

One of last Liberty ships to leave Va. after repairs

The vintage vessel is scheduled to steam up the Elizabeth River on its way back home to Baltimore on Saturday.

It has been undergoing repairs at Colonna's Shipyard in Norfolk for the past month, which involved replacing riveted shell-plating on the bottom of the ship.

The ship named for labor leader **JOHN W. BROWN** is operated as a museum and memorial to shipyard workers, merchant mariners and Navy Armed Guard members who built, crewed and manned the guns on the ships.

"We think that those groups made an incredible contribution to the Allied victory because of the logistics involved in fighting a world war," said Mike Schneider, 75, a retired Navy captain and former chairman of the Baltimore-based nonprofit Project Liberty Ship, which acquired the ship in 1988.



The Virginian-Pilot reports (<http://bit.ly/1ymMsSn>) that during the war, the ship sailed from Hampton Roads to the Mediterranean five times as part of convoys bearing thousands of troops, equipment such as tanks and Jeeps and supplies like food, gas and ammo.

It since has returned several more times for port calls or repair work. The **JOHN W. BROWN** was built in Baltimore in just 54 days in the summer of 1942.

It was part of a national emergency shipbuilding program ordered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt after the loss of hundreds of merchant vessels to German U-boats in the early years of the war, Schneider said.

The ships carried 75 percent of wartime cargo overseas — able to carry about 10,000 tons of cargo, enough to fill about 300 railroad cars.

In addition to its wartime service, the ship was loaned to New York City in 1946, where it functioned as a maritime high school for 36 years. In 1983,

the **JOHN W.BROWN** was towed to join the James River "Ghost Fleet" for five years before its move to Baltimore.

The nonprofit said after being restored 23 years ago, the ship has visited roughly 30 ports on the East Coast, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Jacksonville, Florida.

You can hardly put your finger on a port anywhere on the globe that these ships didn't call on," said 71-year-old Duff Porter III, a retired shipyard worker and Portsmouth resident who is part of the John W. Brown's operating crew.

Source : timesdispatch