



USS *Menkar*

AK-123

The brightest star in the constellation Ceti.

Builder: St. Johns River Shipbuilding Co., Jacksonville, Florida

Class: EC-2, SC-1 (Liberty ship)

Commissioned: 2 June 1944

Decommissioned: 15 April 1946

Length: 441' 6"

Beam: 56' 11"

Draft: 24' 6"

Displacement: 12,350 tons

Propulsion:

Performance:

Max: 12.8 knots

Economic:

Cargo Capacity: 358,458 cu. ft. (bale)

Complement: 16 officers, 8 CPOs, 164 enlisted men, 1 Public Health Service doctor

Passengers: 25 officers; 315 men

Armament: 1 x 5"; 4 x 40mm; 12 x 20mm

Electronics:

HISTORY:

Menkar was laid down as *John White* under Maritime Commission contract by St. Johns River Shipbuilding Co., Jacksonville, Florida, on 17 November 1943. She was launched on 31 December 1943 and was sponsored by Mrs. Cora E. Owens. She was acquired as *Menkar* by the Navy from WSA under bareboat charter 17 January 1944. She was commissioned the next day under the command of LCDR Edward G. Gummer, USNR, to be ferried to Miami, Florida, where she decommissioned 22 January for conversion by Dade Drydock Co.; and commissioned 2 June 1944.

Menkar sailed for Norfolk 20 June and, following shakedown, was temporarily assigned to NTS. In late July she loaded on supplies at Norfolk and got underway for the Canal Zone, via Guantanamo, Cuba, arriving 11 August for duty with the Pacific Fleet.

In October 1944 *Menkar* was transferred to the Coast Guard for LORAN construction work. Construction of stations for LORAN, a navigational system for ships and planes based on the transmission of radio wave pulses, had only begun in the Pacific a year before; and a cargo ship was needed to transport material and equipment.

On 31 October *Menkar*, LCDR Niels P. Thompsen, USCG, now in command, reached Saipan, Marianas, to unload cargo for the first loran station in the Marianas chain. On 11 November she anchored in Apra Harbor and unloaded supplies for the Guam station. She then continued on to Ulithi, Carolines, arriving 13 December. The Marianas stations proved invaluable in the amphibious assault on Iwo Jima in February 1945 and in the bombing attacks on Japan begun in March of that year.

On 5 March 1945 *Menkar* was off Angaur, Palaus, with materials to set up a fixed station. Four days later she was anchored at Pulo Anna, Palaus, unloading her cargo. By the end of March she had supplied the other two stations of the Palau-Mortal chain.

The cargo ship next helped tighten the LORAN network around Japan with the construction of the Iwo Jima-Tokyo-Okinawa chain. *Menkar* reached Kangoku Iwa off Iwo Jima 20 April, just 2 months after the Marines had first landed. Three days later she departed for Ike Shima, arriving 10 May. In the next 4 days she fought off intermittent Japanese air raids while discharging supplies at Okinawa. She continued on to Katchin Wan Harbor, Okinawa, where she again was harassed by enemy planes. On 18 May *Menkar* retaliated by shooting down an "Oscar" diving directly at the ship.

Before construction of the third station at O'Shima began, *Menkar* steamed for the west coast, via Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, arriving Seattle, Washington on 5 August. She remained there through the Japanese surrender 15 August. On 14 September she departed Seattle for Pearl Harbor, embarking 307 passengers on arrival the 24th. She again embarked LORAN units and got underway 9 October for the Marianas, stopping in the Gilbert's and the Marshalls before anchoring at Guam 26 October.

With the construction of a China Sea LORAN chain planned soon after the cessation of hostilities, she continued on to the north China Sea for loran duty into the next year. When the project was abandoned, *Menkar* returned to San Francisco 3 March 1946. On 15 April she decommissioned and was delivered to WSA for service under the Maritime Commission as *John White*.

SOURCES:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

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