

United States Ship
U.S.S. THOMAS STONE (AP-59)

(AP-59: dp. 14,868; l. 492'; b. 69'6"; dr. 24'8"; s. 16.5 k.; cpl. 379; a. 1 5", 4 3"; cl. President Jackson)

Thomas Stone (AP-59) was laid down under a maritime Commission contract (MC hull 58) as President Van Buren on 12 August 1941 at Newport News, VA, by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co.; launched on 1 May 1941; and delivered to the American President Lines on 11 September 1941. The passenger liner was acquired by the Navy on 14 January 1942; converted for use as a troop transport; and commissioned on 18 May 1942, Capt. O.R. Bennehoff in command.

Thomas Stone loaded troops at Norfolk and, on 26 September, sailed for Ireland with Convoy AT 23. The transport was assigned the task of carrying troops for the British-controlled assault on Algiers. She transited the Straits of Gibraltar on the nights of 5 and 6 November. On the morning of the 7th, she was steaming on the left flank of the convoy, second in line, astern of Samuel Chase (AP-56). At 0535, a torpedo hit the ship's port side, aft, blowing a hole in her bottom; breaking her propeller shaft; and bending her propeller and her rudder to starboard. The convoy continued on, leaving Thomas Stone behind, adrift some 150 miles from Algiers, guarded by only British corvette HMS Spey. After daylight, an inspection of the damage revealed that the ship was in no immediate danger of sinking but was nevertheless unable to move under her own power.

But Capt. Bennehoff and Major Walter M. Oakes, USA—who commanded the battalion landing team embarked in Thomas Stone—were not content to let the transport's troops drift aimlessly in the Mediterranean while others took Algiers. Besides, all on board were in deadly peril from a possible renewal of the submarine attack. To solve both problems, the two officers loaded most of the transport's troops in 24 boats which set out for Algiers Bay under the protection of Spey. However, the weather which had been good when the boats left the transport worsened, and the frail craft began taking on water. Engine trouble forced the boats to be abandoned one by one, and their crews and passengers were transferred to the corvette. When Spey finally reached Algiers before dawn on the 8th, she carried all of the crews of the boats and each of their passengers, for every boat had been scuttled. By the time Spey's troops went ashore that morning, they learned that all French resistance had ended.

Meanwhile, two destroyers, HMS Wishart and HMS Velox, had arrived on the night of the 7th and attempted to tow Thomas Stone. The next morning, HMS St. Day, a tug, arrived to assist. Despite bad weather and the twisted remnants of the transport's rudder which made her all but unmanageable, the group of ships finally reached Algiers on the 11th and moored to the Quai de Falaise where she discharged the remaining troops and equipment.

On 19 November, Thomas Stone was moved to the outer harbor to make room for two large convoys. An air raid on the nights of 24 and 25 November caused additional damage to the ship when a bomb pierced two decks, the hull, and exploded beneath her. On the 25th, a high wind and heavy swells caused the ship to drag both anchors and drove her hard aground, further damaging her hull. While still aground, the transport was reclassified APA-29 on 1 February 1943. Salvage operations continued for over a year, and all equipment and stores were removed. Efforts to refloat the ship continued until the spring of 1944, but the ship was finally placed out of commission on 1 April 1944, and her name was struck from the Navy list on 8 April 1944. Her hulk was sold to Le Materiel Economique, Algiers, for scrap.

Thomas Stone received one battle star for World War II service.