

# HAIL, COLUMBIA!

LAUNCHED JUST DAYS AFTER PEARL HARBOR, USS COLUMBIA WAS RUSHED INTO ACTION. EVEN THOUGH HIT BY DIVING KAMIKAZES, SHE CONTINUED BOMBARDING THE ENEMY  
BY ROD REDMAN

Anyone who thinks ships do not have souls is either not a romanticist or has never served aboard a naval vessel. As every sailor knows there are good ships and bad ships in every fleet in war and peace. In a way, ships are like women; they get reputations — sometimes deservedly most flattering and sometimes most unsavory. Equally, there are ships that are good feeders

and ships that are notoriously unlucky or problem-plagued. In the case of the *Columbia*, she was a good ship — fast and well-led by tough, fair, capable skippers. As one of the early war-built *Cleveland*-class light cruisers *Columbia* was the second of 38 (52 ordered, 29 completed as cruisers and nine as light aircraft carriers) to be launched in New York on 17 December 1941 — just ten days

after Pearl Harbor.

The *Cleveland*-class light cruisers were rated as 10,000-ton improvements over the nine *Brooklyn*-class CLs built in the late-1930s.

Essentially, the *Clevelands* were designed for faster wartime construction with many short-cuts being taken via welding and other mass-production methods calculated to bring a much-depleted fleet up to speed in a hurry. With four-shaft geared GE turbines of 100,000-shp, they could make 33-knots at flank speed, a knot slower than their *Brooklyn*-class progenitors.

The most visible difference was the absence of one 6-inch three-gun turret on the foredeck which reduced the main battery from 15 guns in the *Brooklyns* to twelve in the *Clevelands*. Conversely, two additional 5-inch twin mounts were added fore and aft increasing the AA battery from eight 5-inches to twelve. In the frantic air attacks of the later Pacific war these addi-

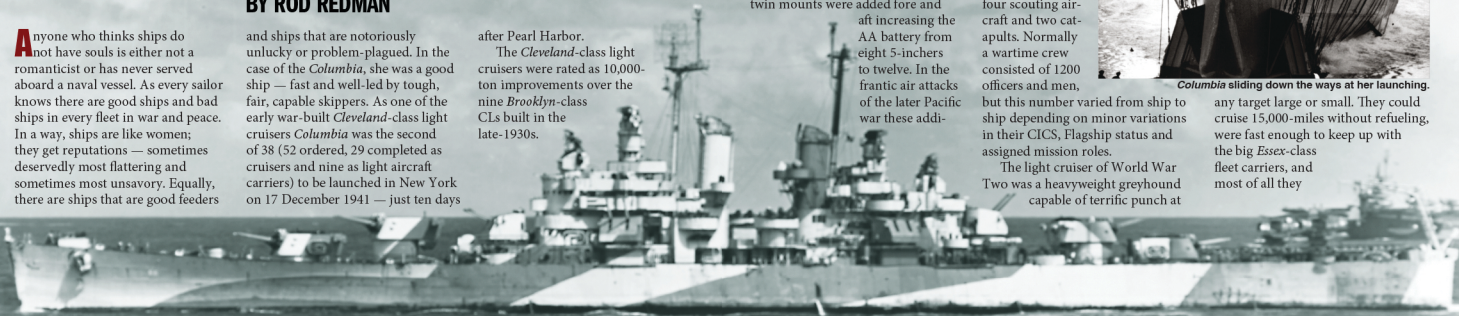
tional dual-purpose mounts would be worth their weight in gold against the dreaded kamikazes. For further air defense, the *Clevelands* were equipped with 28 40mm Bofors and an equal number of 20mm Oerlikons. As with the *Brooklyn*-class, the *Clevelands* carried four scouting aircraft and two catapults. Normally a wartime crew consisted of 1200 officers and men, but this number varied from ship to ship depending on minor variations in their CICs, Flagship status and assigned mission roles.

The light cruiser of World War Two was a heavyweight greyhound capable of terrific punch at

any target large or small. They could cruise 15,000-miles without refueling, were fast enough to keep up with the big *Essex*-class fleet carriers, and most of all they



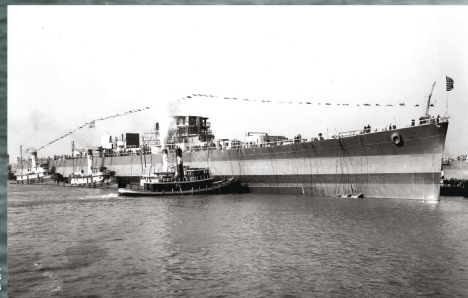
*Columbia* sliding down the ways at her launching.



USS *Columbia* (CL-56) steaming with Task Force 77.4 in Surigao Strait, Philippine Islands, on 3 January 1945, while en route to the Lingayen Gulf landings. Photographed from USS *Makin Island* (CVE-93). *Columbia* is finished in Camouflage Measure 33 Design 1d.



Etching by John Taylor Arms depicting *Columbia* being fitted out at the New York Shipbuilding Corporation shipyard at Camden, New Jersey.



After launching on 17 December 1941, the *Mayla* steam-powered tug *Triton* was one of three Curtis Bay Towing tugs aiding in the operation.