

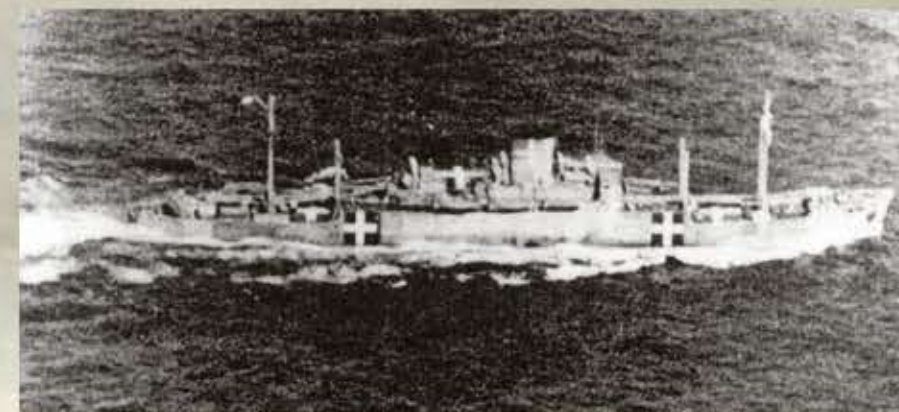
STRANGE MYSTERY OF THE AWA MARU 阿波丸

IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET VITAL FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO PRISONERS OF WAR, AMERICA MADE A DEAL WITH THE JAPANESE TO TRANSPORT THEM ABOARD THE FORMER OCEAN LINER AWA MARU. HOWEVER, THE DEAL BACKFIRED FOR BOTH SIDES
BY RAYMOND OLIVER

For decades, rumors and myths have been built around the sinking of the *Awa Maru* during World War Two. The actual facts about the ship are fascinating and make for one of the more interesting maritime stories of the war.

Awa Maru was originally designed as a Japanese ocean liner but that nation's entry into the Second World War changed all plans for passenger service. Originally owned by Nippon Yusen Kaisha, the ship was constructed by Mitsubishi Shipbuilding and Engineering Company at Nagasaki during the 1941/1943 timeframe. The keel was laid down on 10 July 1941 and *Awa Maru* was launched on 24 August 1942. The final work on the ship was completed on 5 March 1943.

At this point in the war, Japan was



Reconnaissance photo of *Awa Maru* at sea showing Red Cross markings on the hull and the funnel.

in need of more shipping capability and *Awa Maru* was requisitioned and refitted for auxiliary use by the Imperial Japanese Navy. The ocean liner's interior was gutted and replaced by much more utilitarian fittings for troops and cargo.

When launched, *Awa Maru* weighed in at 11,249-grt, had a length of 502 feet, beam of 66 feet, and its two diesel engines could propel the ship at 17 knots.

The need for this category of ship was so great that it was sent out on its



Over the years, numerous artistic interpretations of *Awa Maru* have been done by artists but none of them are completely accurate. This painting of the ship illustrates the vessel in its "hell ship" role transporting POWs in the worst conditions imaginable and before it became a Red Cross messenger.