The crew was composed of workers from Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company with the exception of the bridge officers, who were U.S. Lines employees under contract to the shipyard. Tucker was one of them. "Over 1,300 people were on board, ranging from reporters and engineers to company presidents, admirals and congressmen," he said. One of the reporters described the dining room service by shipyard workers as less than continental in manner. The head chef was a driller called Clamchowder Jordan and the waiters were mostly riggers. "Would you like chicken or chicken?" one asked.[1]

The big question for all on board was the ship's top speed. Company officials knew they had a fast ship and were telling the press that the new *United States* could surpass the speed records set by the *Queen Mary*. However, the ship's top speed was unknown. On the second day, Manning and his officers completed checking mechanical systems and calibrating instruments; next on the schedule were five speed runs. Assembled one deck below, in the captain's quarters, were the men who were responsible for the ship's existence: John Franklin, President of U.S. Lines; William Francis Gibbs, her designer; Vice Admiral E.L. Cochrane, Chairman of the U.S. Maritime Commission; and William Blewett from the shipyard. The tension in the sitting room turned to elation when Cochrane called out, "Let's find out what this ship will do."[2] Manning gradually increased propeller shaft revolutions and the ship picked up speed. It was not long before bad weather set in and Bill Blewett grew increasingly concerned about the strain of gale force winds and choppy seas on the new engine room machinery. Asking Manning for advice, he received a quick reply from the captain, "You turn her up; I'll tell you when to shut her down!" Blewett ordered an increase in engine revolutions. The ship raced through the water bucking 35 mile-an-hour winds with gusts of up to 55 miles an hour.

Ten decks below in the engine room the atmosphere was hot and tense. The black gang from the shipyard was "winding her up," opening up nozzles to feed the boilers with more fuel. The super-hot steam hit the four giant turbines and they responded with a high-pitched hum. Fifteen minutes into the third speed run, alarms connected to high- speed bearings went off; they were overheating. The word to shut her down came from an engineer in overalls. Rushing into the cabin he told Bill Blewett, "The lights for the reduction gears in the after engine room are flashing. We need more oil on the shafts. You'll have to shut her down". Despite this setback, the ship had reached a record 34.13 knots. The *Queen Mary* averaged 31.69 knots on her record transatlantic run. Vice Admiral Cochrane was happy, telling reporters, "We are surer than ever now that America's new sea queen will prove herself the fastest passenger ship afloat."[3] The remaining speed trials were rescheduled for the official trials.

On June 9 and 10, 1952, the ship set out for the official trials. With the gear bearings adjusted, she hit a top speed of 38.32 knots, the equivalent of 42 miles an hour, but her actual top speed would remain a classified secret for many years. John Tucker described how the ship's naval architect kept the speed under wraps. "Mr. Gibbs had it (the instrument used to calculate speed in the chart room) covered with masking tape and a Gibbs & Cox employee watching over it to make sure no one removed the tape," he explained. With the successful test completed, the *United States* was ready to challenge Britain's fast moving Queens, the *Mary* and the *Elizabeth*.

On June 23, 1952, New Yorkers welcomed the new *United States* to her home port. Thousands lined the shores and many more gave a vocal and ticker tape salute from skyscrapers and lofty apartment houses. The ship replied with a distinct bellowing baritone roar that at sea could be heard miles away. In the confines of New York harbor, it scared pets and small children and shook windows as it echoed off the high waterfront buildings. A *New York Times* reporter on the bridge noted, "John S. Tucker, the lean third officer on the *United States,* found no time to take his hand from the whistle control. Salutes piled in too fast, from ships, shore installations, and small craft that came to the party." [4] John Tucker remembered that day, "I was blowing enough so I had to listen to what was being said on the bridge so as not to interrupt an order."

The docking that morning was under the direction of Commodore Manning. Tucker retrieves a book entitled *By Their Works Shall Ye Know Them* by Frank O. Braynard, and flips it open to a picture taken that morning. Using his index finger, he showed how Harry Manning docked the 990-foot, 53,000-ton liner with a flip of the finger. "There's Harry Manning with his famous finger. What he was doing was looking at the marker on the pier and she might want to go a foot ahead. Using his index finger he would signal to the man on the engine room telegraph the commands 'dead slow ahead,' or stop'." I asked him to describe the Commodore.

"Harry Manning was a great ship handler with a nasty personality. He ate third mates like me for breakfast." On the bridge, Manning was all business; his officers never experienced the charm and thoughtfulness he reserved for important passengers. Tucker remembers Manning coming to the bridge on cold foggy nights, taking one of the deck officer's winter coats and opening the center window. He stared into the night protected against the winter cold while the rest of the wheelhouse crew chilled out.

Tucker admired and respected William Francis Gibbs, the ship's creator. Both men developed a good rapport early on with Gibbs selecting Tucker to give VIP tours. "He was a very bright man who could be very frosty when certain subjects came up," Tucker said. One such example is the time U.S. Lines hired one of Gibbs' competitors to design a new line of freighters; they developed several vibration problems. Gibbs had no sympathy, "That's what you get for hiring a boy to do a man's job," he was reported as saying. Tucker also recalled an incident that showed Gibbs could be very thoughtful. When Penny Tucker was in the hospital recovering from surgery, Gibbs sent over a large bouquet of red roses. "He was quite a guy who could also be very salty." Back in the days when mobile phones required a broadcasting license, Gibbs came close to having his revoked. "The FCC told him to clean up his language or lose the phone," Tucker said. Some of those calls were to Chief Engineer William Kaiser. Both men were particularly adept at the seamen's language. Each day