Despite these minor setbacks, those who visited acclaimed the liner as beautiful and magnificent. [5]

Two days before the maiden voyage, Harry Manning received his sailing orders from United States Lines president, John Franklin. "The complete safety of the passengers and the ship is the number one priority. You will shut her down if you encounter heavy weather or fog." [6] On the first day of the maiden voyage, the ship covered a record 696 miles at an average speed of 34.11 knots. On board the ship, *New York Times* reporter George Horne wrote, "Only an unexpected fog could stand between this liner and an Atlantic record."[7] That evening fog did set in when a heavy mist swept down from Newfoundland, cutting visibility down to zero.[8] Manning did not reduce speed, relying on two sets of radar for visibility. He telegraphed a "stand-by" order to the engine room. Extra watchmen would be available in case the ship needed fast power astern. Later, a Finnish shipping journal would call the decision "irresponsible" and compared it to the action of Captain Smith of the *Titanic* when he failed to reduce speed while passing through the ice belt in 1912. Was such strong criticism justified? How reliable was the radar? Four years later on July 25, 1956, it did not prevent the collision of the passenger liners *Andrea Doria* and *Stockholm.*

Captain and Mrs. Tucker with the medal he received at the conclusion of the *United States'* record-breaking voyage. It is inscribed, "To John Tucker, third officer, from William Francis Gibbs for exceptional performance as a crew member on the SS *United States* in her maiden voyage, July 3-15."

Captain Tucker described radar in those days as primitive compared to what ships have now. "It would pick up anything solid within range without indicating direction or speed of any approaching ships. We had to do all of that on the old Navy maneuvering board or somebody invented a way of doing it with a grease pencil. You marked the target and the time and six minutes later marked it again. Draw a line between the two and you could come up with their course in a fairly rough approach," he remembered. The radar would also break down. "Those were the days when if something went wrong there was a big box of vacuum tubes and you changed the tubes until it worked again". During one of the breakdowns Manning became impatient with the repair operation. "He stuck his finger in there one day. I don't know what he did but it sent him flying against the wall," Tucker said. Despite these limitations, Tucker believes Manning did not take unnecessary risk. "No, he didn't take risk," he said. With the use of radar, "all those ships ran in poor visibility".

Tucker was ambitious and moving up the ranks at United States Lines required flexibility, talent, and seniority. This meant accepting assignments on the company's freighters. He would eventually rise to the rank of captain and return to the *United States,* serving as executive officer and relieving captain under Commodore Leroy Alexanderson. "I was 41 when I first took the *U.S.* out." He clearly enjoyed the job. "I can remember when I was skipper and people would say to me: 'Doesn't the responsibility of everything on this ship and you are a very young man, doesn't that bother you?' I told them no; if it bothered me I should not be here." What did he like about the job? "I loved all of it. I remember Commodore John Anderson came up to the bridge one moonlight night; he looked up at the stars and said, 'You know, it's a sin to take the money.' I was a natural; I liked what I was doing every time I stepped on board a ship, big or small." As captain, what were his concerns? "Traffic, visibility, other ships, where are they? In addition, where are they going?" he said.

It was Captain Tucker's turn to ask me a question. "Do you remember that picture of the bow of the *United States* as she arrived off Southampton on the maiden voyage"? I remembered a picture of paint peeling from the bow after the maiden voyage. The press attributed the loss of paint to the ship's high speed. "That bow suffered from abrasive wear caused by cavitations. Every time we got to New York there was a compound called Red Hand cement; it was epoxy cement. The U.S. Lines shore gang would go down and apply it to the bow," he said. He pointed out some other details. The ship's air conditioning exhausted through fans on the top decks of the aluminum superstructure. "The foundation mountings for these exhaust fans were made of steel and it would eat through that aluminum deck leaking water below," he said. Liberal application of Red Hand cement and an aluminum wearing plate provided a temporary fix. "It was a labor intensive job and very expensive," Tucker recalled. Aside from speed, the *United States* had another advantage over the Queens, a shallow draft. "Her deep draft loaded was only about 32 feet, 8 inches; the Queens were forty feet," he said. "If we were on time we could guarantee an 8 o'clock docking; we did not care what the tide was doing. The Queens were tide bound. They might have come up right behind us but would have to wait for the tide."