

VERSATILE BUT UNAPPRECIATED

VICTORY SHIPS WERE A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO AMERICA WINNING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND AFTER THAT CONFLICT MANY TURNED TO NEW AND UNUSUAL ROLES

BY MICHAEL J. MARTIN

Though Victory Ships entered the Second World War later than their Liberty Ship counterparts, their contribution to the Allies' triumph was no less significant. From 1944 to 1946, Victory Ships logged tens of thousands of miles shuttling cargo across the Atlantic, transporting troops and supplies to islands in the Pacific and, as part of *Magic Carpet*, returning those same troops to their homes

when the war ended.

Many US Navy AP5 Victory attack transports continued to operate as warships following WWII. USS *Bexar* (APA-237) landed troops and supplies at Inchon and Wonsan in Korea during 1950 then at Da Nang during the Vietnam War. USS *Rockbridge* (APA-228) transported troops to Guantanamo Bay during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and USS *Renville* (APA-227) conveyed soldiers to the coast of Vietnam following the



1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident.

In peacetime, Victory Ships proved to be every bit as dependable, sturdy, and versatile as their C2 and C3 standard cargo and Liberty Ship predecessors. Commercial AP2 and AP3 Victory freighters loaded with stores that ranged from rubber, fish meal and grain, to bauxite, cement and iron ore while modified Victory combination passenger liners traversed the waters off the Atlantic, Pacific, and Caribbean well into the 1970s.

At least three modified Victory ships — *Alcoa Cavalier*, *Alcoa Clipper*, *Alcoa Corsair* — operated during the 1950s/1960s as combination cargo/passenger liners. All three vessels' keels were laid within a week of each other in August 1945 at Oregon



USS *Bexar* sailed out of WWII and into Korean War and Vietnam War.

Shipbuilding in Portland. When the Maritime Commission cancelled its existing orders for three hulls and six other unfinished Oregon Victory Ships later in the month, the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) stepped in and purchased the former at a cost of 30% less

per ship than a comparably-sized C-2 freighter. Alcoa had wanted to enter the commercial passenger business in 1939, but WWII



had put that plan on hold. Now that the war's end was in sight, the company decided to create a small fleet of combination passenger liners. Those dual-purpose ships would carry travelers to the West Indies and aluminum-laden bauxite back to Alcoa's smelting facilities.

Design of the combination liners was assigned to renowned naval architect George Sharp. The first of the three combination liners was *Alcoa*

Fitted out in a striking WWII dazzle camouflage scheme, *American Victory* leaves Tampa, Florida, for a voyage.