

## Service Report – Ensign unknown

U.S.S. SYRMA (AK-134)  
c/o Fleet Post Office  
New York, New York

11 October 1945

Shortly after 1100 on the Third of August 1944, Boatswain J.W. Taylor, USN stepped forward and piped, "All Hands"; he followed immediately with a short, gruff order, "Set The Watch". The U.S.S. Syrma was fully in commission and thus assumed her berth in the Auxiliary Fleet of the United States Navy.

The ship was commissioned at the Todd-Galveston Shipyard, Galveston, Texas by Captain DeWitt Redgrave Jr., USN and his staff from the Eighth Naval District. In addition to the crew consisting of eighteen officers and one hundred ninety two enlisted personnel many guests witnessed the short wartime commissioning ceremony.

The Syrma is a "liberty-type" ship originally named the "S.S. Andres Almonaster" by the U.S. Maritime Commission for whom she was built in February 1944. The builder was the Delta Shipbuilding Company Incorporated of New Orleans, Louisiana. The United States Navy acquired her in March of 1944 when she was sent to the Todd-Galveston Shipyard in Galveston, Texas for conversion to Navy specifications.

Commissioning date being 3 August 1944, it is readily seen that the Syrma had but a few days over one year to serve during actual wartime. However, under the able leadership of Commander Niles E. Lanphere, D(M), USNR and an ever willing and cooperative group of officers and enlisted men she established a fine record and carried out assignments efficiently during her active duty. Captain Lanphere was relieved on 4 September 1945 by the former Executive Officer of the ship, Lt. Comdr. G.M. Letteau, after commanding the Syrma during her entire wartime history.

The initial few weeks were spent on routine trial runs and the shake-down cruise directed by the Atlantic Fleet Operational Training Command in the Norfolk, Virginia area.

Following a brief post-shakedown availability at the Norfolk Navy Yard in Portsmouth, Virginia the AK-134 set out to sea bound for Gulfport, Mississippi and New Orleans to load for her first mission.

Following loading operations and hitching on a Mobile Floating Drydock tow at Mobile, the Syrma was sent via the Panama Canal to duty with the Naval Transportation Service in the Pacific. The remainder of her wartime career was spent on routine trips for Naval Transportation Service which took her to Pearl Harbor, Maui, Manus and the Gilbert and Marshall Islands.

The Syrma loaded all of her cargo after reporting to the Pacific in the San Francisco Bay Area. There is one exception when on a trip to Pearl Harbor she answered a hurried call to rush greatly needed supplies from Honolulu to Maui where the Army and Marine forces were organizing and training for a new invasion push.

A typical trip was to load in the Bay Area and take a Mobile Floating Drydock or Covered Lighter in tow. Passengers, with few exceptions, would be the crew for the craft the ship had in tow. The great majority of her 38,000 miles of travel was done steaming independently. After discharging cargo at the point of destination, even though she was not specially equipped to handle passengers, the Syrma would generally carry about 60 persons who were bound for the States. Then the round of events would commence again.

In her twelve month career she hauled some 19,800 long tons of cargo approximately 19,000 miles to various outlying bases and shore installations where supplies were needed.

~~In Eniwetok where stevedore battalions were too busy and too few in number to enable them to work cargo, ship's-company put a feather in its hat by discharging the cargo in record-breaking time.~~ On another occasion in the busy San Francisco Bay Area while awaiting orders the Syrma and her crew loaded about 400 tons of defective ammunitions at the Naval Ammunition Depot, Mare Island and took it to the dumping area outside Golden Gate discharging the load in eight hours. That assignment was one refused by other ships in the Bay.

But all wasn't work in the routine aboard the Syrma as one would be led to believe after reading thus far. A modern ship's store with equipment for serving cold drinks and ice cream contributed to making life more pleasant at sea. A ship's band which at one time had 12 members gave frequent concerts on Sundays and other days when "Holiday Routine" was held. An active Athletic Officer scheduled baseball and basketball games whenever possible and the crew defeated teams from ships and stations much larger than the Syrma. In addition to scheduling games the Athletic Officer provided athletic equipment of all sorts to help pass the time in the free hours after the working day was over. Not to be forgotten are the Movie Officers and operators who diligently procured movies for showing both at sea and in port. Perhaps one of the most popular events, and the event occurred not infrequently, was the "Beer Party" at outlying ports where liberty was either prohibited or simply impractical. A good part of the day would be spent swimming, playing, eating, fishing and drinking. The liberty section would always turn out full force for "Beer Party" call.

The spiritual side of the crew's life was not ignored. Whenever possible, in keeping with Navy practice, special liberty would be granted to all those desiring to attend religious services ashore. At sea in the absence of a Chaplain a willing officer would meet with a Protestant and Catholic group at successive hours on Sunday morning. The response to the simple religious services held while underway was remarkable.

The news of the acceptance of the Japanese surrender offer came to the U.S.S. Syrma as she was steaming about 2000 miles out, toward San Francisco. Since that time many have been the changes in her personnel but her job goes on. At this writing, she is loaded and underway bound for Guam. Also on this trip she has heard that she is destined to be decommissioned after discharging at Guam.

Yes, she has been a part of the so-called "dungaree-Navy". During wartime she had no close contacts with the enemy but went steadily on her way serving the fighting fleet and fighting men. In the public's eye, as the center on a football team, she has been ignored in favor of the glorified fighting men who carry the ball. But her job was vital for without her the fighting men and fleet would have been without the necessities of waging war. She has flown her commission pennant proudly for the country whose ensign she carries and justly so.