despite heavy kamikaze attacks; *Centaurus*' guns helped splash two. She cleared Okinawa 9 April for Pearl Harbor, where she loaded additional cargo for the Okinawa operation. Returning to Okinawa 3 June, she offloaded and on 14 June sailed for the United States via Pearl Harbor, and between 19 July and 23 August was in after overhaul at Seattle. *Centaurus* returned to the Far East and operated in the redeployment of troops. On 31 January 1946 she returned to Seattle and thence proceeded to New York City, where she arrived on 23 March and was decommissioned 30 April 1946. She returned to the Maritime Commission 11 September 1946.

The *Centaurus* received six battle stars for World War II service.



"USS CENTAURUS (AKA-17) UNDERWAY ON 10 MAY 1944. SHE WAS COAST GUARD MANNED DURING WORLD WAR II."; Photo No. 26-G-05-10-44 (5); photographer unknown. U.S. Coast Guard photo through National Archives.

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#### **Sources:**

*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.*



