

Foreword

The definitive story of the Multi-National Service Force that backstopped the naval war in the Pacific during World War II has long needed to be told. The actions and accomplishments of the various cargo and support vessels making up this Force are often overshadowed by the exploits of the combatants, or fighting ships, of the Allied navies. Having served in four (4) Service Force ships as both an enlisted sailor and a commissioned officer, *Ready to Haul, Ready to Fight's* powerful recounting brought back memories of serving the Fleet.

As early as 1917, future Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was the U.S. Navy's leading developer of underway replenishment. When he assumed command of the naval war in the Pacific, the techniques and concepts that he developed as a young officer allowed the U.S. Fleet to operate away from port almost indefinitely. Cargo ships cobbled together from various sources by the U.S., Australia, and Great Britain formed a cohesive supply force that kept the Allied navies at sea and allowed them to take the fight to the Empire of Japan.

The ships of the Service Force could and did defend themselves against enemy attacks. They supported all the major naval engagements in the Pacific and were awarded Battle Stars, Battle Honors, and Unit Citations for their efforts. Shortly after joining the Navy, ships I served on operated with two of the top Pacific Theater Battle Star recipients. Attack Cargo Ships USS *THUBAN* (AKA-19), known affectionately as "The Thumping THUBAN," and USS *CAPRICORNUS* (AKA-57), earned 7 and 4 Battle Stars, respectively, for their World War II service. The *THUBAN* subsequently added another three in the Korean War. It is notable that into the 1960s, these two ships and others like them were still supporting and servicing naval operations globally.

Sailors work hard, no matter what type of ship they serve aboard. Knowing this firsthand, I was still struck by the volume of work performed by cargo ships in World War II, and the conditions under which, at times, this seemingly ceaseless toil took place. In particular,

attack cargo ships off enemy-held islands, delivering to Allied troops that had just stormed ashore, desperately needed cargos of food, fuel, and ammunition, did not have the luxury of port facilities (piers, cranes, and stevedores) to assist in this effort. So, days of around-the-clock work were necessary, often amidst periodic enemy shore battery fire or air attack. This involved bringing cargo up out of holds, and lifting deck loads, lowering into boats and craft, sending them to the beach for unloading, return to ship, and repeat same process.

Perhaps no event in *Ready to Haul, Ready to Fight* more vividly displays the can-do and heroic actions of the officers and men of these vital ships than the submarine attack on the Cargo Ship USS *ALCHIBA* (AK-23) during the Guadalcanal Campaign. Anchored in the Solomon Islands delivering her cargo to U.S. Marines ashore engaged in the fighting, she was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine despite being screened by several destroyers. The resultant explosion “holed” her and set her aflame, and captain and crew got *ALCHIBA* under way and beached the ship to keep her from sinking. Concurrent with vigorous and determined firefighting and damage control efforts, a portion of the crew continued to deliver materiel ashore. Nine days later, still in a perilous condition, she was torpedoed a second time by a different submarine. Ultimately, the ship was saved and lived to fight again. For her dauntless and valiant efforts, *ALCHIBA* was the only Cargo Ship to be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for heroism.

Commander Bruhn is a prolific and accomplished writer of naval-themed books depicting true historic events. His attention to the most minute details, and comprehensive research, are readily apparent to readers of his books. *Ready to Haul, Ready to Fight* continues in that vein by presenting a clear and concise portrayal of a mostly unsung group of ships and men that ultimately won the recognition and admiration of grateful nations. Once I started reading, it was impossible for me to put down. I highly recommend it, not only for aficionados of the naval war in the Pacific, but also for those individuals who would like to know more about one important and crucial maritime concept that helped lead us to victory in World War II.

Cdr. Lee M. Foley, USN (Retired)