



USS ADMIRAL W. L. CAPPS

AP-121



Washington Lee Capps, born on 31 January 1864 at Portsmouth, Virginia, was appointed to the Naval Academy in 1880. Upon graduation, he served in the screw frigate USS *Tennessee* for the two years sea duty then customary prior to commissioning. After becoming an ensign in 1886, Capps studied naval architecture at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. After returning to the United States in 1888 and brief duty at the Navy Department, he was assigned to Cramp's shipyard in Philadelphia. Capps moved to the New York Navy Yard in 1889 and remained there joining the Bureau of Construction and Repair in 1892. Three years later he became the superintending constructor at the Union Iron Works in San Francisco. There, he supervised the construction of *Oregon* (Battleship No. 3), *Wisconsin* (Battleship No. 9), *Farragut* (Torpedo Boat No. 11), *Marietta* (Gunboat No. 15), and *Wheeling* (Gunboat No. 14). Later attached to the staff of Rear Admiral Dewey, commander of the Asiatic Squadron, he was present during the Battle of Manila Bay. After the capture of Manila, he had three of the Spanish warships salvaged and repaired.

Next Capps spent two years with the Board of Inspection Survey, followed by a tour of duty as the Head, Construction and Repair Department at the New York Navy Yard. In 1903, he became the Constructor of the Navy and Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair with the rank of rear admiral. During his tenure as Constructor of the Navy, numerous new ideas in warship design were tested and adopted. Notable among his innovations was the decision to mount the main batteries of battleships on the centerline, thereby increasing their broadside weight of metal to the maximum. During his tenure, Rear Admiral Capps served on a number of American and international committees which had been established for such purposes—among others—as improving the organization of the Navy and adopting new safety measures at sea to prevent a recurrence of disasters such as the sinking of the *Titanic* in April 1912. During World War I, he was senior member of the Navy's Compensation Board which oversaw the cost aspect of the Navy's expanded ship acquisition program. He was also general manager of the United States Shipping Board's Emergency Fleet Corp. Forced by poor health to relinquish these duties for a time, Capps returned to his position on the Compensation Board, became the senior member of the Naval War Claims Board, and served on other boards and committees. Although placed on the retired list effective 31 January 1928, Rear Admiral Capps continued on active duty until the day of his death at Washington, D.C., on 31 May 1935.

Builder: Bethlehem-Alameda Shipyard, Inc., Alameda, California

Class: *Admiral W.S. Benson*

Commissioned: 18 September 1944

Decommissioned: Coast Guard crew was removed on 8 May 1946

Displacement: 9,676 tons (lt); 20,120 tons (fl)

Length: 608' 11"

Beam: 75' 6"

Draft: 26' 6"

Propulsion: Turbo-electric; two propellers; 19,000 SHP

Top Speed: 21.3 knots

Complement: 618

Troop capacity: 5,200

Cargo capacity: 100,000 cubic feet

Armament: 4 x single-5"/38 dual-purpose gun mounts; 4 x twin 40mm; 16 x twin 20mm (1945)

Coast Guard history:

USS *Admiral W. L. Capps* was one of eleven *Admiral W.S. Benson*-class troop transports assigned to the United States Coast Guard from the Navy during World War II. The *Admiral Capps* first and only commanding officer was Captain Neil S. Haugen, USCG. The *Admiral Capps* sailed from San Francisco to San Pedro on Sept. 30, 1944 where it remained available there until November 15, 1944. It returned to San Francisco on November 16, 1944.

Admiral W. L. Capps made several trans-Pacific voyages to the Far East with troops between November 23, 1944 and August 4, 1945. From September 1945 to and December 15, 1945, it made three trans-Atlantic voyages returning troops

from Europe. On December 29, 1945, it returned to the Pacific for two more "Magic Carpet" trips to Okinawa and Japan, returning to San Francisco in April of 1946. From there the *Admiral Capps* sailed from San Francisco to New York where it was eventually decommissioned May 8, 1946. It was returned to the Maritime Commission on the same day. She was then transferred to the U. S. Army Transportation Service, renamed USAT General Hugh J. Gaffey. She was reacquired by the Navy, 1 March 1950 and placed in service by the *Military Sea Transportation Service* (MSTS) as USNS General J. Gaffey (T-AP-121). She was placed out of service and struck from the Naval Register, 9 October 1969. She was then transferred to the Maritime Administration for lay up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet. She was reacquired and reinstated in the Naval Register on 1 November 1978 and was placed in service as a barracks hulk, redesignated "Miscellaneous Unclassified" (IX-507). She was laid up in the NISMF Pearl Harbor, HI,, (date unknown) and struck from the Naval Register on 25 October 1993. She was sunk during RIMPAC 2000 EXERCISE as a missile target on 16 June 2000, location: 023° 35' 01.0" North, 159° 50' 00.2" West, depth: 2,730 fathoms.



USS *Admiral W. C. Capps* (AP-121), 1944.

Original caption reads: "AP 121 ADMIRAL W.L. CAPPS SAN PEDRO BAY
11/14/44 STBD QUARTER."

Photo was provided courtesy of CDR Keith Barker, USCGR (Ret.), whose father-in-law, Jim Jennings, served aboard her during the war.



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Sources:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.
Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships. Washington, DC: USGPO.

Robert Scheina. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982.

