

D2 S.F. EXAMINER Thurs., May 21, 1981

# Memorial Day and Liberty ship nostalgia

By Bill Boldenweck and Sydney Kossen

The nostalgia was thicker than the usual summer fog today as the Jeremiah O'Brien, last of the Libertys, eased her way away from the pier at Fort Mason and backed into the bay for a half day memorial cruise.

There were a few youngsters among the 600 that climbed aboard the World War II vintage freighter, but most of the passengers had spent a good sized chunk of their youth sailing aboard Liberty ships as troops or as crew, or escorting them across the perilous waters toward the war fronts.

The class (more than 2,750 — by far the largest class of ships ever built) represented something of a miracle of American industrial production, which is arguably improbable ever to happen again.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized an emergency shipbuilding program in 1941 to replace the ships that were being sunk by the dozens each week by enemy submarines.

The design was modified from the classic British tramp steamer for simplicity and economy, and the first vessel, the SS Patrick Henry, was completed and at work after only 245

days, an extremely quick time.

By the end of the war the average construction time was brought down to an average of two months, and the record was eight days from keel laying to delivery, accomplished at the Kaiser Richmond shipyard.

The production effort created vast and irreversible social changes as thousands of women went to work in such traditional male tasks as shipfitting, rigging, welding, and riveting. Hundreds of thousands of people left rural homes for the shipyards and other war production plants and huge "temporary" housing projects were built to house them, some of them still in existence as slums.

All of the old Libertys are gone now, sunk or scrapped, but the Jeremiah O'Brien was saved by the Maritime Administration as a floating monument to those who built them and those who sailed in them.

She was brought down from the Suisun Bay reserve fleet in 1979, under her own power, and the process of restoration was begun, largely through volunteer labor and voluntary donations.

Today's she crossed the bay, steamed up the Oakland Estuary, then sailed out the Golden Gate to drop 50 donated wreaths in memory of the maritime dead of the war before returning to Fort Mason for a luncheon.

The 600 or so passengers paid \$50 each toward the restoration fund.

Back on shore, meanwhile, Mayor Feinstein planned to introduce a 93-year-old hero of World War I and seven other holders of the Congressional Medal of Honor at The City's special service marking Memorial Day in Civic Center Plaza today.

The mayor called it a "great honor and privilege" to have nine of the nation's 272 living recipients of the highest award for bravery assembled in San Francisco.

"Their service beyond the call of

duty and their truly incredible heroism stand as an inspiration to all who cherish democracy and who love unfettered liberty," Feinstein said in prepared remarks. "Our city is proud to pay a richly deserved tribute to these heroes and to salute the efforts of all who have fought and died in order to preserve and to protect our nation."

These were her special guests:

- Former Sgt. Phillip C. Katz, a native San Franciscan, who at 93 is the dean of America's Medal of Honor corps. He was decorated by Gen. John J. Pershing for rescuing a wounded comrade and carrying him to safety.

- Maj. Gen. William F. Dean of Berkeley, described by the mayor as "a United States Army leader who showed outstanding courage and ability during the Korean War."

- William Badders, former Navy chief machinists' mate, decorated for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty during the rescue and salvage of the submarine USS Squalus, which sank in 1939.

- Lt. Col. Patrick Henry Brady, U.S. Army, honored for a rescue operation he directed in January 1968 near Chu Lai in South Vietnam.

- Lt. Col. Kern W. Dunagan, U.S. Army, decorated for acts of heroism in South Vietnam on May 13 and 14, 1969. He now is assigned to the University of San Francisco as military science professor in the Reserve Officers Training Corps unit.

- Lt. Col. Edward S. Michael, U.S. Air Force, retired, honored for an "incredible act of courage" on a bombing mission over Germany in April 1944. This involved the safe return of his crew and heavily damaged plane to England, though he was seriously wounded.

- Col. Mitchell Paige, Marine Corps, retired, decorated for extraordinary heroism in the Solomon Islands in May 1942.

- Col. Charles W. Davis, U.S. Army,

retired, decorated for outstanding courage in the Battle of Guadalcanal in World War II. He is the president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

"These men have earned not only the highest possible military honor of the United States," Feinstein said, "but they also have our everlasting gratitude and profound esteem for their complete willingness to give us everything, including life itself, to serve our nation. We are forever indebted to them."

The memorial service included music by the Sixth Army Band and formal presentation by the Bechtel Power Corporation of 18 flags that will fly from freshly repainted Civic Center standards.

"San Francisco is proud to fly these flags where both visitors and residents alike may see and appreciate the more than 200 years of America's rich history which they symbolize," the mayor said.

## Peking gazette's boost for kissing

HONG KONG (AP) — A Peking literary magazine has advised its readers that kissing is not indecent.

"Kissing in Western countries is as common as shaking hands in China," according to the Literature and Art Gazette.

The magazine noted that a kissing scene in the Shakespearean play The Merchant of Venice produced recently by Peking's Youth Art Theater "almost caused a scandal" because of China's "ignorance of the outside world."

