

Liberty Ships vs. Victory Ships

A Liberty ship's maximum speed was 11 knots, making her easy prey for submarines, so early in 1942, the U.S War Shipping Administration commissioned a design for a faster, 15-knot ship. Vessels in this new class were to be known as "Victory" ships (officially a VC-2) and were 455 feet in length, slightly longer than Liberty ships, and 62 feet wide. Cross-compound steam turbine engines with double reduction gears were designed to deliver 6,000 or 8,500 horsepower, and could make up to 17 knots, significantly faster than a Liberty.

Victory ship profiles would feature a sleek, "raked" bow, a raised forecastle, and a "cruiser" stern, markedly different from a Liberty ship profile.

Victory ships were strengthened to avoid fractures in hull plates and ship sides, a problem which often plagued Liberty ships. Armament for the new ship class was similar to that on Liberty ships, and included one 5-inch stern gun, one 3-inch bow antiaircraft gun and eight 20-mm machine guns at various locations on main, boat and bridge decks for protection from enemy attacks. Victory ships were designed specifically to allow for easy modification after World War II into other types of cargo carriers, special uses and even passenger ships.

The first Victory ship, the *SS United Victory*, was launched on February 28, 1944, and like Liberty ships, production line techniques were used to build the vessels. The next 34 Victory ships were named for each of the member Allied nations participating in World War II. The subsequent 218 were named after American cities, the next 150 after educational institutions; the balance received miscellaneous names.

Regardless of their differences, both Liberty and Victory class ships and tankers were vitally important to America's war

efforts on both fronts during World War II and decisively contributed to the ultimate Allied victory. The U.S. merchant fleet played a major role in winning the war, transporting an estimated 85% of the troops, ammunition and supplies used to support Allied war effort in both the European and Pacific theaters.

Victory ships also played a significant role during the Korean War and the Vietnam War, transporting thousands of refugees to freedom and carrying material, equipment and ammunition to these areas.

Victory ships were at the forefront of the resurgence of the United States as a world economic power and became the "workhorses" of American waterborne commerce after the war. To carry American goods around the world in support of the Marshall Plan, private firms chartered hundreds of Victory ships. Hundreds were sold or leased to foreign countries for use as freighters and some were converted for passenger service.

Others were converted for use as satellite and radar tracking ships for the U.S. Navy; the U.S. Army converted several Victory ships into troop transports. Some may still remain in commercial service today, more than 50 years after the first Victory ship slid down the slipway.

Victory and Liberty ships were crewed by members of the U.S. Merchant Marine and defended by an all-volunteer group of U.S. Navy sailors called the Navy Armed Guard. The operation of these ships during World War II came at great human cost: The Merchant Marine suffered more loss of life, by percentage of their ranks, than any other branch of service; the Armed Guard lost thousands. US Merchant Mariners and the Navy Armed Guard are truly the forgotten heroes of WW II.

Source: www.liberty-ship.com