

VICTORY AT



SEA

The story of the large World War II troop ship that was named for little Williams College.

by Ernest F. Imhoff '59



On March 16, 1945, workers at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard Inc. of Baltimore, Md., laid the keel of the *SS Williams Victory*. A prefabricated emergency cargo/troop ship, she was faster and bigger than her more famous cousin, the Liberty cargo ship. As one 85-year-old seaman I know in Baltimore puts it, the *Victory* was like a Chevy Suburban compared to the Liberty's Model T Ford.

So why would a 455-foot government vessel that could haul 11,000 tons of cargo be named for a small New England college whose water frontage and maritime heritage consisted of the Green and Hoosic rivers and the Hemlock and Broad brooks? It turns out Williams, and the 38 other colleges and universities for which *Victory* ships were named, just happened to be born at the right time—early. And that happenstance was enough to go to sea, in the eyes of the War Shipping Administration.

The *Williams Victory* was launched on May 7, 1945, and outfitted and ready for sea later that month, just a few weeks after the Nazis surrendered and before Japan gave up. She probably helped in the mop-up before becoming a commercial freighter with Smith & Johnson steamship company. The U.S. government sold her in 1947 to Rotterdam Lloyd, for whom she sailed as a freighter named *Salatiga* under the flag of the Netherlands. She later carried goods under the Liberian flag for the Magellan Strait Development Co., which called her *Salamat*.

The story of the *Williams Victory* ended on land in June 1969, when shipbreakers in La Spezia, Italy, took her apart for scrap metal. (The *Amberst Victory*, by the way, was scrapped in 1977.) As of last June, only two *Victory* ships were still sailing, as historic museum vessels. ■

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