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# S.S. JOHN W. BROWN



*Baltimore's Living  
Liberty*

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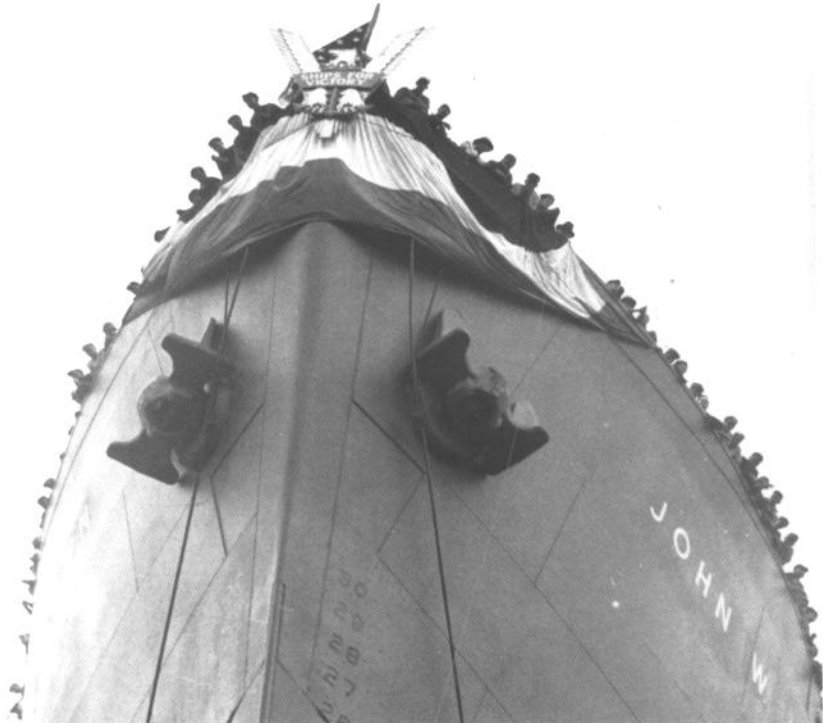
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Cover photo: Reproduced from  
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**S.S. JOHN W. BROWN**

*Baltimore's Living Liberty*

by  
Sherod Cooper



*The JOHN W. BROWN in Way 12 just before launching at the Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore. (Project Liberty Ship Collection)*

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Great Britain had been fighting Germany for over two years when Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and Germany's declaration of war on the United States four days later finally forced the United States into World War II. Up to then a powerful isolationist sentiment had restrained the United States' involvement. Thirteen months before Pearl Harbor, in November 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to a third term as president. The war in Europe had been going on for more than a year, and Hitler had overrun Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, and was subjecting Britain to merciless bombing raids. United States neutrality laws in force until November 1940 stipulated that United States merchant ships could not carry arms to the belligerents nor could investors and private firms lend them money or give them credit. Shortly after the election Roosevelt proposed the Lend-Lease Act, which after much debate Congress passed by a vote of 260 to 165 in the House of Representatives and sixty to thirty-one in the Senate. This vital legislation in effect reversed the old neutrality laws by allowing the government and private firms to lend or lease military equipment, supplies, and other goods to Britain and the other Allies. But among the many problems in implementing the Lend-Lease Act, getting the arms and supplies across the Atlantic was the most crucial. There were

far too few merchant ships to begin with, and the number was constantly being reduced by German U-boats. The statistics tell the story: between the beginning of the war in September 1939 and the entry of the United States in December 1941, German U-boats sank 882 ships in the North Atlantic, and in 1942, the United States' first full year at war, they sank 1006.

At about the same time that he proposed Lend-Lease, President Roosevelt also decided that a new program had to be developed if ships were to be built faster than German U-boats could sink them. Since nothing was more important than speed in production, the emergency shipbuilding program that evolved from the President's decision called for relatively uncomplicated ships that could be quickly mass produced. The design chosen was a modified version of the one American shipyards were using to build sixty ships for the British. Although President Roosevelt, so the story goes, called the ship an "ugly duckling" when he first saw the design, he called it a Liberty ship in his Liberty Fleet Day address on 27 September 1941 on the occasion of the launching of the first one, the S.S. PATRICK HENRY, at the Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore.

Between the launching of the PATRICK HENRY and the delivery of the last Liberty ship four years later—the ALBERT H. BOE in October 1945—over 2700 were built in shipyards from coast to

coast. Bethlehem Fairfield in Baltimore, incidentally, built the most, 384. By the end of World War II Liberty ships could be found in just about every port in the world. Over two hundred were lost during the War to torpedoes, bombs, and mines, about fifty on their maiden voyages, but 2500 survived to transport the arms, supplies, and personnel needed to fight the war. Four of the 2500 survivors still remain afloat. Of the four the JEREMIAH O'BRIEN has been fully restored and is open to the public in San Francisco. Two others currently in the Reserve Fleet in the James River in Virginia were so drastically modified that they are not suitable for restoration or for anything else and will soon be sunk for fishing reefs. The fourth,

the S.S. JOHN W. BROWN, is in Baltimore being restored by members of Project Liberty Ship.

The last of three Liberty ships launched in special Labor Day ceremonies at Bethlehem Fairfield, the S.S. JOHN W. BROWN slid down the ways into the Patapsco River at 1215 on 7 September 1942, forty-two days after her keel had been laid and seven months ahead of schedule. She was sponsored by Annie Green, wife of the president of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America, and was named for a well known figure in the labor movement in the late Nineteenth Century and the first forty years of the Twentieth. John Brown was born in Canada in 1867 and after moving to the United States worked as



*Launched at 1215 on 7 September 1942, the JOHN W. BROWN slides into the Patapsco River. (Project Liberty Ship Collection)*

a joiner at the Bath Iron Works in Maine. Convinced by his experiences at Bath that workers must band together to fight for better conditions, Brown by the end of the century had begun organizing workers for the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Early in the Twentieth Century he went over to the United Mine Workers and played a part in the violent and bloody labor conflicts in Colorado in 1913 and in West Virginia in the 1920s. In 1935 Brown retired to his farm in Maine, but in retirement he helped establish Local 4 of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America at the Bath Iron Works where he had worked as a joiner many years before. Until his death in a hunting accident on his farm in 1941, Brown continued to be active in the affairs of the Industrial Union, not only at the local level in Bath but also by serving as an advisor to the Union's officers and its General Executive Board and by writing a column for the *Shipyards Worker*, the Union's newspaper.

On 19 September 1942, the War Shipping Administration turned the JOHN W. BROWN over to States Marine Corporation for operation. After further work done while berthed at Pier 5 Pratt Street, she left Baltimore empty on 29 September for the short trip down the Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk. Her master was Matt R. Coward, and there were forty-three men in the Merchant Marine crew. Lt.(jg)



*Some of the officers on the Maiden Voyage*  
 Front row, left to right: Kenneth Nielsen, Deck Cadet; Matt R. Coward, Master; Warren Wagenseil, Deck Cadet.  
 Behind Wagenseil: Ralph Nilson, Engine Cadet. Back row: George Wickens, Radio Officer; George Whiteford, Third Assistant Engineer; Leroy Poole, Chief Engineer; Robert Bloxson, Second Mate; Raymond McMahan, First Assistant Engineer; Lt.(jg) Charles Calvert, Commander of the Armed Guard unit. (Ralph Nilson)

Charles F. Calvert was the commanding officer of the twenty man Navy Armed Guard unit responsible for the 5"51 gun mounted on the stern and for the five 20MM guns, two of which were on the bridge, two aft, and one on the bow which was replaced by a 3"50 two weeks later in New York.

At Norfolk the BROWN was de-gaussed and depermed, processes that reduced her magnetism so that she would be less likely to attract magnetic mines. She then returned up the Chesapeake and after anchoring off Annapolis overnight continued north in the Bay on 4 October and passed through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal to the Delaware River and then Delaware Bay. There she joined a convoy of four merchant



*Loading at Pier 17 Brooklyn, New York, was interrupted so that the BROWN could spend the morning of 9 October 1942 on the degaussing and compass adjusting ranges. (U.S. Coast Guard)*

ships, three escorts, and a blimp for the run up the coast of New Jersey to New York.

Loading began almost immediately upon arrival in New York on the morning of 6 October and continued without interruption except for a morning spent on the degaussing and compass adjusting ranges. At 2200 on 14 October the BROWN was completely loaded and ready for sea with a Merchant Marine crew that now numbered forty-five plus Captain Coward. Most of the varied cargo of 8380.9 long tons was for Russian Lend-Lease and included two P-40 fighter planes, two hundred motorcycles, one hundred Jeeps, over two hundred and fifty tons of canned pork lunch meat, ten Sherman tanks, and over seven hundred tons of ammunition.

On the morning of 15 October 1942 the JOHN W. BROWN departed New York in convoy on the first leg of her voyage to deliver her cargo to Russia through the Persian Gulf. Since the Axis Pow-

ers controlled the Mediterranean and German U-Boats were a constant threat in the Atlantic, the BROWN was routed down the east coast of the United States to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where she joined a convoy bound for the Panama Canal. After passing through the Canal, the BROWN steamed south down the west coast of South America. As the enemy was much less active in this part of the Pacific, ships normally sailed alone, although as a precaution they were spaced out at intervals of about two hundred and fifty miles. It took the BROWN two weeks to cover the distance from the Panama Canal to Cape Horn at the tip of South America. After rounding the Horn and plowing through the rough seas found there, the BROWN headed across the South Atlantic to Cape Town, a trip requiring seventeen days. She stopped for two days in Cape Town for fuel and provisions and then headed out into the Indian Ocean and sailed north up the east



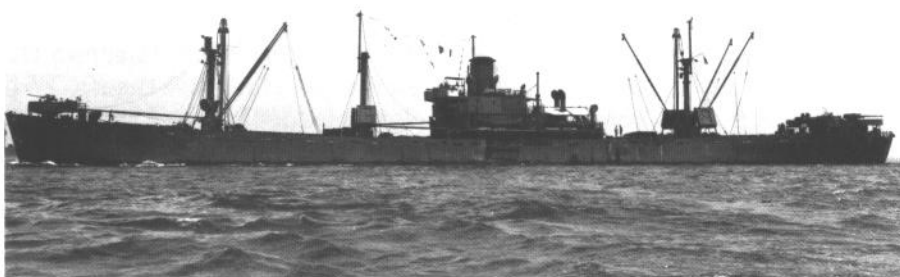
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coast of Africa towards the Persian Gulf. Finally after a two and a half months voyage of about 14,400 miles, the JOHN W. BROWN anchored in the Persian Gulf on Christmas morning 1942.

Because the Gulf ports did not have the facilities to handle the cargo pouring into the area, ships were backed up for long periods waiting to dock. Thus the BROWN lay at anchor for a month before going into Abadan to unload the two P-40s and some of the tanks. Another month and a half were to pass before unloading was completed at Khorramshahr. Finally on 16 March 1943 the BROWN left the Gulf and headed back to Cape Town. After a forty-eight hour stop at Cape Town for fuel and provisions, she sailed west across the Atlantic for Bahia, Brazil, arriving two weeks later, on 23 April 1943. There she joined a north bound convoy headed toward Paramaribo, Surinam. Upon arrival there she sailed up river a short distance to Paranam to take

on a partial load of bauxite. She next went to Port of Spain, Trinidad, for more bauxite, and when fully loaded left in convoy for Guantanamo and then on to New York. Completing a voyage which had lasted about eight months, the JOHN W. BROWN arrived back in New York in the afternoon of 27 May 1943.

After discharging the bauxite the BROWN went to the Bethlehem Shipyard in Hoboken, New Jersey, for repairs and for modifications in her forward tween decks to enable her to carry troops and prisoners of war. Her fire power was also increased by the addition of two 20MM guns amidships and two forward, so that her total armament now consisted of the 5"51 aft, the 3"50 forward, and eight 20MMs. With so much time needed in the shipyard and to load cargo, a month passed before the BROWN was able to leave New York on 24 June 1943 to begin her second voyage.



*Loaded with bauxite from Surinam and Trinidad, the BROWN arrived in New York on 27 May 1943 to end her Maiden Voyage. (U.S. Coast Guard)*

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Captain William E. Carley commanded the forty-seven men in the Merchant Marine crew and Lt.(jg) Arley T. Zinn the twenty-eight Navy Armed Guards. The BROWN's 5,023 long tons of cargo consisted mostly of food. In addition she carried as passengers seven U.S. Army officers, three Royal Navy officers, 145 U.S. Army M.P.'s, three enlisted medical assistants, and 148 Royal Navy sailors, a total of 306 men. The Royal Navy personnel were survivors of a torpedoed ship on their way home for reassignment.

The BROWN left New York in convoy for Hampton Roads to join another section of the convoy bound for Gibraltar. The convoy left Hampton Roads at about daybreak on 27 June 1943 and passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea on 18 July. Two days later the BROWN arrived at Algiers, her destination. After discharging the cargo and debarking all but thirty-eight Army personnel who stayed aboard as guards, the BROWN embarked five hundred German POWs from Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps. On 5 August she left Algiers in convoy for the trip back to the United States. Although there were many submarine alerts during the crossing, there were no attacks, and the section of the convoy that included the BROWN arrived safely at Hampton Roads on 26 August 1943. By the afternoon of the 27th the POWs had debarked to become part of the 18,310 POWs

who passed through Hampton Roads that August.

Captain Carley and Lt. Zinn remained aboard for the third voyage which officially began on 31 August 1943 and on which the BROWN carried thirty-six officers and 303 enlisted men as passengers and 7854.5 measurement tons of TNT, gasoline, and general cargo. The BROWN left Hampton Roads in convoy on 15 September 1943 and after an uneventful crossing arrived at Oran, Algeria, on 4 October. Two days later the Army personnel debarked and stevedores came aboard to discharge the cargo, finishing on 15 October. On 1 November after embarking fifteen officers and 346 enlisted men of the First Armored Division and loading 274 of their vehicles, including motorcycles, half tracks, and sixty-one tanks, the BROWN began the first of eight shuttle trips in the Mediterranean between North African ports and Naples, Italy. She left Oran in convoy and sailed to Naples via Augusta, Sicily, arriving on 7 November. Naples had fallen to the Allies five weeks earlier and was still reeling under the heavy damage inflicted by the Germans before they retreated. Despite the limited port facilities the BROWN was unloaded by the 11th, and on the 12th sailed empty from Naples, spent four days in Augusta, and arrived back in Oran on 22 November. There she embarked 241 French and American troops and a cargo consisting of 261 trucks, cars,

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and tank destroyers and a load of asphalt in lower holds 2, 4, and 5. She left Oran on 30 November and arrived in Naples on 7 December 1943, the second anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

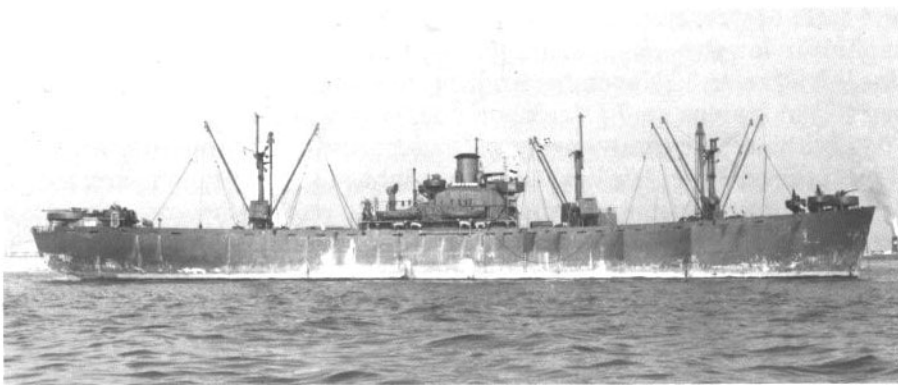
Unloading was completed in a little less than two days, and on the 10th the BROWN left Naples empty in convoy bound for Bizerte, Tunisia, where after a three day layover in Augusta she arrived on 16 December. At Bizerte she embarked six French officers and 305 French enlisted men and loaded a total of 958 tons of cargo consisting of trucks, trailers, cars, ambulances, and weapon carriers. Even though only slightly more than ten percent of her cargo capacity was being used, the BROWN left Bizerte in convoy for Naples, arriving at an anchorage in Pozzouli Bay on 26 December. The next afternoon the Liberty ship ZEBULON PIKE while shifting anchorages rode over the BROWN's anchor cable, causing a collision that heavily damaged the BROWN's starboard side although not to the extent that she was made unseaworthy. In fact she was not repaired until she returned to the United States.

After discharging cargo and debarking passengers the BROWN departed Naples empty in convoy on 4 January 1944 and arrived in Oran on 10 January. On the 13th she went to Mostaganem forty-two miles east of Oran, loaded 5000 tons of gasoline in drums and cans, and returned to Oran to discharge

the cargo. She then embarked 263 passengers and 799 tons of supplies, engineering equipment, and 186 vehicles. On 29 January she departed Oran and after an overnight stop at Augusta arrived in Naples on 5 February. Five days later she left Naples again, this time with 106 U.S. Army and thirteen U.S. Navy passengers, bound for Bizerte. After a stopover at Augusta where she embarked a Royal Navy lieutenant, the BROWN arrived in Bizerte on 14 February, debarked the passengers, and then loaded a cargo of scrap metal and the personal effects of deceased soldiers.

On 21 February the BROWN left Bizerte in convoy for the United States. The next day she experienced what was probably her closest call of the war when the Liberty ships PETER SKENE OGDEN about five hundred yards ahead and the GEORGE CLEEVE about eight hundred and fifty yards off her starboard bow were both torpedoed. Although neither sank, both vessels were total losses and had to be beached. Several other contacts were made with enemy U-Boats as the convoy continued through the Mediterranean, but no more ships were torpedoed. On the 25th the convoy passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and had a rough but otherwise uneventful trip across the Atlantic. The BROWN arrived in New York on 17 March 1944.

On the morning of 23 March the BROWN steamed for a little over



*The JOHN W. BROWN at anchor in New York on 18 March 1944 at the end of a six-month voyage to the Mediterranean Theater. (U.S. Coast Guard)*

two hours up the Hudson River to Blair Ship Yard in Yonkers for repairs and for the installation of additional quarters for Navy personnel. Two more 3"50s were also installed at this time, increasing the BROWN's firepower to a total of one 5"51, three 3"50s, and eight 20MMs. The BROWN's fourth voyage officially began at midnight on 2 April 1944, and at Pier 3 Bush Terminal in Brooklyn the next day she began loading a cargo which consisted in part of high explosives placed in specially constructed bins in #4 and #5 holds. With Captain George N. Brown as the new master of a Merchant Marine crew of forty-three and Ensign Joe B. Humphreys in command of the thirty-five Navy men, the JOHN W. BROWN on 10 April 1944 left New York in convoy for Hampton Roads to join another section of the convoy for the trip across the Atlantic. On 13 April the full convoy departed Hampton Roads. There were several alerts but no enemy attacks during the

crossing, and the convoy passed through the Strait of Gibraltar on 29 April. The BROWN's section dropped out at Augusta on 5 May and arrived in Naples on 8 May.

After discharging her cargo, the BROWN loaded 3,322 tons of high explosives and gasoline. She then embarked five U.S. Army officers and 170 enlisted men and on 18 May left Naples to go to the Anzio beachhead, arriving there the next day. The beachhead had been established four months earlier in late January, but the Allied forces had been unable to break out. Although the intensity of the fighting at Anzio had decreased since the middle of March, the Germans continued to shell the harbor area with long range guns and to attack with bombers. On 23 May while the BROWN was still at Anzio, the Allies finally broke out of the beachhead in a thrust coordinated with a massive attack from the south by the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies against German forces holding a line which bisected

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Italy roughly half way between Anzio and Naples. This attack resulted in the capture of Rome on 4 June 1944. Meanwhile on 24 May the BROWN had left Anzio and arrived back in Naples on the 25th.

Early the next morning an Army officer and thirty-two enlisted men boarded the BROWN to guard the 336 POWs who embarked a little later. She then departed Naples in convoy and after an overnight stop at Augusta went on to Bizerte, arriving on 31 May. The prisoners were debarked and the BROWN reloaded with 939 tons of cargo and 406 Army personnel as passengers. Departure was on 10 June and arrival in Naples on the 14th. Ten days later after taking on sea rations, life rafts, and life preservers, the BROWN again steamed to Anzio where on 26 June she embarked about one thousand French Colonials and took them back to Naples, arriving on the 27th. These were no doubt part of the French troops withdrawn from the Italian campaign for training for the invasion of Southern France, which was to take place in a little over six weeks.

Two days later the BROWN was again under way, this time to Cagliari, Sardinia, where she loaded explosives and embarked 1017 Italian soldiers. Because Italy had declared war against Germany the previous October, these troops were being taken to join the Allies in the fight against the Germans still raging in Italy. The BROWN arrived in Naples on 3 July and

debarked the troops the next day. On the 5th she again left Naples for Cagliari. There she loaded ammunition and embarked 144 R.A.F. and 759 Italian troops for the trip back to Naples where she arrived on 9 July.

The BROWN remained in Naples at dock or anchored in the Bay and Gulf for the next five weeks as preparations went forward for Operation Anvil, later renamed Dragoon, the invasion of Southern France scheduled for August 1944, a little over two months after the Normandy invasion. The routine of shipboard life at anchor was broken on 24 July 1944 when George VI, the King of England, toured the harbor. In recognition of the King's visit, the merchant crew dressed the ship, that is, strung a line of flags from the bow to the tops of the foremast, mainmast, and mizzenmast to the stern, and the gun crew mustered at their stations in dress whites.

By 29 July the BROWN had been loaded and had also embarked fifteen officers and 299 enlisted men, but it wasn't until two weeks later, on 13 August, that she left Naples in convoy to take part in the invasion of Southern France. The invasion was a huge undertaking ultimately involving about a quarter of a million troops, 880 Navy vessels, among them the battleships ARKANSAS, NEVADA, and TEXAS, the British battleship RAMILLES, the French battleship LORRAINE, plus almost 1400 landing craft and other vessels, 159 American merchant

ships plus merchant ships of the other Allies, and slightly more than four thousand aircraft. As the BROWN left the Bay of Naples she passed a British destroyer with Prime Minister Winston Churchill aboard waving his famous "V" sign to the men on the departing ships. The convoy proceeded westward and passed through the Strait of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia. It then turned to starboard and sailed north along the coast of Corsica and finally veered to the northwest. The BROWN arrived at the beachhead in Bognon Bay near Ste. Maxime at 1800, H-Hour plus 10, on 15 August. Although the Germans attempted to repel the landings, they simply did not have the men and resources to mount more than a token defense. Allied troops therefore moved quickly inland to secure their immediate objectives. There were, however, air attacks and alerts in the vicinity of the beachhead and the Bay, most notably the six alerts on 17 August. Unloading began on the morning of the 16th and some of the troops debarked with their equipment, but it wasn't until the morning of 21 August that the last of the troops finally debarked. Now empty, the BROWN at 1800 left the beachhead and sailed in convoy back to Naples, arriving in the evening of 23 August.

On 3 September she embarked five hundred POWs and thirty-three guards and departed Naples the next morning. After stopping in Augusta for a day, the BROWN



*Bos'n Matts Oman with an unidentified member of the Armed Guard unit on the Maiden Voyage. About 58 years old when this picture was taken, Matts Oman served longer on the BROWN than anyone else, from September 1942 to November 1945. (Ralph Nilsen)*

sailed in convoy for Hampton Roads. As U-boats were no longer a significant threat, the voyage was routine except for extremely heavy weather, especially during the five days prior to arrival in the United States. The BROWN arrived off the Pilot Station at 0330 on 28 September, and after debarking the POWs at Newport News the next day, steamed up the Chesapeake to Baltimore where she arrived at 1040 on 30 September 1944.

Captain Brown continued as master for the BROWN's fifth voyage, but Lt.(jg) James R. Argo replaced Ensign Humphreys as commander of the Armed Guard.

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The BROWN remained in Baltimore, part of the time at Pennsylvania Railroad Pier 1 on South Clinton Street, until 19 October when she went down to Hampton Roads. She departed Hampton Roads in convoy at 0815 on 22 October carrying general Army cargo and 356 passengers including about thirty fighter pilots and troops of the 758th Tank Battalion, one of the few black combat units in the European Theater. As before the enemy did not appear during the crossing, but heavy weather did, becoming so bad that for three nights the convoy commodore ordered the ships to burn their blue stern lights. At all other times the ships were completely blacked out. The BROWN arrived in Augusta on 14 November, and forty-eight hours later departed for Naples, arriving the following morning, 17 November. She debarked the fighter pilots at Naples, and on 23 November left for Leghorn where she debarked the remaining troops and discharged her cargo. After loading mail at Leghorn she departed on 4 December and arrived in Naples on 6 December where she spent a day loading cargo for Oran and then left on 7 December 1944. Because the Allies now controlled the Mediterranean, the BROWN for the first time sailed independently and burned her running lights and masthead light. She arrived in Oran on 11 December, discharged her cargo, and on 13 December departed in convoy for the United States. After a trip notable for

gales and mountainous seas, she arrived in New York in the early evening of 29 December 1944.

Captain Brown remained in command of the Merchant Marine crew and Lt. Argo of the Navy Armed Guard as the JOHN W. BROWN began her sixth voyage on leaving New York on 9 January 1945 and sailing independently for Hampton Roads with general Army cargo. She spent only six and a half hours in Hampton Roads before going on, again independently, to Charleston, South Carolina, arriving on 12 January. After taking on more cargo, the BROWN departed Charleston five days later and steamed north for Hampton Roads, arriving on the 19th. Sometime during the four days she spent in the area, the BROWN went into Newport News to embark fifty-four Army passengers. Then on 23 January she left Hampton Roads in convoy for Naples. Again the crossing was uneventful except for over a week of heavy seas at the beginning. On 7 February after passing through the Strait of Gibraltar the BROWN left the convoy and continued independently for Naples. Because problems with the port boiler on the 9th forced the engineers to shut it down, the BROWN had to steam at reduced speed for the rest of the journey, which ended at Naples on 11 February. After discharging the passengers and having the boiler repaired, the BROWN departed Naples for Leghorn and arrived on 19 February. Between 20 and 26 February she

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discharged cargo and on the 27th left Leghorn. After a stop at Piambino she arrived back in Naples on 1 March 1945. The next day she sailed for Oran with her running lights burning at full brilliancy. She arrived at Oran on 5 March and three days later departed in convoy for New York. On 14 March the BROWN again had trouble with the port boiler, causing her to drop out of the convoy and to follow the route designated for stragglers. After temporary repairs, the port boiler was fired up again on the 16th, and from then on unless slowed by bad weather the BROWN steamed at full ahead, making over 10 knots. Because of uncertainty over the port boiler, Captain Brown did not zig-zag, as prescribed under such circumstances, but instead took the most direct course for New York. Shortly before reaching New York, the BROWN overtook the convoy and arrived with it on 24 March 1945.

Almost a month passed before the BROWN put to sea once more. Between 7 and 11 April she was at the Atlantic Basin Iron Works in Brooklyn having the boiler repaired and a gyrocompass installed. By the time she was ready to sail again, Captain Andrew Lihz had replaced Captain Brown as master, but Lt. Argo continued as Armed Guard commander. Carrying trucks lashed to her deck and general Army cargo in her holds, the BROWN departed in convoy on her seventh voyage on 23 April 1945 bound for Antwerp, Belgium.

As before, the weather, not the enemy, caused the only problems. The BROWN arrived at the Downs off the southeast coast of England late in the day on 8 May 1945, V-E Day. She then went on to Antwerp, arriving on 10 May a bit too late for the crew to join the wildest victory celebrations. After discharging cargo she left on the 19th for Le Havre, arriving on the 22nd. At Le Havre the BROWN embarked thirty-one Army officers and 321 enlisted men, including some liberated prisoners. Carrying homeward bound troops for the first time, the BROWN left Le Havre on 24 May, and after a two day lay-over in The Solent, the channel between the Isle of Wight and the south coast of England, she departed on 27 May. Although still in convoy, for the first time on the open seas the ships burned their running lights at full brilliance. The convoy arrived in New York on 11 June.

When the BROWN left for Philadelphia under the command of Captain Lihz on 20 June, most of the Navy personnel had been detached and all but four of the remaining men were detached on arrival in Philadelphia. On 3 July 1945 the BROWN left Philadelphia on her eighth voyage bound for Antwerp. After discharging cargo there, she embarked 419 troops and on 28 July sailed for New York. She arrived in New York on 11 August, the same day that the QUEEN ELIZABETH arrived with fifteen thousand troops.



Between 17 August and 10 September, the BROWN was in the J. K. Welding Company shipyard in Yonkers for changes that increased her troop accommodations to 562. On 13 September the 5"51, the three 3"50s, and the eight 20MMs were removed from the BROWN and the four remaining Navy personnel detached. On the 15th with Captain Lihz still serving as master she left New York to start her ninth voyage and arrived in Baltimore on 16 September. On the 25th she sailed for Marseilles with a load of grain and arrived there on 15 October. After discharging the cargo and embarking 645 troops, eighty-three above capacity, she returned to the United States, arriving in New York on 14 November. After the troops debarked, the BROWN went into the Bethlehem 56th Street Yard in Brooklyn for inspection and to have radar installed.

Captain Alfred W. Hudnall replaced Captain Lihz as master for the tenth voyage, which began with the signing of articles on 20 November 1945. After going up the Hudson River to pick up a load of wheat in Albany, the BROWN on 1 December 1945 left New York for Naples where she arrived on 20 December. She stayed in Naples until 3 January 1946 when she went to Marseilles. After arriving on the 6th and embarking 564 men from the 100th Infantry Division, she left for New York the next day on what turned out to be her last trip as a troop carrier and arrived on 26 January 1946.



*Crew members holding a religious service during voyage 10, November 1945-January 1946. (Stanley Kestie)*

With Captain Hudnall still in command the JOHN W. BROWN started her eleventh voyage on leaving New York on 16 February 1946 bound for Baltimore via the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. She arrived on 17 February, loaded coal at the Curtis Bay Coal Pier, and departed on 20 February for Copenhagen, where she arrived on 11 March 1946. After discharging the coal, she embarked one woman and nine men passengers, civilian airplane pilots under contract to the United States government to fly planes to Denmark. The BROWN left Copenhagen on 21 March and arrived in Baltimore on 6 April 1946.

She lay idle in Baltimore for about two and a half months before departing under the command of Captain Hudnall on 18 June 1946 for Hamburg, Germany, with a general cargo. She arrived at Hamburg on 4 or 5 July and left on 9 July for the return trip to New York, arriving on 23 July.

Captain Hudnall was also the master on the BROWN's thirteenth and final voyage, which began

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when she left New York on 9 August 1946 for Galveston and then Houston where she loaded cargo. She then sailed for Hull, England. After arriving on 22 October and discharging cargo, she departed Hull for London on 29 October to pick up a small cargo and then left London on 1 November. She arrived back in New York on 15 November 1946. When the voyage officially ended on the 19th, the BROWN's seagoing career also ended.

But a new career was awaiting her. In August 1946 while the BROWN was on her final voyage, the War Shipping Administration responded to an inquiry by the City of New York about the possibility of lending the City a Liberty ship to use for educational purposes. The City agreed to the War Shipping Administration's terms, and on 27 November, less than two weeks after arriving in New York from London, the JOHN W. BROWN was selected to be turned over to the Board of Education. Accordingly on 13 December 1946 the BROWN was delivered to the City of New York to become an annex of the Maritime Department of the Metropolitan Vocational High School, later the Food and Maritime High School, and, finally, Park West High School. The BROWN was berthed at Pier 73 on the East River until 1967 when she shifted to Pier 42 on the Hudson River for the rest of her years as a schoolship. Enrolling during its best years about 450 students, the Maritime Department emphasized

studies in the deck, engine, and steward's departments but also offered courses in radio operation, the duties of the purser, and boat building. In addition, by graduation all students had received at least 120 hours of experience in swinging out and lowering lifeboats and handling them under oars and sail. The students spent half their time aboard the BROWN and the other half ashore at the high school taking the usual academic courses required for a diploma. Upon the graduation of the class of 1982, at which time the BROWN had served as a schoolship for thirty-six years, the Board of Education decided to put the entire maritime program ashore at Park West High School and to return the BROWN to the United States government.

Four years earlier in May 1978, the National Maritime Historical Society had sponsored a "Liberty Ship Seminar" which focused on preserving the JOHN W. BROWN when her service as a schoolship ended. Dedicated to maintaining her as a museum ship and as a memorial to the men and women who built and served on Libertys during World War II, the Liberty Ship Project, as it was then called, worked to stimulate interest and financial support for the BROWN and to find her a permanent berth somewhere in the New York metropolitan area. Almost immediately after the Board of Education announced the decision to give up the BROWN, representatives from government, labor, industry, and preservation groups formed a new



*The JOHN W. BROWN at Pier 73, East River, New York City, during her thirty-six years as a schoolship. (Project Liberty Ship Collection)*

organization, the John W. Brown Preservation Project, which superseded the original organization. At about the same time Congressman Mario Biaggi of New York, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Merchant Marine, introduced legislation to transfer the BROWN to the John W. Brown Preservation Project. Congress passed the bill, and President Ronald Reagan signed it on 18 October 1983. Meanwhile after remaining in New York for about a year under the care of City employees, among them some Project members, the JOHN W. BROWN in July 1983 left New York under tow bound for the National Defense Reserve Fleet in the James River off Fort Eustis, Virginia. She joined the Fleet on 31 July 1983.

Earlier that same July the John W. Brown Preservation Project merged with the National Maritime Historical Society, a move

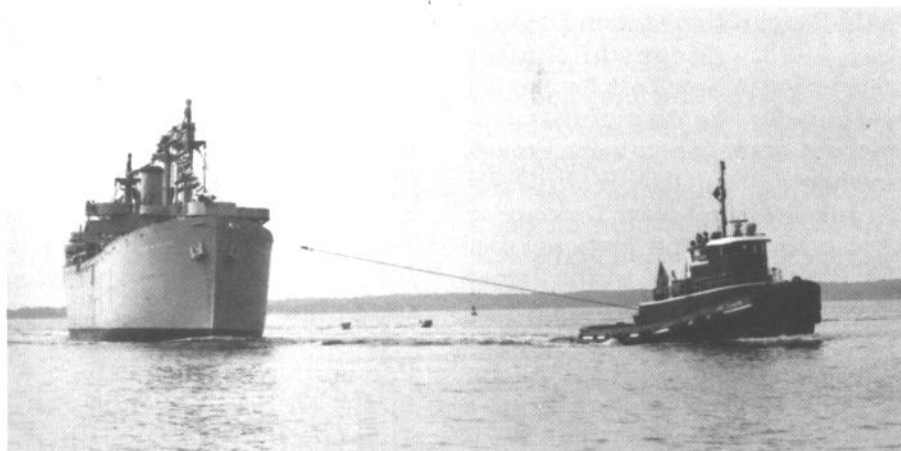
which enhanced the Project's efforts to preserve the ship. Another important initiative during 1983 was the submission of an application to have the JOHN W. BROWN placed on the National Register of Historic Places. After a long and difficult process lasting almost two years, the National Park Service finally approved the application, effective 1 March 1985. Meanwhile Project members were searching for a berth for the BROWN in New York or New Jersey, but no suitable places turned up. Finally reconciled to the futility of continuing the search in New York, the Project on 28 January 1988 met with members in the Baltimore area to discuss berthing the ship in Baltimore. The issue was settled when the Maryland Port Authority offered the use of Pier 1 on South Clinton Street. Thus on 29 July 1988 the BROWN was towed from the Reserve Fleet

to the Norfolk Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation for the first stages of restoration and a much needed coat of paint. This done, on 12 August the BROWN under tow began the trip up the Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore. On the morning of 13 August as she entered Baltimore harbor, she met an enthusiastic welcome from City of Baltimore and Coast Guard fireboats, from boats of the United States Navy and the Association of Maryland Pilots, and from an assortment of privately owned craft. These escorted her to Pier 1. The JOHN W. BROWN was home again.

A little over three weeks later, the BROWN was towed to the Dundalk Marine Terminal where on Labor Day, 5 September 1988, she was rededicated at ceremonies attended by about 1200 people. Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley of Maryland was the keynote speaker. Since then Project Liberty Ship volunteers have been

working to restore the ship to steaming condition in anticipation of taking her on a "Matron" Voyage. But restoration work requires money as well as time, talent, and muscle. Project members and a number of organizations and individuals have generously contributed almost a million dollars in support of the work. An important boost came in April 1989 with the passage by the Maryland Legislature of State Senator American Joe Miedusiewski's bill to grant Project Liberty Ship \$225,000 in matching funds. Governor William Donald Schaefer signed the bill on 5 May 1989, and the Project after meeting the bill's requirements received the money in early June 1991. But because much more is needed, raising money remains an ever-present concern.

Project Liberty Ship celebrated Maritime Day, 22 May 1990, aboard the BROWN with ceremonies which featured lighting off the starboard boiler, another



*The BROWN under tow arrives in Baltimore on 13 August 1988. (Sherod M. Cooper III)*

milestone in returning the ship to steaming condition. Captain Warren Leback, Maritime Administrator, gave the main address before an overflow crowd in the #1 tween deck. An additional highlight of the celebration was the presence of eight men who had sailed on the BROWN during World War II. Six of the eight had sailed on the Maiden Voyage to the Persian Gulf.

During the Summer of 1990 Project Liberty Ship volunteers worked with growing excitement and anticipation to ready the BROWN for her "Matron" Voyage, scheduled for early September. The voyage had to be postponed, however, due to unexpected delays in getting her into a shipyard for essential repairs, and, once in, being forced to leave before the work was completed because the shipyard facilities were needed to prepare ships for Desert Shield.



*Captain Warren Leback, Maritime Administrator, lights off the BROWN's starboard boiler on Maritime Day, 22 May 1990. (Project Liberty Ship Collection)*

In late Fall 1990 the members of Project Liberty Ship were heartened when through the efforts of Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley the United States Congress passed and President Bush signed HR 4900, the Federal Maritime Commission Authorization Act. This legislation includes a provision that provides funding for Merchant Marine Memorials by selling two obsolete ships in the Reserve Fleet for scrap. Project Liberty Ship will share with one other group the proceeds from the scrapping of one of the ships. A second provision of even greater long-range importance exempts the JOHN W. BROWN, the JEREMIAH O'BRIEN, and the LANE VICTORY, another West Coast museum ship, from complying with the current Coast Guard standards for passenger ships, which differ significantly from the standards in effect when the ships were built. Thus the three ships will be permitted to carry passengers on day cruises without undergoing modifications which would destroy their integrity as historic vessels.

The BROWN went back to the shipyard in Spring 1991 to have the remaining hull work, rudder repairs, and other drydock items completed. Shortly after her return to Pier 1, the BROWN's engineers finished reactivating the engine room and held initial dock trials on 11 and 12 June. The engine ran perfectly for a total of four hours. To celebrate this success, Project Liberty Ship

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volunteers held a formal dock trial party on the Fourth of July to demonstrate the operation of the BROWN's engine for their guests.

Having gained the confidence that comes with overcoming many difficulties and sometimes discouraging set-backs, the members of Project Liberty Ship now look forward to September 1991 when the S.S JOHN W. BROWN under her own power will once again leave

Baltimore and head down the Chesapeake Bay—this time on her “Matron” Voyage to begin a new career as a fully operational museum ship and as a memorial to the men and women who built, sailed, and defended the great fleet of American merchant ships in World War II.

16 July 1991



*The BROWN as she appears today at Pier 1, South Clinton Street, Baltimore.  
(Project Liberty Ship Collection)*