

SS LINDENWOOD

# 'Victory' Ships Heading for the Scrap Yard

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Technology overtakes vessels built to carry soldiers and cargo

By Carl Nolte  
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Two old ships are tied up temporarily at a rundown pier on San Francisco's waterfront like two gray ghosts from America's wars.

The ships are the Lindenwood Victory and the Council Bluffs Victory, both built 49 years ago as part of a class of 560 identical "Victory" ships constructed to carry soldiers and cargo during World War II. The two ships — one a veteran of three wars, the other a veteran of two — are being prepared for one final voyage to a scrap yard in Asia sometime next month.

It has been almost 25 years since these two ships last went to sea; they have been laid up at the Reserve Fleet in Suisun Bay off and on for most of their lives. Now their useful lives are long past.

Once there were hundreds of Victory ships in the mothballed fleet. Now there are 10 left, all to be sold for scrap.

"Technology has passed them up," said Joe Pecoraro, superintendent of the Reserve Fleet. The ships had been preserved like insects in amber in a state of suspended animation, and they could still steam if anyone wanted them. But nobody does.

The engines are "antiquated," said Pecoraro, and so is the design of the vessels. The ships are very slow and inefficient by today's standards.

"They are like dinosaur bones," said Captain Steve Robinson, a ship's master who is a maritime consultant and rode the Council Bluffs Victory down from the Re-

serve Fleet to San Francisco last week.

The two ships were lashed together and hauled — slowly and carefully — by four tugs. Robinson roamed through the dead ship on the trip down the bay, a voyage he described as "really eerie."

"I kept thinking of what this ship had done and where the crews were. The chart room had charts from every ocean in the

world and on an engine room bulkhead was a 1969 calendar from "Old Joe's Place, Where All Seamen Meet, 220 Turk Street, San Francisco."

It was as if the ship were haunted, he thought. Everything was in place except the people. "I could almost hear voices," he said.

He found some papers. The ship's last trip was in July, 1969, from Port Chicago to Thailand. A

typical cargo for that era: bombs that B-52 planes dropped on Vietnam. The Council Bluffs Victory stopped in Manila on the way back, crossed the international date line on September 15 and arrived in Oakland for the last time at 2:38 a.m. on September 21.

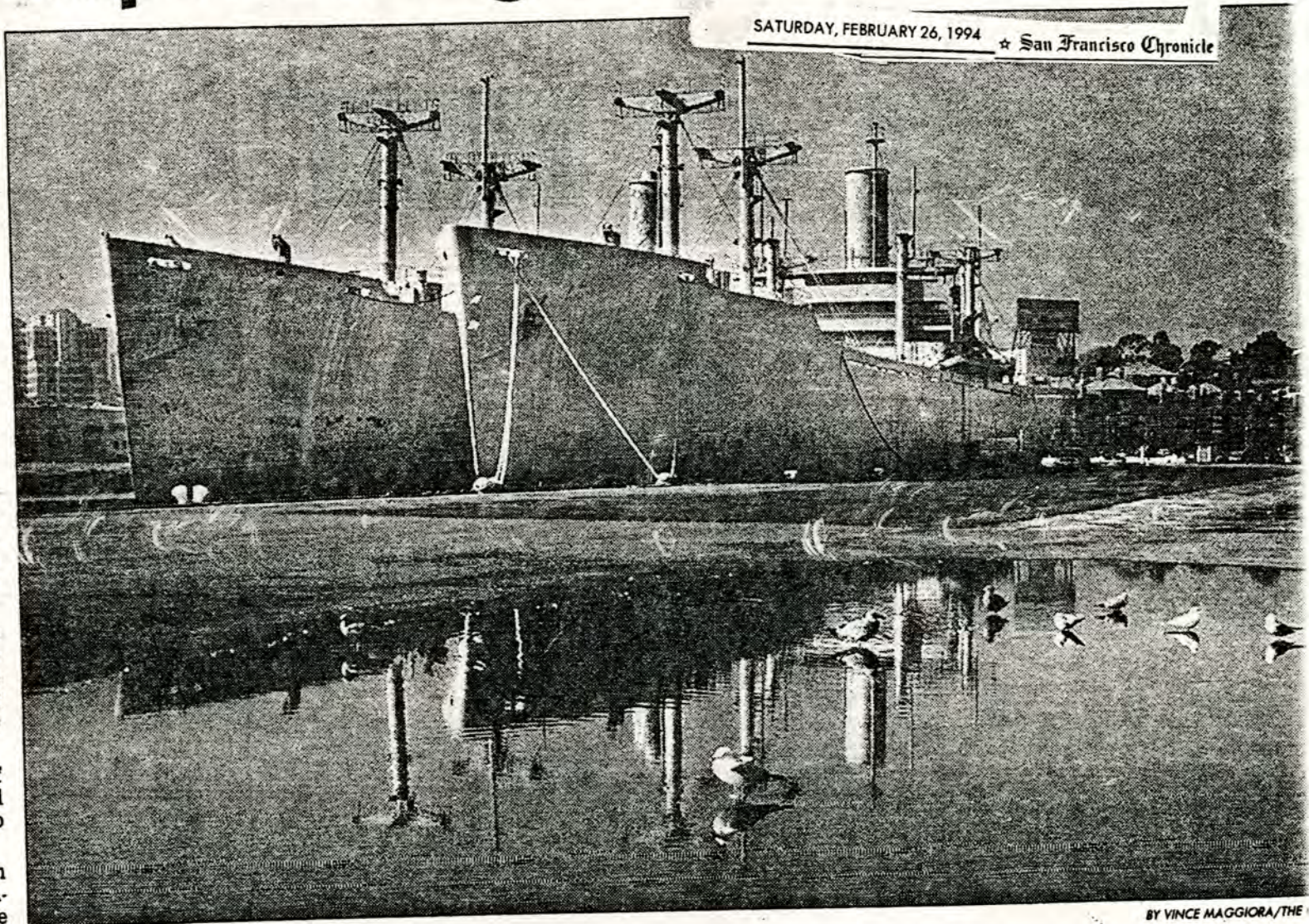
The ship was laid up in Suisun Bay just as she was, waiting for a call that never came.

Ships on their way to the bone-

yard do not normally stop in San Francisco to get ready for tow, but Chenco International company that bought the scrap, could not find a berth at other bay ports, and San Francisco's piers are not busy these days.

So they will be at Pier 84 at the Bay Bridge, for some

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BY VINCE MAGGIORA/THE

Two World War II ships, the Lindenwood Victory and the Council Bluffs Victory, are docked in San Francisco en route to Asia



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until a seagoing Russian tug arrives to take them to ship breakers in Thailand or Taiwan.

The Lindenwood Victory is the older of the two ships. Built by Kaiser at the Permanente Metals Corp., Yard Number 2, just across the bay in Richmond, in July of 1945, it served in the last month of World War II, in the Korean War and in Vietnam. The Council Bluffs Victory was built in Los Angeles, two months after the end of World War II, but served in Korea and Vietnam.

The Richmond shipyard is long gone, but Pecoraro notes that it left a legacy: the shipyard hospital grew into the Kaiser Permanente health maintenance organization. The Victory ships — each 408 feet long, 56 feet in the beam — were designed to replace the better-known Liberty ships in World War II. There were 2,751 Liberties built, and the last unaltered Liberty ship is the San Francisco-based Jeremiah O'Brien, the last survivor of the D-Day invasion fleet.

The O'Brien will sail to England and France this summer to participate in the 50th anniversary of the invasion. The Lane Victory, the last operating Victory ship, will also make the trip from its home port in Los Angeles.

The ghostly ships on the Em-

barcadero will one day return, Robinson predicted. "They'll come back as Hyundais," he said.