



## USS *Leonard Wood* (AP-25 / APA-12)

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The USS *Leonard Wood* was named for Leonard Wood, who was born on 9 October 1860 at Winchester, New Hampshire. After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1884, he was commissioned assistant surgeon in the Army Medical Corps on 5 January 1886. That summer, he distinguished himself in the Apache campaign and was later awarded the Medal of Honor for voluntarily carrying "dispatches through a region infested with hostile Indians, making a journey of 70 miles in 1 night and walking 30 miles the next day. Also, for several weeks while in close pursuit of Geronimo's band and constantly expecting an encounter, he commanded a detachment of infantry..." Promoted to captain in 1891, he was assigned to Washington, D.C., where he met Theodore Roosevelt and became President McKinley's personal physician. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Wood joined Roosevelt in organizing the "Rough Riders" and commanded the regiment. Immediately after the war, Wood became military governor of Santiago Province, then, from December 1899 to March 1902, Governor-General of Cuba. He restored order to that troubled island and established educational, political, and sanitary systems. Wood next used his skill as an administrator, pacifying the Maro Province of the Philippines which he governed from 1903 to 1906. Promoted to major general in August 1903, Wood commanded the Philippine Division from 1906 to 1908. As Army Chief of Staff from 1910 to 1914, he reorganized the War Department and prepared the Army for the challenges of World War II. He was a leading candidate for the Republican nomination for president in 1920. In 1921, President Harding appointed Wood Governor-General of the Philippine Islands. He remained at that post until his death 7 August 1927.

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Builder: Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation

Laid down: 1921 (Commercial)

Commissioned: 10 June 1941 (USN)

Decommissioned: 22 March 1946

Displacement: 21,900 tons

Length: 535'

Beam: 72'6"

Draft: 31'3"

Top Speed: 17.5 knots

Complement: 667

Troop Capacity: 1,962

Armament: 4 x 3"; 4 x 40mm.

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### **History:**

The USS *Leonard Wood* (APA-12) was taken over by the Navy from the Army Transport Service early in 1941. During the period of national emergency beginning in 1939 when the war in Europe began and up to the attack on Pearl Harbor, energetic steps had been taken to increase our fleet of transports. As one of these steps the passenger liner SS *Western World*, a 17-knot ship of 13,712 tons, which had been running to South America, was purchased by the Army and converted into the transport *Leonard Wood*. Her capacity by peacetime standards had been 1,500, but this was greatly increased when she became an Army transport. On June 10, 1941, the transport was placed in commission at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, with Commander H. G. Bradbury, USCG, commanding. From that date until the end of the war she was manned by Coast Guard personnel.

From June to November, 1941, the *Leonard Wood* was engaged in various training exercises off the coast of North Carolina. Proceeding to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in November 1941, she embarked British troops and transported them by way of Cape Town, South Africa to Bombay, India. She returned to the United States in March, 1942, and was converted into an amphibious attack transport, the alterations being completed on April 26, 1942, when Commander E. Zoole, USCG, relieved Commander Bradbury as commanding officer.

For the next six months, the *Leonard Wood*, along with other amphibious ships, engaged in training and amphibious warfare exercises in Chesapeake Bay in conjunction with Army troops. These consisted of disembarkation drills, landing exercises, short range battle practice and boat drill. During August, secret scientific experiments were conducted as she moored at Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth for repairs and alterations. These were completed on September 12, 1942, and more maneuvers and landing exercises were followed by more repairs and alterations until October 18th. Meanwhile, on October 1, 1942, Captain Merlin O'Neill, USCG, relieved Commander Zoole as commanding officer.

On October 23, 1942, 92 officers and 1,800 enlisted men from the 3rd Division, U. S. Army, were embarked and supplies loaded at Army Base, Norfolk. She got underway on the 24th in convoy formation. On November 7, 1942, she

maneuvered into her assigned position in the transport area off the port of Fedala, French Morocco, Northwest Africa. Army personnel began disembarking at 0145 on November 8th. The first four waves departed for the beach at 0340. The first visible firing was seen at 0525. Heavy gun fire was exchanged all morning between supporting vessels and shore batteries, with repeated dashes toward the beach made by supporting destroyers to silence shore batteries and protect landing boats. Disembarkation continued throughout the day. At 1201 enemy planes strafed the beaches, destroyers replying with anti-aircraft fire. Following an armistice with French forces, the American flag was hoisted at 1314 at Cape Fedala. As the evening advanced the scarcity of landing boats became acute, some boats having been damaged on the rocks during the darkness and some being stranded.

Disembarking continued on November 9th. The *Leonard Wood* opened fire on a single enemy plane over the transport areas at 0735 and ten minutes later was firing on a ten-plane enemy squadron on its way to bomb and strafe the beaches. American planes appeared shortly thereafter. There were difficulties of identification and our own aircraft were fired upon during the day. Landing operations, hampered by the heavy surf, continued with air activity throughout the afternoon. Unloading of ammunition, gasoline, rations and motor vehicles continued on November 10th. Aerial bombardment of Casablanca was visible in the early afternoon, accompanied by bombardment from the sea. At 0630 casualties from the beach were received on board. To overcome the shortage of landing boats, chains of liferafts, loaded with gasoline cans, were utilized. Although formal French resistance had ceased at Fedala, fighting continued back from the coast. Sniping within the city was a problem, with reports of Arabs slaying soldiers while they slept. As unloading continued on November 11th, it was announced that Casablanca had capitulated.

At 1950 the transport USS *Joseph Hewes* (AP-50) was torpedoed and sank within two hours. Nine minutes later the tanker USS *Winooski* (AO-38) had also been hit. The *Leonard Wood* sent all available boats to the *Hewes* to aid in rescue work. An enemy submarine attempting to escape on the surface was reported hit by a destroyer. The first boat loads of survivors came alongside the *Wood* at 2100. Half an hour later the USS *Hambleton* (DD-455) was reported torpedoed but still afloat, as was the *Winooski*. Survivors continued to come aboard on November 12th as unloading proceeded. At 1730 the USS *Edward Rutledge* (AP-52) and USS *Hugh Scott* (AP-43) were hit by torpedoes. Boats from the *Wood* were sent to their assistance. Seven minutes later the USS *Tasker Bliss* (AP-42) was torpedoed [the *Rutledge*, *Scott* and *Bliss* had been torpedoed and sunk by the U-130]. The *Wood* started heaving anchor shortly afterwards and stood out of Fedala Bay, along with the rest of the transport division. In the sudden departure officers, crew and ship's boats had been left on the beach. The convoy headed toward the Coast again on the 13th with a heavy escort, including strong air support. The *Wood* moored in the inner harbor at Casablanca at 2216, and unloading continued on the 14th with more casualties being received on board. The *Wood* departed Casablanca on November 17, 1942, and arrived at Norfolk on the 30th. The *Wood* had been flagship for

Commander Task Group 34.4 and 34.9 of Task Force 34, from 1 to 17 November, 1942, and for Task Group 34.9 from 17 - 30 November, 1942.

After a period at Norfolk Navy Yard for alterations and repairs, the *Leonard Wood* departed Norfolk on January 14, 1943, to conduct training exercises and drills in the Chesapeake Bay area. Here she was engaged until June 3, 1943, in the training of embarked Army troops in the technique of amphibious landing attack operations, handling as many as 900 troops and 145 vehicles in ten-day training periods.

On June 3, 1943, approximately 2,300 officers and men of the 179th Regiment, 45th Division, U. S. Army were embarked at Newport News, Virginia, and the *Wood* sailed in convoy as part of Task Force 65, arriving on June 22nd at Mers-el-Kebir, Algeria. After practice landings northeast of Oran on June 25th, the *Wood* reembarked on July 1st Army troops who had been on maneuvers ashore, and on the 5th was underway en route the island of Sicily. On July 9th she anchored in the transport area and began unloading waves of troops and equipment five and a half miles west of Scoglitti, Sicily. The first wave of the assault group landed on the assigned beach at H hour, 0345, on July 10th, 1943. At dawn the *Wood's* gunners fired at an enemy bomber which dropped bombs 200 to 300 yards astern of the ship, and continued to fire at enemy planes throughout the day. Unloading continued on the 11th with a working party dispatched to assist in clearing the congested beach. At 2230 enemy aircraft bombs fell near the ship's port bow, and in the ensuing anti-aircraft barrage fire from all the ships in the transport area, three planes were observed to fall near the starboard quarter of the *Wood*. Unloading was completed on the 12th and after a shore party had salvaged landing craft damaged during the landings, the *Wood* got underway to her advanced base where she arrived on the 15th and began debarking Italian prisoners of war and U. S. Army casualties. She then embarked 766 German prisoners and 145 U. S. Army casualties and got underway for Norfolk on July 22nd where she arrived on August 14, 1943.

The *Wood* departed Norfolk on August 24, 1943, and on the 30th proceeded through the Panama Canal. At Balboa, Canal Zone, 1,959 troops were embarked and the ship proceeded to San Francisco arriving there on September 10, 1943, and debarked troops. After alterations and repairs, 2,403 Army troops were embarked on September 20th and the *Wood* departed for Honolulu, T. H., arriving there September 27, 1943. The troops were debarked and on October 2nd she moved to a berth at Pearl Harbor and began loading troops of the ship's platoon. On the 4th the ship got underway to carry out landing exercises, as well as other drills, until the 10th when she moored at Pearl Harbor, debarked troops and unloaded cargo. Stores, cargo, ammunition and Army troops were embarked until October 30th when she departed to carry out landing exercises off Maui Island. Returning to Pearl Harbor on the 4th, troops were unloaded and again embarked on November 9th and 10th.

The *Wood* departed Pearl Harbor on November 10, 1943, for the Makin Atoll Operation, the objective being the capture and occupation of the Atoll. On board

were 1,788 officers and men of the 165th Combat Team of the 27th Division, U. S. Army. On November 20th at 0525, the signal "take stations for attack" was executed, the vessel reaching the transport area, 2-1/2 miles west of Makin Island at 0600. Here she commenced lowering away all boats and loading them with equipment. At 0617 our carrier planes began bombing the island and at 0640 all boats were waterborne and were forming waves in the rendezvous area. At 0615 the assault waves were proceeding to the line of departure and at 0834, LVT waves from LSTs were landing on Red Beach. The first of the *Wood's* landing boats were on Red Beach 0840 and at 0900 the first empty boats returned to the ship. From then on the *Wood's* boats were engaged in evacuating casualties, hoisting boats for repair and reloading boats for return shuttle trips to the beach. By 1800, when the vessel was secured from unloading, 38% of the cargo had been taken off.

The boats were sent into the lagoon for the night, and the Task Force formed up in cruising disposition for the night. At 0625 on November 21st the *Wood* returned to her station off Beach Red Two, and commenced lowering boats and unloading all holds. At 1000 the *Wood* proceeded to a point off Yellow Beach and continued unloading into landing boats and into *LST-179*. Japanese prisoners of war were brought aboard. Retiring for the night in cruising disposition, she returned on November 22nd for another day of unloading. On the 23rd enemy aircraft were reported and she again got underway at 0800 returning to the transport area at 0830. Here she drifted, loading wounded and prisoners and unloading cargo. At 0513 on November 24th, personnel aboard the *Wood* observed a violent explosion 13.5 miles away and it was later discovered that this explosion was the USS *Liscombe Bay* (CVE-56) which had been torpedoed. At 0640 the *Wood* proceeded into the transport area northwest of Flint Point, Makin Island, lowered all boats and prepared to re-embark troops and receive survivors from the *Liscombe Bay*. At 2011 the destroyer USS *Hughes* (DD-410) alongside to transfer the 150 survivors from the torpedoed vessel. Altogether 245 casualties from six vessels were taken aboard and the *Wood* maneuvered closer to the beach to facilitate reloading of Army equipment from the ship's boats. At 1435 on the 24th the vessel stood out to form convoy and departed for Pearl Harbor arriving there December 2, 1943.

From December 2, 1943 until January 23, 1944, the *Wood*, after repairs and alterations, was engaged in landing maneuvers at Maalaea Bay, Maui, T. H., and Kahului, T. H. Returning to Pearl Harbor on January 17th, she was underway on the 23rd as fleet guide of Task Group 51.2 and arrived at Kwajalein Lagoon on February 2, 1944. Embarked were 1,617 troops of the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines. The Task Group was to serve as Attack Force Reserve Group during the landing operation. She proceeded into the lagoon of Kwajalein Atoll on February 2nd and on the 4th shifted to an anchorage off Kwajalein Island. Following the capture of the Atoll, the *Wood* remained in Kwajalein Lagoon until February 15, 1944.

Standing out of Kwajalein Lagoon, as flagship of Transport Division Task Unit 51.14.2, on February 16, 1944, the *Wood* proceeded to Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall

Islands to participate in its assault and capture. The Transport Group constituted a unit of the Eniwetok Expeditionary Group under Rear Admiral H. V. Hill, USN. Embarked were the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines (reinforced) and attached units. 622 long tons of equipment and supplies were carried for the assault landings. The *Wood* entered Eniwetok Lagoon on February 17, 1944, and proceeded to carry out its mission to boat the embarked troops as reserves for assaults on Engebi, Eniwetok and Parry Islands. Engebi Island was reported as secured at 1540 on the 18th and the *Wood* began re-embarking troops at 1800, all troops being aboard by 1920. The vessel stood down the swept channel en route to Eniwetok Island on February 19th, anchoring off the island at 0904. Boats were then lowered and troops debarked for landing on Eniwetok. They were re-embarked after the island had been secured on February 21, 1944. Next day, after lowering boats and debarking troops, the *Wood* shifted anchorage to a position off Parry Island. Although there were about 1,000 Japanese on Parry Island there were no signs of activity as the ship passed 800 yards off shore. Some troops were re-embarked on the 23rd and the balance on the 24th. The *Wood* departed Eniwetok Atoll on the 25th and arrived at Kwajalein Atoll on the 26th, where troops and equipment were unloaded and the 1st Battalion, 25th Marines were embarked. Also received on board were 5 Japanese and 5 Korean prisoners of war. Loading and unloading operations were completed on February 28, and on the 29th the transport stood out of the lagoon enroute to Hawaii. She arrived at Maui, T. H. on March 9, 1944. Troops and cargo were debarked and she sailed for San Pedro, California, where she arrived March 19, 1944, and underwent repairs and alterations. On April 29, 1944, at San Pedro, Captain H. C. Perkins, USCG, relieved Captain O'Neill as commanding officer.

On May 2, 1944, the *Wood* sailed from San Pedro with about 1,000 Sea Bees en route to Pearl Harbor, arriving there on May 9, 1944. After embarking elements of the 14th Marine Division, she departed on May 29, for Eniwetok, arriving there June 8, 1944. She departed Eniwetok on June 11, 1944, as Flagship of Commander, Transport Division Twenty, in company with Task Group 52.15, to participate in the capture and occupation of Saipan Island, Marianas Island Group. Embarked were Major General H. Schmidt, USMC, Commanding General, 4th Marine Division and Staff, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines. Attached units comprised a total of 154 officers and 1,700 enlisted men, together with 825 short tons of cargo. The *Wood* arrived at its designated position on June 15, 1944, and landed all assault troops, completing the operation on June 24th, having stood off the island from the 18th awaiting its turn of unloading. The boat group remained in the area throughout this period, assisting in unloading other ships until the return of the *Wood*. 356 casualties from shore were received and treated prior to her departure from Saipan. She sailed from Saipan June 24th and arrived at Eniwetok on the 28th and at Pearl Harbor July 20, 1944.

The *Wood* sailed from Honolulu, T. H., en route to Guadalcanal on August 12, 1944, with 1,848 troops of the 2nd Battalion, 322nd Infantry, U. S. Army embarked arriving there on August 21st. On September 3rd, she sailed from Guadalcanal en route the Palau Island Group to participate in the capture and occupation of Angaur Island. She arrived off Peleliu Island on September 15th

and took her assigned position off Angaur Island on September 17th, unloading all assault troops by the 21st and departing for Manus Island on the 27th. During the operation 234 casualties were received on board and treated.

On October 12, 1944, the *Wood* sailed from Manus Island in company with Commander, Task Group 78.2 to participate in the capture and occupation of Leyte Island, Philippine Islands. Embarked were element. of the 1st and 8th Cavalry Divisions and other Army units totaling 1,770 troops. She arrived at her assigned position off Leyte Island on October 20, 1944, and landed all troops and cargo. The 696 tons of cargo was unloaded in the record time of 166 tons per hour. The *Wood* departed the same day for the Palau Islands arriving there on the 23rd. On the 31st she had arrived at Guam. On November 3rd she embarked troops and equipment of the 77th Division, U. S. Army and after a brief stop at Manus Island arrived again at Leyte Gulf on November 23, 1944, debarking all troops and supplies. On this second trip to Leyte Gulf, Transport Division Twenty, of which the *Wood* was part, was under enemy air attack. The *Wood* left Leyte on the 24th and arrived at Hollandia, New Guinea, on November 29, 1944.

On December 30, 1944, the *Wood* sailed from Sansapor, New Guinea, with Commander, Transport Division Twenty aboard as part of Task Group 78.5 for the capture and occupation of Lingayen Gulf area, Luzon Island, Philippine Islands. Embarked were 6th Division units and other Army elements totaling 95 officers and 992 enlisted men. Also aboard were 457 short tons of cargo. En route the *Wood's* anti-aircraft guns assisted in the destruction of a Japanese plane, the convoy being attacked several times. The *Wood* arrived in Lingayen Gulf on January 9, 1945, unloaded all troops and supplies and departed on the same day in company with Task Group 79.14.1 for Leyte Island, arriving there on January 12, 1945.

The *Wood* departed for Biak Island on January 18, 1945, with Commander Task Group 78.6 on board and arrived there on the 22nd. Here elements of the 141st Division consisting of 540 troops were embarked and transported to Mindinao Island, Philippine Islands, where they were unloaded on February 9, 1945. The *Wood* departed next day, arriving at Ulithi on February 19, 1945, after a stop at Leyte. The *Wood* sailed for home on March 6, 1945, stopping at Pearl Harbor from the 18th to 20th of March, 1945, and proceeded to San Francisco, California, where she arrived on March 27th, 1945. During April and May and until June 5, 1945, she underwent repairs and alterations at San Francisco. Then she was placed on the run between the United States and Manila and continued on this run making two trips to Manila and one to Tokyo by December 18, 1945.

Her Coast Guard crew was removed on March 26, 1946.

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**DANFS History:**

The USS *Leonard Wood* (AP-25), ex-*Nutmeg State* and *Western World*, was built in 1922 by the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Co., Sparrow Point, Md.; purchased by the War Department in 1939 and renamed *Leonard Wood*; served as an Army transport until acquired by the Navy 3 June 1941; and commissioned 10 June, manned by the Coast Guard, CDR H. G. Bradbury, USCG, in command.

After training off North Carolina, *Leonard Wood* departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, 10 November 1941 carrying reinforcements around the Cape of Good Hope to British outposts in the Far East. After debarking troops at Bombay and Singapore, she returned, entering Philadelphia Navy Yard in March 1942 for conversion to an attack transport. She was redesignated APA-12 on 1 February 1942. Alterations completed late in April, the attack transport trained in Chesapeake Bay for the invasion of North Africa. She departed Hampton Roads 24 October carrying almost 1,900 fighting men from the 3d Division and slipped in close to beaches at Fedhala, French Morocco, on the night of 7 to 8 November. The next morning, she sent her boats ashore and provided gunfire support while also rescuing survivors from torpedoed sister ships. The *Leonard Wood* remained in the first line of transports, carrying out her mission until 12 November when enemy submarines, which had already sunk or damaged six Allied ships, forced the remaining transports to finish unloading at Casablanca. Departing 17 November, she arrived Norfolk on the 30th for repairs and more amphibious warfare training.

The transport sailed 3 June 1943 and arrived Mers el Kebir, Algeria, 22 June where she prepared for the assault on Sicily. She sortied with TF 65 on 5 July and 4 days later, began unloading waves of troops in the Wood's Hole sector, some 5.5 miles west of Socglitti, Sicily. At dawn of the 10th, her gunners fired at an enemy bomber which dropped bombs 200 to 300 yards astern and kept up an anti-aircraft barrage throughout the day, helping to splash three planes. With unloading completed and damaged landing craft salvaged, the ship got underway for Norfolk on the 12th, arriving 4 August. Three weeks later, she departed Norfolk for San Francisco, embarked troops, then steamed for Honolulu, arriving 27 September.

The *Leonard Wood* spent the remainder of World War II in the Pacific, distinguishing herself in seven amphibious landings. In the Gilbert Islands and Marshall Islands operations, the ship gained experience, especially in cargo handling, which proved invaluable when *Leonard Wood* later took part in the final push toward victory with the landings at Saipan, Leyte, and Lingayen Gulf. She departed Pearl Harbor on 29 May 1944, bound for the capture and occupation of Saipan, Marianas Islands. Arriving Eniwetok, Marshall Islands, an atoll *Leonard Wood* had helped to secure just 3 months before, the ship fueled, watered, and provisioned before departing 11 June for her assigned anchorage off Saipan.

Arriving 15 June, *Leonard Wood* unloaded and cleared all boats in 49 minutes. For the next nine days, the transport stood off Saipan, unloading cargo and receiving on board casualties for transfer to hospital ships. The transport sailed 24 June for Eniwetok, and then returned to Pearl Harbor 20 July. After Saipan,

the ship made transport and training runs between Pearl Harbor, Eniwetok and Guadalcanal until she sailed from Guadalcanal 8 September for the capture and occupation of Angaur Island, Palau Island Group. Arriving 7 September, the ship landed troops, and then began unloading cargo and receiving casualties. The *Leonard Wood* completed unloading 21 September, and departed for Manus Island 27 September. Remaining at Manus just long enough to fuel, provision and reembark troops, the transport sailed 12 October to begin the long-awaited liberation of the Philippines. Arriving off the Leyte beachheads 20 October, *Leonard Wood* debarked troops and cargo in record time and steamed for Palau only 10 hours later.

For the next week, *Leonard Wood* prepared for further operations in the Philippine Islands, departing Sansapor, New Guinea, 30 December 1944 for the assault on Lingayen Gulf. Many Japanese suicide planes attacked the formation and *Leonard Wood* helped down one of them. Arriving Lingayen 9 January 1945, she again unloaded troops and cargo while firing at enemy planes before departing the same day for Leyte. She took part in her last amphibious landing with the Mindoro Island assault on 9 February 1945. Debarking her troops and cargo in less than 5 hours, she steamed for San Francisco via Leyte, Ulithi, and Pearl Harbor, arriving 27 March.

After repairs at San Francisco, *Leonard Wood* began transport duties between the United States and the western Pacific, making two runs to Manila and one to Tokyo. The ship's Coast Guard crew debarked 22 March 1946 when *Leonard Wood* decommissioned and was redelivered to the Army at Seattle, Washington, pending transfer to the War Shipping Administration. The ship was sold to Consolidated Builders, Inc., for scrap on 20 January 1948.

The *Leonard Wood* earned eight battle stars for World War II service.



"APA 12 STBD. BOW."; 28 April 1944; Photo No. 6206; photographer unknown.  
US Navy photo (US Naval Air Station, San Pedro, Calif.).



U.S.S. *Leonard Wood*. No official caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown.

A copy of this photo was provided to the Historian's Office by Ben Webster in honor of his brother, Duane Kenneth Webster, who served aboard *Leonard Wood*.

Please note that this is not an official USCG photograph.

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**Sources:**

*Coast Guard At War: Volume V: Transports & Escorts, Part II*. Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Historical Section, Public Information Division, 1949.

*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

