



USS *Arthur Middleton*

AP-55 / APA-25



USS *Arthur Middleton* was named for a South Carolina politician and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Builder: Ingalls Shipbuilding Company, Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Length: 489'

Beam: 69' 9"

Draft: 27' 4"

Displacement: 16,480 fl

Top speed: 18.4 knots

Complement: 528

Armament: 1 x 5"/38 dual-purpose; 4 x 3"/50 dual purpose; 8 x 20mm; 4 x .50 caliber A.A.

History:

The Coast Guard-manned USS *Arthur Middleton* (original designation AP-55) was the first of three sister ships built by the Ingalls Shipbuilding Company of Pascagoula, Mississippi, for the American South African Lines, Inc. The hull design was the U.S. Maritime Commission type C3P. The sister ships were the *Samuel Chase* (APA-26) and *George Clymer* (APA-27). The keel of *Middleton* was laid on 1 July 1940 and she was launched on 28 June 1941, sponsored by Miss Mary Maud Farrell. Designed as a combination cargo passenger ship to run between New York and South and East African ports, she was originally named the *African Comet*. She was 489 feet overall, with a maximum beam of 69 feet, three inches; a mean full load draft at 16,700 ton displacement was 27 feet, four inches. The ship was all welded construction, single screw, geared turbine driven of 8,500 shaft horsepower and had a maximum sustained speed of 16.5 knots. her gross registered tonnage was about 11,800 tons and her net registered tonnage was about 8,150. She was originally designed to carry 116 passengers and a crew of about 220 men. *Middleton* was reclassified APA-25 on 1 February 1943.

The ship completed her trials shortly after the outbreak of World War II, and, with a civilian crew, proceeded to the west coast in January 1942, she was then acquired by the Navy, and she made several trips to the South Pacific with troops. It was during this time that her name was changed to *Arthur Middleton*, in honor of a South Carolina lawyer and revolutionary patriot and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The vessel now underwent a conversion for war service, at San Francisco between July and September 1942, and after considerable alterations became the AP-55. The alterations consisted mainly of the installation of armament, elimination of the greater part of the boat deck, and the removal of her glass enclosed promenade to provide for the carrying of landing craft. Holds 1, 4, and 5 were subdivided by installing bulkheads. The Navy formally commissioned the *Middleton* on 7 September 1942 under the command of CDR P. K. Perry, USCG.

Arthur Middleton departed San Francisco on 10 September 1942 for San Pedro and San Diego where she engaged in training exercises for the next three months including landing rehearsals on southern California beaches. She arrived at Oakland, California, on 21 December where she was loaded with Army equipment. Departing on the 23rd, she arrived at Adak, Aleutians, via Dutch Harbor on 29 December 1942 and remained there until 11 January 1943, loading 102 officers and 2,060 enlisted Army personnel. She arrived at Constantine Harbor, Amchitka Island in the Aleutians on January 12th, slipping through the small inlet into the harbor at daybreak, where landing operations began. They followed the pattern that had been learned in the Solomons and at Adak and Atka. Thirty six-foot Higgins boats and 50-foot tank lighters were used. The first wave moved in on the shallow, rocky beach with the temperature at 30 degrees. All went well until later in the day when a fast williwa (sudden wind peculiar to the Arctic) whipped down the harbor, threatening all the landing craft. To save the boats "men donned rubber suits and waded out to their armpits in the harbor to serve as human docks. They unloaded barges and passed supplies back, hand

over hand, to keep them above water and the scum of the oil from the two ships." The wind increased to gale velocity before nightfall. Despite every precaution, most of the landing barges were wrecked in the store. At 2307 on the 12th *Middleton* unfortunately went aground on her port quarter, although her boats continued unloading operations in the harbor.

The destroyer USS *Worden* (DD-352), one of the escort vessels, dragged a ground on the reefs and eventually became a total loss. *Middleton's* boats took off the *Worden's* crew, one boat being lost in the operation, but without casualties. The weather was extremely bad for the rescue. When the distress call came, a Coast Guard landing boat under LCDR R. R. Smith, USCG, was rushed to the scene to render assistance. More help soon became necessary and Coast Guardsmen pulled their boats near to the vessel and sail "mountainous seas that threatened to swamp the landing boats" passed lines aboard to enable the mend to slide down into the rescue craft. *Middleton's* crew saved six officers and 171 men of the *Worden's* personnel but 14 of the destroyer's crew were lost. LCDR Smith, LT(jg) C. W. MacLane, USCGR, ENS J. R. Wallenberg, USCG, Russell M. Speck, Coxswain., USCG, Robert W. Gross, Coxswain, USCG, George W. Pritchard, Coxswain, USCG, and John S. Vandeleur, Jr., Seaman 3/c, USCG, all received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, while four other officers and 42 enlisted men of *Middleton* received letters of commendation from the Commander, North Pacific Force.

With the rescue of the *Worden's* crew completed, the work of debarking the troops and their equipment continued, the soldiers being debarked in the late afternoon, although the landing of the equipment continued for several days. Several boats were severely damaged on submerged reefs in the harbor. *Middleton* remained aground until 6 April 1943, salvage operations having continued in the meantime. There was very little light or heat on board during this time. There were constant alerts, Japanese planes coming over Amchitka daily for part of this period. On one occasion two bombs were dropped within 100 yards of the ship. On 9 April 1943 the transport was taken in tow by the USS *Ute* (AT-76), and, escorted by three destroyers, arrived at Dutch Harbor on the 13th where she remained until 17 June 1943, to make such repairs as would permit her to be towed to the continental United States. Departing for Bremerton Navy Yard on the above date, in tow of the commercial tug *James Griffiths* and the USS *Cree* (ATF-84) she arrived there on June 27th.

Having finished her repairs, *Middleton* was again ready for sea on 9 September 1943. Meanwhile the ship's type designation was changed from AP-55 to APA-25. CAPT Severt A. Olsen, USCG, had relieved CAPT Paul K. Perry, USCG, as commanding officer on 31 July 1943. On September 12th the transport was at San Francisco, where 78 officers and 1,354 men of the Army's 119th AAA group were embarked. The ship sailed on the 18th for Suva in the Fiji Islands, where some stores were landed and then proceeded to Lantaka Harbor, Viti Levu Island, where the troops and a considerable amount of cargo and equipment were discharged. On October 6th, three officers and 97 soldiers of the New Zealand Army came aboard for transportation to Wellington when the ship arrived on 12 October 1943.

A few days later, personnel of the Third Battalion, Second Regiment, Second Marine Division Assault Landing Team, consisting of 54 officers and 1,331 Marines, together with a small group of naval personnel, came on board. Training in landing operations were held in the vicinity of Wellington during the next few days, and *Middleton*, assigned to Task Group 53.1 of Task Group 53, proceeded to Hawke Bay for more rehearsals. Returning to Wellington on October 24th, the division, designated Transport Division 4, of Task Unit 53.1.1, with flag in the USS *Zeilin* (APA-3), left on 1 November 1943 for Efate in the New Hebrides.

Here additional exercises were carried out until the 14th when the task group sailed for the occupation of Tarawa. The Tarawa Operation began on the morning of "D" day, 20 November 1943, when the transports arrived in the transport area at 0350. Immediately the LVTs were unloaded and the Marines debarked into them. Other ships carrying LVTs sent them to the *Middleton* to receive troops all of whom were debarked by 0608. The first wave was ashore at 0913 where they were stopped against a barricade running parallel to the beach and 20 yards inland. *Middleton's* beach party consisting of three officers and 43 enlisted men with LT(jg) Robert Hoyle, USCG, in charge, went ashore in the morning and remained there for the next five days, handling the boats and equipment as they came to the beach. Two of *Middleton's* officers were wounded during the operation. Transport Division 4 remained at Tarawa until 29 November 1943, discharging supplies and equipment and while there acted as receiving ship for Marine casualties from the fighting ashore. On November 29th *Middleton* proceeded to Pearl Harbor as a unit of Task Group 53.8, arriving there on 7 December 1944.

Between December 13th and the 20th, a detachment of Marine and Navy personnel embarked upon *Middleton* for training in amphibious landings near Kahuli, Hawaiian Islands, in preparation for the next assault. Returning to Honolulu, the transport returned to Kahuli on 4 January 1944, where 63 officers and 1,389 men of the First Battalion, 22nd Marine Regiment were embarked and after additional training and rehearsals in the vicinity of Maalaca Bay, Maui Island, through the 17th, returned to Pearl Harbor. Here CAPT G. W. McKean, USCG, temporarily relieved CAPT Olsen, who went to the hospital. *Middleton*, as a member of Transport Division 20, consisting of the USS *Heywood* (APA-6), USS *President Monroe* (AP-104), USS *Electra* (AKA-4), and the USS *Leonard Wood* (APA-12, flagship), all assigned to Task Group 51.1, departed Pearl Harbor on 23 January 1944, as the Attack Force Reserve Group for the operation against Kwajalein. The capture and occupation of the atoll went exceedingly well and the Reserve Group was not required in the initial operation, but entered the lagoon the next day where it remained until 15 February 1944.

The Transport Division, consisting of the same ships, now designated Task Unit 51.14.2, entered Eniwetok Atoll on the early afternoon of "D" day, 17 February 1944. Some howitzer troops and equipment were transferred from the ship to LSTs and from them to LVTs for the occupation of the small islands to the west and southeast of Engebi Island. These troops were to harass the enemy on Engebi during the night and prevent their escape to the small islands when the

main assault got underway on 18 February 1944. "W" hour for the first wave of LVTs on Engebi was set for 0900. Engebi, the largest island in the northern part of the atoll, contained an air strip, and was the objective of the Northern Attack Force to which Transport Division 20 was attached. The first wave, led by boats from *Middleton*, landed at 0902. The island, in the meantime, had received a thorough pounding from the battleships and cruisers of the fire support force, which materially contributed to its subjugation and reduced resistance. Word was received from the ship's beachmaster, LT(jg) Robert Hoyle, USCG, that the beach assigned to the *Middleton* had been secured by 0930. One member of the beach party was wounded in action. The ship's beach party received very favorable comments for its work under fire and LT(jg) Hoyle was later awarded the Silver Star. The other members of the crew, Malcolm Anderson, RM 3/c, USCGR, and Russell Alsen, RM 3/c, USCGR, were awarded Bronze Stars. The securing of Engebi went well and mopping up operations were in progress before nightfall. Five Japanese prisoners were brought aboard and the transport also received a total of 76 Marine casualties aboard by evening. Supplies and equipment continued to be unloaded until the afternoon of the 19th when the First Battalion was re-embarked to assist in the operation on Eniwetok Island. *Middleton* arrived at the southern area and anchored about 2200. The situation on Eniwetok Island, however, had clarified and the troops aboard *Middleton* were not needed.

The occupation of Perry Island was set for 22 February 1944, this island being one of the atoll about two miles NNE of Eniwetok Island. "Z" hour for the landing of the first wave was set for 0900 and it landed exactly on time, the Marines debarking from *Middleton* beginning at 0600. The assault went well, but it was the following morning before Parry Island was secured. The Marines who engaged in the assault re-embarked on board on the 24th. During the operation 278 Army, Navy and Marine Corps casualties were received on board, 12 of whom died later. During the assault on 22 February 1944, the *LCI-442*, a rocket-fire ship of the first wave, was hit by an enemy shell and was seen to burst into flames. LT(jg) John M. Johnson, USCGR, the first wave guide officer from *Middleton*, in an LCVP, went alongside and learned that the magazine was on fire and that the ship was in imminent danger of blowing up. A number of dead and injured were lying on the deck. LT(jg) Johnson and members of his boat crew removed the injured to the LCVP and transferred them to the hospital ship *USS Solace* (AH-5). All received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for their heroism. The Eniwetok operation having been completed, *Middleton*, on 25 February 1944, proceeded to Pearl Harbor, stopping off at Kwajalein to discharge the Marines taken aboard for the Eniwetok operation and to re-embark 1,118 Marine officers and men of the 25th Regiment, 4th Marines, for transportation to the Hawaiian Islands. On arrival at Pearl Harbor, CAPT S. A. Olsen, USCG, returned and resumed his command, relieving CAPT G. W. McKean. *Middleton* was in quarantine from 12 March 1944 until 1 May 1944, when an epidemic of bacillary dysentery broke out on board. All personnel were kept on board. Meanwhile the transport proceeded to sea on April 20th to search for the *LST-20* reported broken down 400 miles southwest of Honolulu. She located the

LST on the 23rd and took her in tow, returning to Pearl Harbor four days later. On 7 May 1944 the 2nd Battalion Marines of the 2nd Regiment, 2nd Division were embarked and the ship engaged in landing rehearsals and drills until the end of May, when on the 30th, newly assigned to Transport Division 10, and Task Unit 52.3.1, *Middleton* sailed with Transport Divisions 10, 18, and 28 for the occupation of Saipan. They arrived at Eniwetok on June 9th and left there on the 11th for Saipan where they arrived on 15 June 1944, which was "D" day. Transport Division 10 conducted a feint on the northwest side of the island at Tanapag Harbor, for the purpose of splitting the enemy's defending forces, while the main assault was taking place at Charan Kanoa, about eight miles southward. The ship's boats were lowered and several waves, without troops, were started for the beach. They were recalled when a few miles off shore, hoisted, and all ships of Division 10 then proceeded to the scene of the main attack. The diversionary plan succeeding in dividing the Japanese and undoubtedly contributed materially to the successful landings at Charan Kanoa. Debarkation of troops and equipment from the *Middleton* began there at 1400 and continued until dark, when the transports retired from the area until the following daybreak. Marine who were debarked in the afternoon were compelled to remain in the LCVPs overnight because of bad surf landing conditions, but landed the next morning by transferring to Amtracs. The next two days were occupied in discharging armament, equipment, and troops. Casualties from the fighting area were periodically received on board. Between the night of the 17th and 21st, *Middleton* was absent in the retirement area. Returning to the anchorage off Charan Kanoa, *Middleton* completed her discharge of personnel and cargo and on the evening of June 23rd, together with two other transports and three escorts, formed Task Unit 51.18.16 and, with a destroyer escort, departed for Eniwetok, arriving there on 27 June 1944. At Eniwetok *Middleton* took aboard 122 Japanese prisoners, including four children and one woman, for transportation to Pearl Harbor. 350 Army personnel were picked up at Tarawa and Pearl Harbor was reached on July 9th. The next day the ship proceeded to San Diego, arriving there on the 17th. After a short stay she sailed on the 22nd to Hilo with members of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Regiment, 5th Marine Division, debarking them on the 31st. Another return trip was made to San Diego, when Marine personnel of the 3rd Battalion, 27th Regiment, were taken aboard and landed at Hilo on August 20th. Preparation for the next operation, that against Yap, were now proceeding and after a few days in repair status, Army personnel of the 2nd Battalion, 381st Infantry Regiment, 96th Division, came on board for several days of amphibious warfare. Sailing on September 15th, assigned to Transport Division 10, Task Group 33.2, *Middleton* stopped at Eniwetok for a few days and then proceeded to Manus, anchoring in Seeadler Harbor on 4 October 1944. Here a change in plans occurred. The Yap operation was cancelled, and the group was reorganized as Task Group 79.4, Transport Division 10, consisting of six other transports, with *Middleton*, as Task Unit 79.4.1 for the operation against Leyte, Philippine Islands. The Division arrived at Leyte Gulf on "A" day, 20 October 1944. The troops on board the ships of the division constituted a reserve of the

Sixth Army making the assault landings. Some field artillery troops and their equipment were landed on "A" day on the beach near Dulag. The greater part of the remaining troops and their equipment were debarked on the 23rd. The ship, completely discharged on the following morning, sailed for Rumboldt Bay, New Guinea where she arrived on 29 October 1944, with a number of other transports in Task Unit 79.15.2. Proceeding to Morotai Island, 600 Army personnel, vehicles and cargo were loaded for Leyte and discharged at Dulag on 14 November 1944, the ship then returning to Manus on November 20th. Transport Division 10 left Manus on 27 November 1944 and proceeded to Borgen Bay, New Britain, where the next day Army personnel of the 2nd Battalion, 185th Regiment, 40th Division were taken aboard and, during December 1944, landing rehearsals were held frequently, *Middleton* going from Borgen Bay on the 10th, to Manus, and then to Huon Gulf, and back to Seeadler Harbor on the 21st, remaining there until the 31st. On New Year's Eve, Transport Division 10 sortied out of Manus to participate in the Lingayen Gulf, Philippine Islands Operation. "S" day for the assault was set for 9 January 1945, and on arrival in the Lingayen Area, unloading operations began immediately. *Middleton's* boats were assigned to the fourth and succeeding waves, the fourth wave landing at 0800, the others a few minutes later. No enemy opposition was met at the beach, which was quickly established by the ship's beach party. The landing operation went smoothly and neither boats nor personnel suffered even minor injury or damage. All troops and their equipment were debarked by 1810. The transports, however, were subject to frequent air attacks throughout the day. Although *Middleton* was not hit or damaged, flak from numerous ships repelling an attack at 0750 fell on board, injuring one officer and 14 of the ship's crew. In order to avoid after dark attacks, the transports sailed hurriedly for Leyte, *Middleton's* beach party and 10 boats being left behind to be taken on board the USS *Cambria* (APA-36), joining the ship later in Leyte Gulf. While at Leyte, Transport Division 10 was dissolved and *Middleton* was assigned to Transport Division 35 of Transport Division 12. 1,215 officers and men of the 8th Regiment, First Cavalry Division were loaded and with other units of Task Group 78.4 returned to Lingayen Gulf, discharged the troops and immediately came back to Leyte on 30 January 1945. While en route to Lingayen and when off the southwest end of the Negros Island on the night of the 24th, a torpedo was seen passing across the bow of the ship. The USS *Shadwell* (LSD-15), another ship of the convoy, had been torpedoed a few hours before. Departing Leyte on 2 February 1945, Task Unit 78.2.9 to which *Middleton* was attached sailed for Gavutu Harbor, Florida Island in the Solomons, arriving on the 11th and remained there until the 23rd, when she moved over to Guadalcanal to load for the Okinawa operation. The period between 23 February and 14 March was spent in the vicinity of Guadalcanal, holding exercises with other ships of Transport Division 35 and loading Army, Navy and Marine Corps units including Sea Bees, Medical Teams, Military Government Units, Military Police, totaling 77 officers and 954 men, including an 850 ton cargo and 87 assorted vehicles. The Transport Division then became a unit (TU 53.1.2) of Task Group Able (TG 53.1)

of the Northern Attack Force for the operation against Okinawa and sailed for Ulithi on 15 March 1945, arriving there on the 19th. Departing Ulithi, the staging point for the Okinawa assault, on 27 March, the Task Group arrived on the outer area off the southern part of Okinawa on "L" day, 1 April 1945. The embarked units were not expected to be landed for a few days and *Middleton's* boats were detached to assist in the debarking of the 29th Marines, from other ships in the division. The ships retired from the area for the night but returned to the transport area the next morning, when unloading personnel and equipment continued until another night retirement. Discharging was resumed on the 3rd by the afternoon of the 4th all troops and equipment had been landed. There were numerous air alerts and a single enemy suicide plane crashed 3,000 yards off *Middleton's* starboard beam, having been shot down by ships in the area. *Middleton* left Okinawa for Saipan on 5 April 1945, when she anchored there on the 9th where she fueled and proceeded to Pearl Harbor. Arriving there on the 21st she departed the next day for San Pedro, California, to undergo a needed overhaul. She remained there until 31 August 1945, and in this period was converted to a relief amphibious group command ship. On 20 August 1945 CAPT Olsen was relieved by CAPT J. A. Glynn, USCG. Hostilities having come to an end on 11 August 1945, *Middleton* departed for Leyte on 8 September 1945, with 1,210 officers and men, as Army replacements. She arrived there on September 29th and was assigned to Commander, Service Force Pacific under Commander, Task Group 16.12 for "Magic Carpet" duty of retaining military personnel home. She sailed for San Francisco on 5 October 1945, with 1,450 officers and men of Army and Navy personnel, was diverted to Portland, Oregon, and arrived there on 21 October 1945. Here over 200 of *Middleton's* officers and crew were transferred either for release or for other assignments. *Middleton* departed on 9 November 1945 for another trip to the Philippines, arriving at Leyte on November 27th and at Dumaguete, Negros Island on the 30th where 1,558 Army officers and men were taken on board for arrival at San Padre on 18 December 1945. This was the *Middleton's* last trip as a last trip as a Coast Guard-manned Navy transport. She proceeded to San Francisco on 15 January 1946 and on 9 February her Coast Guard crew was removed and steps were taken to return her to her former status in the American Merchant Marine.

USS *Arthur Middleton* earned seven battle stars for her World War II service.



"USS ARTHUR MIDDLETON (APA-25), STARBOARD BOW."; 30 August 1945;
Photo No. USN 339869, photographer unknown. US Navy photo.

SOURCES:

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