

AKA-9/A12  
Ser 308

Oct 1  
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SHORT HISTORY OF THE

U.S.S. ALHENA, AKA-9

PERIOD COVERED

June 15, 1941

TO

September 15, 1945

151542

## PREFACE

In this history of the U. S. S. ALHENA it should be borne in mind that, for the most part, she operated with other ships and units of the U. S. Navy. However, for purposes of clarity and better presentation references to other ships have been kept to a minimum.

The service of the ALHENA is roughly divided into four periods: Atlantic service, Pacific service prior to being torpedoed, Pacific service subsequent to being repaired and prior to returning to the United States, and Pacific service since leaving the United States. The following narrative is a general survey of her activities, and detail has been largely ignored.

On June 15, 1941 the steamship ROBIN KETTERING, originally intended for service with the Robin Line, was commissioned as the U. S. S. ALHENA, AK26, with Commander C. B. Hunt, USN, as commanding officer. The commissioning took place in Hoboken, New Jersey. Following the commissioning, several weeks were required to make the necessary conversions to fit her for naval use. However, due to the exigencies of the times the conversion was incomplete when the ALHENA began its first trip.

The first year of service of the ALHENA was spent, for the most part, in North Atlantic waters. After several trips along the eastern seaboard of the United States, she loaded troops and equipment and set sail for Reykjavik, Iceland. Following her initial overseas trip she made trips to Argentia, Newfoundland, Belfast, Ireland, and Clyde Bank, Scotland, as well as several more trips along the United States coast. Further conversion was effected during the periods spent in United States ports.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked the ALHENA was in Norfolk, Virginia. Her first wartime trip was to Argentia.

On the 9th of April, 1942, the ALHENA left New York, en-route Panama, C. Z., passed through the canal on the 19th, and set sail for Tongatabu, Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific. Embarked were various Army and Navy personnel, on board for transportation. The passage was quiet, and having discharged its cargo in Tongatabu, the ALHENA returned to the United States, arriving in San Diego on the 5th of June. There she underwent further conversion, and embarked units and cargo of the United States Marine Corps.

After a month of uncertainty as to sailing date, and having rushed to completion the installation of additional armament, she departed San Diego on the 1st of July, destination unknown. On the 14th, Tongatabu was announced as the first port of call. After having spent several days there, the ALHENA left that port and proceeded to the Fiji Islands to participate in landing exercises, prior to the attack against Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands. Landing exercises completed, the attack force proceeded toward the objective on the 29th.

The ALHENA arrived off Guadalcanal on the 7th of August, and the preliminary operations were effected. In the afternoon the force was attacked twice by hostile planes. On the afternoon of the 8th there were further attacks, and also on the 9th. Although many ships of the force suffered severe damage, and several were sunk, the ALHENA came through unscathed, and had three Jap planes to her credit. On the night of the 9th she departed for Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides, and arrived there on the morning of the 19th. Having completed loading she departed on the 20th and returned to Tulagi, making the latter part of the trip, escorted by one destroyer.

There she unloaded sorely needed supplies, the first to be brought in, and evacuated prisoners and wounded. She returned to Espiritu Santo on the 24th without mishap. From then until the 24th of September, she was engaged in short runs between Espiritu Santo and Efate.

On the 24th of September she sortied from Espiritu Santo enroute Guadalcanal, and arrived there on the 26th. While there, there were several enemy air attacks and, for safety, she retired each night. On the 29th she completed unloading and set sail for Espiritu Santo. At 2354 she was torpedoed by an "unseen vessel." The torpedo hit in the vicinity of #5 hold, and caused extensive damage in the after part of the ship. Fire broke out, but was brought under control in a short time. She was unable to make any headway, and drifted throughout the night and the next day. During this time ship's force made what repairs they could, the main one being the shoring of the bulkhead in #4 hold. An attempt was made to get way on with the engine, but without success. Casualties: 1 missing, 4 killed, and 20 wounded. The destroyer Monssen stood by and rendered assistance, and on the 1st of October took the ALHENA in tow pending the arrival of the U. S. S. Navajo. Late in the afternoon of the second the Navajo arrived and took her in tow. The ALHENA arrived in Espiritu Santo on the 7th of October. Further repairs were made, and on the 16th the Navajo again took her in tow, and they arrived in Noumea on the 20th.

On the 8th of November, having effected further repairs, the tug Sonoma took the ALHENA in tow, and departed Noumea enroute Sydney, Australia, arriving in the latter port on the 20th of November.

The ALHENA remained in Sydney until the following June, undergoing repairs, during which time she became the AKA 9, and also underwent a change of command. Captain Hunt was detached, and Commander Bradbury, USN, the executive officer, assumed command.

Seven months after her torpedoing, the ALHENA departed Sydney enroute Noumea, where she arrived on the 14th. Thus began another epoch in the life of the ALHENA.

In the ensuing months she was engaged in runs between Noumea and Guadalcanal for the most part, with occasional trips to Espiritu Santo, Fiji Islands and New Zealand. She also participated in the first operations against Bougainville Island, during which she was under attack several times. Happily she incurred no damage in these operations. In March of 1944, Commander Bradbury was relieved by Commander Malcolm D. Sylvester, USN.

She departed from Guadalcanal on the 24th of March for Pearl Harbor, arriving on the 9th of April, having been diverted to Funafuti, Ellice Islands, on the way.

Throughout April and May she was engaged in maneuvers and loading operations in the Hawaiian area, in preparation for the forthcoming operation against Saipan. With units of the Second Marine Division embarked, she departed Honolulu May 30th enroute Saipan via Eniwetok, and arrived off the objective on the 15th of June. She underwent two air attacks without mishap, and having completed her mission, departed for Pearl Harbor on the 23rd, where she arrived on the 4th of July.

The next day she departed and set sail for the United States for extensive alterations and overhaul. She arrived on the 11th of July for a three months' stay after two years overseas. During this time there was an almost complete turn-over in personnel, and Lt. Commander R. C. Ericson, USN succeeded Commander Sylvester as commanding officer.

Alterations and overhaul having been completed, she departed on the 13th of October 1944 for Manus Island in the Southwest Pacific, arriving November 1st. While waiting to discharge her cargo, she was involved in the explosion of the ammunition ship Mount Hood, and suffered extensive above decks damage, and moderate personnel casualties. (Three killed, and seventy wounded, about twenty-five seriously). This delayed any further operations for about six weeks until repairs had been effected.

The new year, 1945, saw the ALHENA participating in the liberation of the Philippines, operating alone. Then she proceeded to Ulithi, Caroline Islands, in company with her assigned unit. Thence to Guam, where elements of the Third Marine Division were embarked, for the impending operations against Iwo Jima.

Her part in the Iwo Jima operations being completed, she left for Noumea, stopping at Guam and Guadalcanal on the way. Nearly two months were spent there in company with her squadron in area reserve for the Okinawa operation before she again got underway, this time for Leyte, Philippine Islands. Then began a period of shuttling between New Guinea and Manila. This lasted for several months, and she was enroute Manila from Finschhaven when the Japanese capitulated.

The ALHENA was then employed in the initial occupations of Japan, and anchored in Tokyo Bay on the 13th of September, 1945.

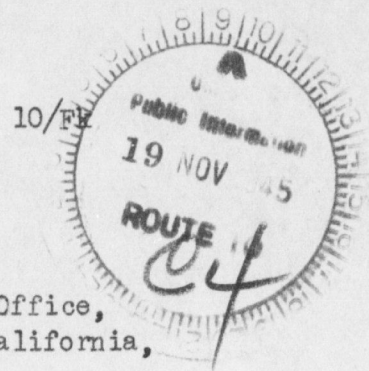
AKA-9/A12

Serial ( 365 )

U. S. S. ALHENA

Care Fleet Post Office,  
San Francisco, California,

NOV 8 1945



From: Commanding Officer.  
To : Secretary of the Navy (Office of Public Information).  
Subject: Personnel Data - Supplement to Ship's History -  
forwarding of.  
Reference: (a) Alpac 278-45.

1. In accordance with reference (a) the following  
information is furnished:

(a) List of successive commanding officers during war period,  
together with home address:

- (1) Commander Charles B. HUNT, U.S. Navy,  
200 North Grand Avenue,  
Pasadena, California.
- (2) Commander Howard W. BRADBURY, U.S. Navy,  
321 Overdale Road,  
Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania.
- (3) Commander Malcolm D. SYLVESTER, U.S. Navy,  
Home address not known.
- (4) Commander Ramond C. ERICSON, U.S. Navy,  
Eugene, Oregon.

(b) Officer performing outstanding action:

- (1) Lieutenant Marion S. HAY, (MC), U.S. Naval Reserve.

Description:

For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of  
outstanding service as the Medical Officer on November 10, 1944.  
Although seriously wounded as the result of an explosion,  
Lieutenant HAY proceeded to treat the wounded while fragments

Serial ( 005 )

## U. S. S. ALHENA

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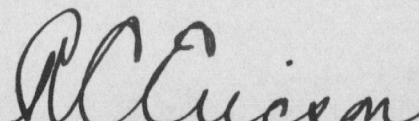
Subject: Personnel Data - Supplement to Ship's History -  
Forwarding of.

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and wreckage still were falling about the ship. He refused treatment for himself until all the wounded had been cared for; he was the last of the injured to be taken from the ship. With professional skill and courageous action, he unquestionably was responsible for saving numerous lives. His outstanding service and conduct throughout were in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service.

Award: Legion of Merit.

Home Address: Municipal Building,  
Dayton, Ohio.

  
R. C. ERICSON.

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CinCPac