

THE GHOST SHIP THAT WOULDN'T SINK

FROM A MYSTERIOUS MURDER DURING HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER CREW AND PASSENGERS IN 1955 — WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE YACHT JOYITA?

BY MARSHALL WAINWRIGHT



Color view of *Joyita* when it was being operated by Capt. Miller.

During the 1920s and 1930s, many Hollywood personalities involved in the film industry were becoming rich — very rich — as Americans filled theaters to watch a steady release of movies that would sweep them away from the drudgery of everyday life. The newly rich began building fabulous southern California homes in the form of castles or Tuscan estates, purchase the most exotic of cars, and as sort of the ultimate pinnacle — build their own yachts. Such was the case of movie director Roland West.

Contracting with the Wilmington Boat Works, West had a 60-foot wooden yacht designed and built. This company opened in 1920 and undertaken the creation of a variety of vessels. Her hull was constructed of two-inch cedar attached to oak frames. She had a beam of 17-ft, a draft of 7-ft 6-in, and a

gross tonnage of approximately 70-tons. She could carry 3000-gallons of diesel fuel and 2500-gallons of water. The vessel was complete in 1931 and he gave it the name *Joyita*. At the time, he was married to actress Jewel Carmen (born Florence Lavina Quick in Oregon) and *joyita* meant “little jewel” in Spanish.

However, it was not all smooth sailing. West (born Roland Van Zimmer in Ohio) had become a director of a number of popular movies that were money makers but his career would come to a sudden halt with a mystery that partially involved the *Joyita*. West had begun a long-time affair with very popular actress Thelma Todd, without Jewel Carmen's knowledge. Nicknamed “The Ice Cream Blonde” and “Hot Toddy,” Todd was big box office but she and West became entangled not only romantically but also in business ventures (that included Jewel Carmen!). In 1934, Todd opened Thelma Todd's Sidewalk Café on Pacific Coast Highway (apparently, this



As a Hollywood director on the rise, Roland West ordered the construction of the *Joyita*.



West would name the ship for his then-wife, actress Carmen Jewel. After Thelma Todd's death, she and West divorced. She would have a relatively short career and died in obscurity in an El Cajon, California, nursing home in 1984.



The *Joyita* after being towed in following the discovery of the ship minus passengers and crew.