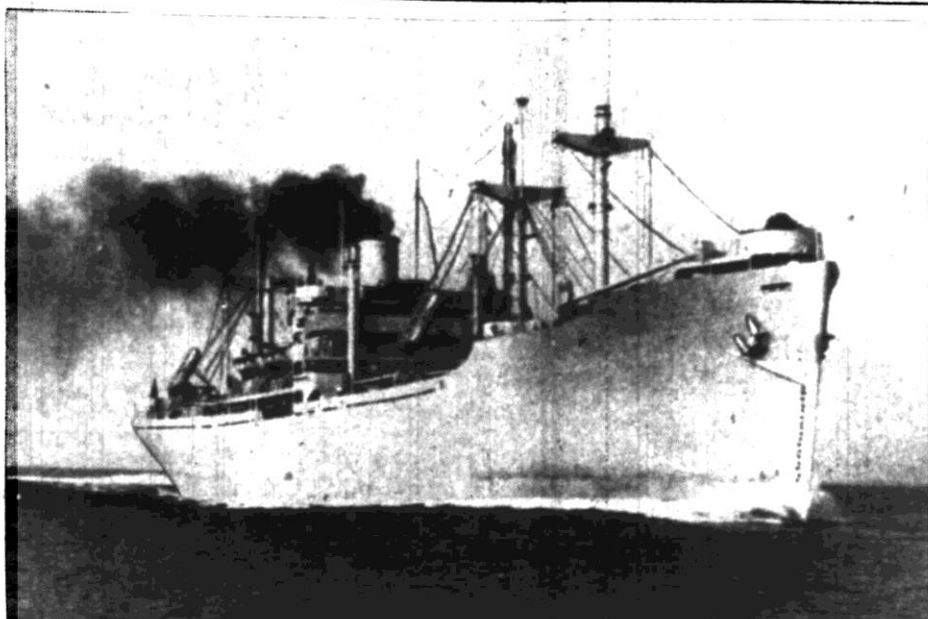


# 1945 February 19-25

## Liberty & Victory in Ships



Shown On Her Trial Run Before Acceptance by the U. S. maritime commission is the SS "La Crosse Victory," which was launched Dec. 22 by Mrs. L. C. Cilley, 229 North 20th. The ship has been turned over to the American Export Lines, which will be the operators for the maritime commission.

### Maritime Commission Accepts La Crosse Victory After Trial

BALTIMORE, Md.—(Special)—La Crosse, Wisconsin's namesake, on the high seas, the S.S. "La Crosse Victory," 455-foot sleek and speedy cargo carrier for war and peace, is ready to take her place on sea lanes to our fighting forces overseas. She successfully passed a series of rigid tests in a trial run in Chesapeake bay.

For 11 hours the "La Crosse Victory" was put through her paces by a trial crew from the Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyard, builder of the ship. A painstaking staff of technical experts was continuously busy recording data taken from various measuring devices aboard the ship while a "show me" group of maritime commission inspectors passed on the performances indicated. When the vessel finally rode into the shipyard dock about 6 p. m., she bore the stamp of approval of the maritime commission's trial board.

Included among a multitude of tests the "La Crosse Victory" was called upon to execute were: A six-hour endurance run, a "crash" stop which puts the ship's turbine engines in reverse immediately following a full speed ahead, anchor test, rudder steering tests and a full speed astern performance.

The "La Crosse Victory" has been delivered to the United States maritime commission and it will be boarded and operated by American Export Lines. The master of the "La Crosse Victory" is Capt. H. B. Wilder and the chief engineer is F. J. Mills, both having had long and commendable records at sea.

The keel for the "La Crosse Victory" was laid Nov. 4, 1944, and she was launched Dec. 22, 1944, and turned over to the maritime commission Jan. 29 with a total time of 86 days from keel-laying to loading.

*La Crosse Tribune, 1945 February 2, page 2*

The S.S. *La Crosse Victory* was just one specimen representing a remarkable manufacturing achievement by the home front during World War II.

The far-flung battlefields of World War II, separated from the United States by two vast oceans, required enormous quantities of men and supplies to travel by ship. For example, it took 15 cargo ships just to transport the vehicles, equipment, and supplies for one armored division to Europe. Additional ships were required for the men. Convoy routes spanned 2,000 to 8,000 miles across the Atlantic and Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

Both sides expended great effort towards disrupting supply lines, and this meant ships were being attacked by aircraft and submarines. The United States lost 538 cargo ships during the war; Great Britain 2,570; other Allies 1,172. Shipbuilders had to make up for these losses, and more, to keep supplies flowing to the front lines.<sup>2</sup>

Liberty ships were prefabricated cargo ships that could be constructed quickly. American shipbuilders churned out 2,700 Liberty ships alone during the war.<sup>3</sup> Without adequate shipping, the island nation of Great Britain would be starved of sustenance. British shipyards could not keep up with their losses during the war, so Liberty ships filled a critical gap for them.<sup>4</sup> The Liberty ships were mass-produced in the United States and provided to Great Britain through Lend-Lease. By 1944, Liberty ships had resolved the British shortage of shipping.<sup>5</sup>



Model of a Liberty ship  
(ww2-weapons.com)

Liberty ships were originally a British design. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dubbed them “Liberty” ships that would help restore liberty to Europe.<sup>6</sup>

The first Liberty ship was launched on September 27, 1941, a couple of months before the United States entered World War II. One year later, there were more than 60 shipyards in the United States, using materials from more than 700 industrial plants, creating an ocean-worthy cargo ship in 70 days from start to finish. Three new Liberty ships were being launched every day.<sup>7</sup>

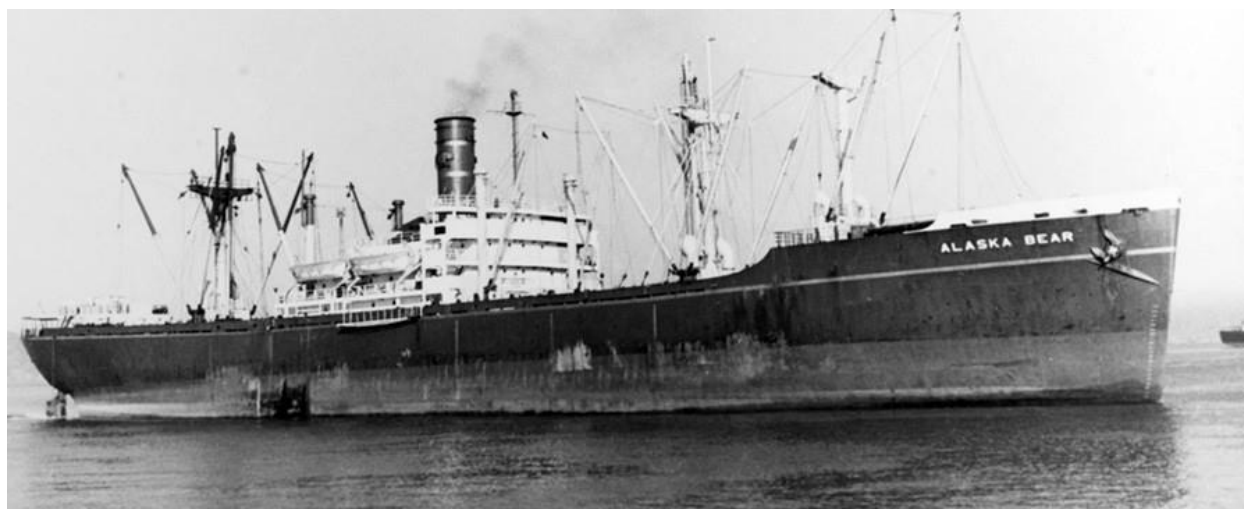
Depending on the shipbuilder, each Liberty ship cost \$1,508,000 to \$7,161,000 to build.<sup>8</sup>

The genius behind mass production of cargo ships during World War II was Henry Kaiser. Born the son of German immigrants in upstate New York, Kaiser dropped out of school after the eighth grade and got a job as a store clerk. He created a succession of careers for himself in photography supplies and studios, wholesale hardware, road construction, dam construction, and cement manufacturing. In 1940, he constructed a shipyard in Richmond, California to build cargo ships for the British. Four years later, the Richmond shipyard employed almost 100,000 workers fulfilling government contracts for cargo ships. Kaiser built another shipyard in the Portland area. His shipyards constructed 1,490 ships, among them fifty small aircraft carriers and one-third of all the cargo ships built in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

The traditional way of building a ship was to lay the keel and then rivet steel plates up and around it. Henry Kaiser, who had been in a shipyard only once before he started building ships, had the innovative idea to prefabricate pieces of a ship and weld them together. This greatly speeded up the construction process. One of his shipyards built and launched a Liberty ship in just 80 hours and 30 minutes. When his seven shipyards ran short of steel, Kaiser borrowed millions of dollars from the government to build his own steel mill in California.<sup>10</sup>

Called “Ugly Ducklings”<sup>11</sup> by some, the Liberty ships proved their worth by conveying over 5,000,000 tons of cargo from the United States to all parts of the world by June 1943.<sup>12</sup>

Liberty ships were small and slow, so a new line of “Victory” ships replaced them.<sup>13</sup> Victory ships were built to higher specifications with an eye toward post-war commerce.<sup>14</sup> The first Victory ship was launched on January 12, 1944. Because the new ships were capable of traveling at a higher speed, convoys could move faster and were more difficult targets for enemy submarines. After the war, Victory ships carried many soldiers back home to the United States.<sup>15</sup>



Victory ship  
(National Museum of the U.S. Navy)

The *S. S. La Crosse Victory* was one of the new Victory ship class. Haley Gagliano of the La Crosse County Historical Society thoroughly documented the lifespan of the *La Crosse Victory* just two months ago. See her article here: [https://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/things-that-matter-s-s-la-crosse-victory-christening-bottle/article\\_0f428829-559e-5b95-b058-4d8f8805c653.html](https://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/things-that-matter-s-s-la-crosse-victory-christening-bottle/article_0f428829-559e-5b95-b058-4d8f8805c653.html).

The February 25, 1945 edition of the *La Crosse Tribune* includes a letter from a sailor on the *S. S. La Crosse Victory* thanking the citizens of La Crosse for funding the purchase of books for the ship's library.

LIBRARY PRESENTED BY  
THE CITIZENS OF LA CROSSE, WIS.  
COMMEMORATING  
THE LAUNCHING OF THE  
**S.S. LA CROSSE VICTORY**  
DECEMBER 1944

SELECTED BY THE  
AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE LIBRARY ASS'N

This is a Photostatic Copy of the plaque which hangs in the SS La Crosse Victory, which was launched in Baltimore, Md., last December. The city council appropriated \$300 for the gift, which was purchased from the American Merchant Marine Library association, which also furnished the plaque. The copy of the plaque was sent to the city by the association.

## Seaman Aboard SS La Crosse Thanks Residents For Library

Merchant seamen aboard the SS La Crosse Victory won't have to worry about slack moments at sea from now on—providing they like to settle down in their bunks with a good book.

Citizens of La Crosse contributed substantially to a fund to purchase books for the sailors serving aboard the ship named after this city. Hugh G. Corbett of the Chamber of Commerce received the following letter of appreciation from Chief Radio Officer Thomas Yohovic of the SS La Crosse:

### Expresses Appreciation

"Dear Citizens of La Crosse:

"It gives me great pleasure to thank you for the wonderful library that your city contributed to the SS La Crosse Victory ship. Your choice of books are of the highest quality. We here know that our monotonous hours throughout the day and night both at sea and in restricted ports, will pass more rapidly due to the excellent reading material. Just to mention a few: 'The Sun Is My Undoing,' 'The Keys of the Kingdom,' 'Gone With the Wind,' and many others, not to forget the complete works of Shakespeare.

"Perhaps you often wondered what a real merchant ship looks like. What it does and who are the people who man her. Merchant ships vary in sizes anywhere from 200 feet to 600 feet. However, I can't tell you the exact length of the La Crosse Victory, but I can tell you that she is in the neighborhood of 500 feet. Some merchant ships are very ugly and others are as streamlined as all things are becoming in this century. So our girl friend La Crosse is one of the pin-up girls of the merchant fleet.

"She is very trim and gentle, although at times, when Father Neptune proves that all seas are under his jurisdiction, I suppose that our girl friend La Crosse may act up. But regardless of her actions, we shall try and please her during her moments of distress. After all, she is a lady.

"The men who man her are from all over these United States. Most of us are from the eastern seaboard. I am sure that the men on this vessel will uphold the name of La Crosse Victory and also do their utmost to see that she gets her campaign bars from all of the fighting fronts. Too, we believe, that she will play her part in this, our fight for freedom and peace.

### Would Enjoy Exploring

"We here wish that we could take each and every one of you through the different departments of this vessel. I am sure that you would enjoy exploring the depths of the La Crosse. But due to wartime re-

strictions, I can't even give you any details on paper. Perhaps in the very near future when such information will not grace the restricted list, I will be able to give you some details about the La Crosse Victory.

"In closing I wish to extend my kindest thanks for the wonderful books. One of these days a native son of your city may have the good fortune to become a member of this ship and I'm sure he will be proud of your contribution. I checked the crew list and found that none of the members hail from your state."

American shipbuilding prowess did more than help win World War II. Because of its massive shipbuilding program undertaken during the war, including ships like the *S. S. La Crosse Victory*, the United States supplanted Great Britain as the world's leading maritime power after World War II.<sup>16</sup>

Jeff Rand  
Adult Services Librarian  
La Crosse Public Library

### Sources & Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences: An Alphabetical Reference Book* (Chicago: F.E. Compton & Company, 1946), 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences*, 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences*, 106.

<sup>4</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, 281.

<sup>6</sup> "Liberty Ships," *National Museum of the U.S. Navy*, accessed 2020 February 22, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-atlantic/battle-of-the-atlantic/merchant-ships/liberty.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Associated Press, "Text of Roosevelt's Letter on Shipbuilding," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 1942 September 26, page 14.

<sup>8</sup> "Inquiry Reveals Liberty Ship Cost Showed Huge Variance," *Valley Morning Star*, Harlingen, Texas, 1946 September 27, page 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mark S. Foster, "Kaiser, Henry John," *American National Biography*, 2000 February, <https://0-www-anb-org.sierra-app.wrlsweb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1000898?rskey=lpME5l&result=1>.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front: USA* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1977), 82.

<sup>11</sup> President Franklin Roosevelt was the source of this nickname. "Liberty Ships and Victory Ships, America's Lifeline in War," National Park Service, accessed 2020 February 22, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/116liberty\\_victory\\_ships/116liberty\\_victory\\_ships.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/116liberty_victory_ships/116liberty_victory_ships.htm).

<sup>12</sup> "Bland Praises Liberty Ship Performance," *The Times Dispatch*, Richmond, Virginia, 1943 June 13, page 17.

<sup>13</sup> "Liberty Ships," *National Museum of the U.S. Navy*.

<sup>14</sup> *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences*, 106.

<sup>15</sup> "Victory Ships," *National Museum of the U.S. Navy*, accessed 2020 February 22, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-atlantic/battle-of-the-atlantic/merchant-ships/victory.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences*, 106.