



*The Anniston Star*

# VETERANS DAY

★ With respect, honor and gratitude to those who served ★



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Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star/File

**COVER PHOTO:** A scene from the 31st Annual Veterans Day Ceremony at Centennial Memorial Park in 2021.



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Sherry Kughn/The Anniston Star

**Retired Lt. Col. Franklin McLain believes it is important for veterans to continue supporting each other even after their military service ends. McLain started out his military career as a tank mechanic and became the maintenance officer in the U.S. Marine. He worked in bases along the West Coast and in Hawaii keeping vast numbers of military equipment, from guns to ships, ready for conflicts.**

## ‘Veterans understand each other,’ says retired Marine

**BY SHERRY KUGHN**

The Anniston Star

Franklin “Work” McLain, 63, gives himself that nickname. Now a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marines with 30 years of military service, the Anniston native said his late father, Johnny Frank McLain, and his mother, Annie Ruth, expected nothing less than hard work from their children. They set the example.

Johnny Frank worked as a crane operator at Union Foundry. Often, Johnny Frank carried one of his sons, often McLain, with him after work each day when “second shift” began. Usually, that was a job renovating or building houses. McLain learned about maintaining things alongside his father, who sometimes found another job for his son, cutting grass for others.

“I’ve always had to work,” McLain said. “My whole family did. Mother was a domestic housekeeper for others, and she ran a household with five children.”

One of McLain’s two sisters, Clester Burdell, a retired public affairs officer from Anniston Army Depot, echoed McLain’s words.

“My siblings are all responsible,” said Burdell, “but Franklin grasped onto that at an early age. Even as an adolescent, he was building wagons, fences, a barbecue pit and always something constructive. He learned to be that way early, and that has made him the man he is today. He will tackle any project, do it well and circle back around to make sure it is 100 percent correct.”

As a boy who often visited on Leighton Avenue where his cousin lived, McLain would peek from behind houses to see a distinctive-looking group of men often walking up and down Quintard Avenue. He always recognized them, similar haircuts, stout builds, inflated chests and swagger. They were Marines, and little Franklin liked how the men always seemed to have camaraderie, his grownup word for that. It was a given, then, that when he graduated from Anniston High School in 1977, he became a Marine.

McLain entered military service and started his first job as a tank mechanic at Camp Pendleton, Calif., the state where he spent most of his career. From then on, it seemed, the military had a new job for him in a variety of worldwide locations every two to three years, including his last job as maintenance officer overseeing ground equipment and large ships in Hawaii.

Mostly working stateside, though, one time McLain found himself in Somalia where he first felt afraid for his life as a Marine.

He was riding in the back of a truck on a convoy when the convoy stalled. Then, the truck jerked forward, and McLain, standing at that moment, fell off the back into a mob of Somalis who had been following the convoy. They quickly surrounded him, and he had to take a defensive posture until he decided to turn around and run to catch up with his truck to avoid being robbed, to say the least.

“Those Somalis wanted food, and the convoys had food,” McLain said. “Of course, they would take anything you had, even your gun.”

Regardless of the occasional tense situation, McLain’s responsibilities cost him long hours and more hard work, but he never minded.

“I loved my job,” he said. “The seriousness was exciting to me. I thrived on the type of work ethic my father had. Working alongside him had kept me energized and out of trouble.”

No matter where McLain went, he always came back home every year. Eventually, he married a Brooklyn, N.Y., native named Barbara and had a son who is the father of the couple’s grandchild.

After retirement, McLain returned to his beloved Anniston and, of course, continued to work. Today, he is a government contractor at the Anniston Army Depot where he oversees equipment overhaul. Also, he is a deacon and the superintendent of Sunday school at his church, the Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on 14th and Brown Avenue. He also enjoys spending time with his mother, who is now in her 90s.

McLain believes in supporting his fellow veterans by volunteering to speak at various veteran events and helping to raise money to support their needs.

“Veterans understand each other,” he said. “Often, it’s easy to move on in life with a family, career and whatever, but not all veterans can do that because of things like PTSD and injuries. It is extremely important that we do not forget them. We need to serve as their voice.”

Another message he has is for all Americans is this: “An old phrase says, ‘A hunting dog does not notice the fleas,’” he said. “I like that because it means we must stay focused and disciplined. In America today, we need to focus on being positive and accountable to each other.”



# Wreath-laying has multiple meanings

BY SHERRY KUGHN

The Anniston Star

Mike Abrams of Anniston and Sandra Goodwin of Piedmont are leading two respective groups of volunteers in raising funds for a nonprofit known as Wreaths Across America (WAA). Fulfilling its mission, the group saw to it that more than 2.4 million wreaths were placed on veterans graves last year. The number of participating cemeteries is up to 3,300.

Those wishing to donate the money to purchase one or more flags, at a cost of \$15 each, have until Nov. 30 for the Fort McClellan Military Cemetery and Nov. 21 for the Highland Cemetery in Piedmont. This year's wreath-laying will be Dec. 17.

Thirteen years ago, Abrams took on the task of starting the WAA event at McClellan thanks to the suggestion of now retired Maj. Gen. Gerald G. Watson. This year, as in other years, Abrams and a committee of volunteers have raised the money to purchase enough wreaths to lay on the 353 graves of veterans buried in the Fort McClellan Military Cemetery, which is

closed, except to family members of veterans buried there.

Two years ago, Goodwin coordinated her first WAA event. They hope to raise the money to purchase 100 wreaths this year, and they hope to purchase 500 wreaths in the future.

## McClellan's ceremony

Abrams and his committee have added many levels of meaning to the opening ceremony at each WAA event, some of which takes place before the laying of wreaths. Prior to the event, volunteers place flower stands with ceremonial wreaths representing each of America's military branches, plus one wreath that represents the prisoners of war and those missing in action. The playing of music by Brian Conary, a bagpipe player, adds weight to the occasion, as does the entrance of the National Guard Color Guard. Those in attendance, including children, are invited to lay the wreaths against the headstones. Each volunteer stands before the grave and calls out the name of the veteran before laying the wreath on the grave. WAA asks wreath-layers to say the name of a veteran to keep his

or her memory alive.

At some point, Abrams began placing a smooth stone on each of the Jewish graves. He started the practice when he learned that Jewish veterans prefer a stone rather than flowers because a stone is God-made whereas a wreath is made by human hands.

Also, the McClellan committee orders enough wreaths to assist the Women Army Corps. Members of the corps now place wreaths wherever they know that a corps member is buried. The McClellan group places a symbolic wreath at the New Hope Cemetery adjacent to the McClellan Military Cemetery. New Hope has several Civil War veterans' graves.

"Throughout the years, I have met several family members who appreciate the honor and respect we bring to their loved ones," Abrams said.

## Piedmont's ceremony

Two years ago, when Sandra Goodwin decided to bring the WAA event to Piedmont's Highland Cemetery, her motivation was personal and patriotic.

"My husband, LeWayne Goodwin, was a national guardsman and a part of the

Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom operations, stateside. This event is a way we also show support to our living veterans."

Each year, she has coordinated the ceremony. Before it begins, the Piedmont Honor Guard also stages the setting. They set up a flag to represent each branch of service until, during the ceremony, Goodwin will call out the name of the branch, and Ian, her 17-year-old son who is the captain of the honor guard, will lay a wreath beneath a flag, along with Piedmont veterans who do the same. Then, Goodwin or Ian will remind those in attendance the purpose of the WAA, which is to remember and honor veterans and to allow parents to teach their children the value of freedom.

In Piedmont, the civilian volunteers will stand before each grave and place their hand over their heart, while the veterans will salute as both say the name of the deceased veteran.

Goodwin is glad Piedmont residents have an opportunity to participate.

"A lot of people have cried and said they've never had someone who cared enough to do this," she said.



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# 'A REGIONAL TREASURE'

## Hall of Heroes exhibit celebrated as it ends OPAC run

BY BRIAN GRAVES

The Anniston Star

**OXFORD** — The exhibit which honored veterans at the Oxford Performing Arts Center's Martin-Lett Gallery has now closed after being hailed as a great success.

Filled with artifacts from the Hall of Heroes in Talladega, the exhibit claimed the venue's showcase space on Memorial Day last year and quickly became a popular stop for OPAC visitors of all ages for more than a year.

OPAC hosted a reception Oct. 29 for the Hall of Heroes and presented an Award of Excellence to the hall's president, Chuck Keith.

"This has been our 33rd exhibit here and it has been a wonderful experience working with the Hall of Heroes," OPAC director John Longshore said, noting how the friendship between OPAC patron Greg Potts and Keith had helped make the way for the exhibit to be possible.

Longshore also gave credit to Martin-Lett Gallery director Amanda Wentzel



Brian Graves/The Anniston Star

**OPAC director John Longshore (center) presents the venue's Award of Excellence to the Talladega Hall of Heroes president Chuck Keith as OPAC advisory board member Marilyn Lipscomb-Clark looks on.**

and said when he first saw the exhibit "it took my breath away."

"Knowing what is happening in the Ukraine and seeing cultural facilities like this being destroyed in war makes this exhibit even more poignant knowing in America we have had dedicated men and women who for cen-

turies have fought for our freedoms to make events like this possible," Longshore said.

He also expressed appreciation for the city of Talladega's support for the Hall of Heroes, calling it "a true community and regional treasure."

"Since the exhibit opened, we have had 24,000 people come

through this lobby," Longshore said. "I believe the overwhelming number of them took the opportunity to visit the exhibit."

He added the "strong success" of the exhibit has led to preliminary conversations about how OPAC and the hall can work together again in the

future.

OPAC advisory board member Marilyn Lipscomb-Clark was emotional talking about her experiences with the exhibit.

"We are here to honor the Talladega Hall of Heroes and their inspiring tribute to our heroes and honors their achievements, courage and

dedication," Lipscomb-Clark said. "It also says 'Thank you' for their sacrifices."

"You can't see this and not appreciate the dauntless task the Talladega Hall of Heroes has undertaken," she said. "I have seen one veteran come and stand beside the uniform he once wore and answered every question from every little child."

Hall of Heroes president Chuck Keith accepted the award on behalf of the museum.

"It has been an honor for us to do this," Keith said. "This has encapsulated what our mission is at the Hall of Heroes and enabled us to make new friends at this fantastic venue. We are delighted to be part of it. We look forward to having a continued relationship."

The Talladega Hall of Heroes is located at 112 Court Square East and is open Wednesday through Friday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and the second Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Admission is free.



# Annual memorial service at German Italian POW cemetery to return after three-year hiatus

## FROM STAFF REPORTS

The Annual Memorial Service at the German Italian POW Cemetery at Fort McClellan will be held on Sunday, Nov. 20, at 1:30 p.m. Special guests are family members of one of the German veterans buried there. They have travelled from their home in Marburg, Germany, to attend the ceremony.

For more than four decades, services have been held at the cemetery to pay tribute to the 26 Germans and 3 Italians buried there. Only four German soldiers buried there were interned at the Fort McClellan POW Camp. The others died and were buried in various area POW camps. When those camps closed, the remains were moved for final burial at the Fort McClellan Cemetery.

The third Sunday in November is the traditional date for the service, as it coincides with many Memorial Day Services

in Europe. The US Army conducted these dignified services each year. Military wore dress uniforms, the Honor Guard presented flags and the Army Band provided appropriate music. Representatives from all three countries spoke and placed wreaths at the site. A reception followed with fellowship and renewed friendships. When the post closed, local civilian citizens took up the responsibility of the annual service.

The cemetery is now under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and has undergone an extensive upgrade. It is maintained to the same standards as all other national cemeteries.

While there are other German and Italian POWs buried in the US, it is believed the service at Fort McClellan is the only one that continues to honor these fallen dead in this manner. Citizen volunteers give their time and person-

al resources, and provide food and other support to this event.

The service follows the traditional format established by the military. The Jacksonville State University ROTC Department provides the Color Guard, flags are placed on each grave and wreaths are laid by Senior Military Representatives from each country.

German Italian Memorial Cemetery is located at 3541 Shipley Drive at Fort McClellan. Shipley Drive is off Alabama 21, north of Anniston, just across from Wal-Mart.

In the event of inclement weather, the service will be held at the Cane Creek Community Gardens, 77 Justice Avenue, located across from the sports complex off Summerall Gate Road.

The public is cordially invited to attend. For more information, contact Thom Cole at 256-283-4246 or Thomas Gilbert at 407-848-4328.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star/File

German LTC Stefan Deppe and Italian COL Clemente D'Amato during the German Italian Cemetery Memorial Service in 2014.



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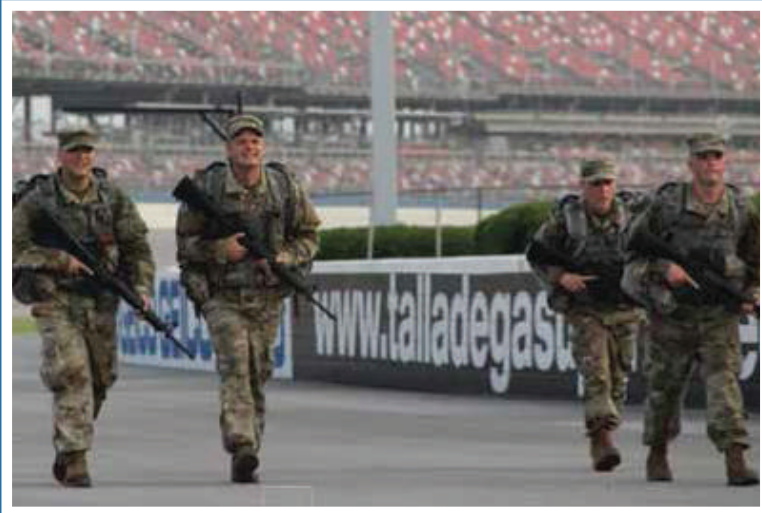
Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star/File

The German Italian POW cemetery at Fort McClellan.

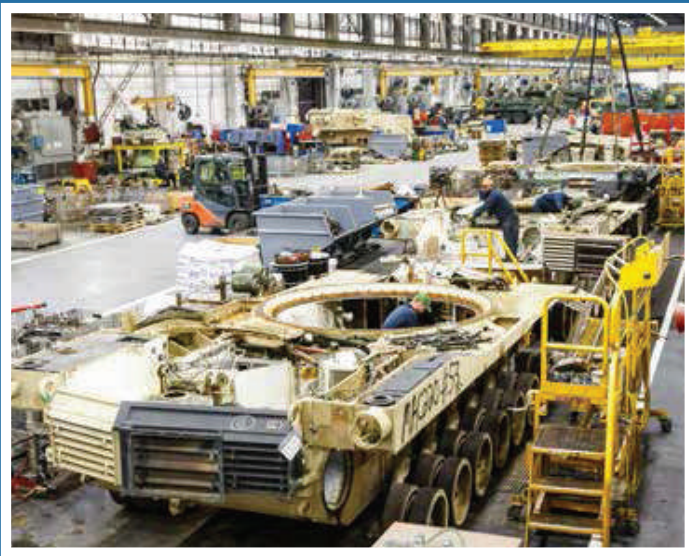


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Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star/File  
Calhoun County Circuit Clerk Kim McCarson speaks during the 27th Annual Veterans Day Ceremony at Centennial Memorial Park in Anniston.

# *LOOK BACK: 5 YEARS AGO*

At a Veterans Day ceremony at Centennial Memorial Park in 2017, patriotism could be felt in the air as community members paid tribute to the brave men and women who have served our country.





Photos by Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star/File

The late Eli Henderson (above) and members of the Young Marines (below) salute during the ceremony.



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Photos by Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star/File

**LEFT:** 94-year-old Hilman Pressley (left) salutes during the ceremony. **TOP:** The Young Marines salute during the Fallen Comrade ceremony. **MIDDLE:** Members of the audience listen to the guest speakers. **BOTTOM:** Brian Conary plays “Amazing Grace” on bagpipes.



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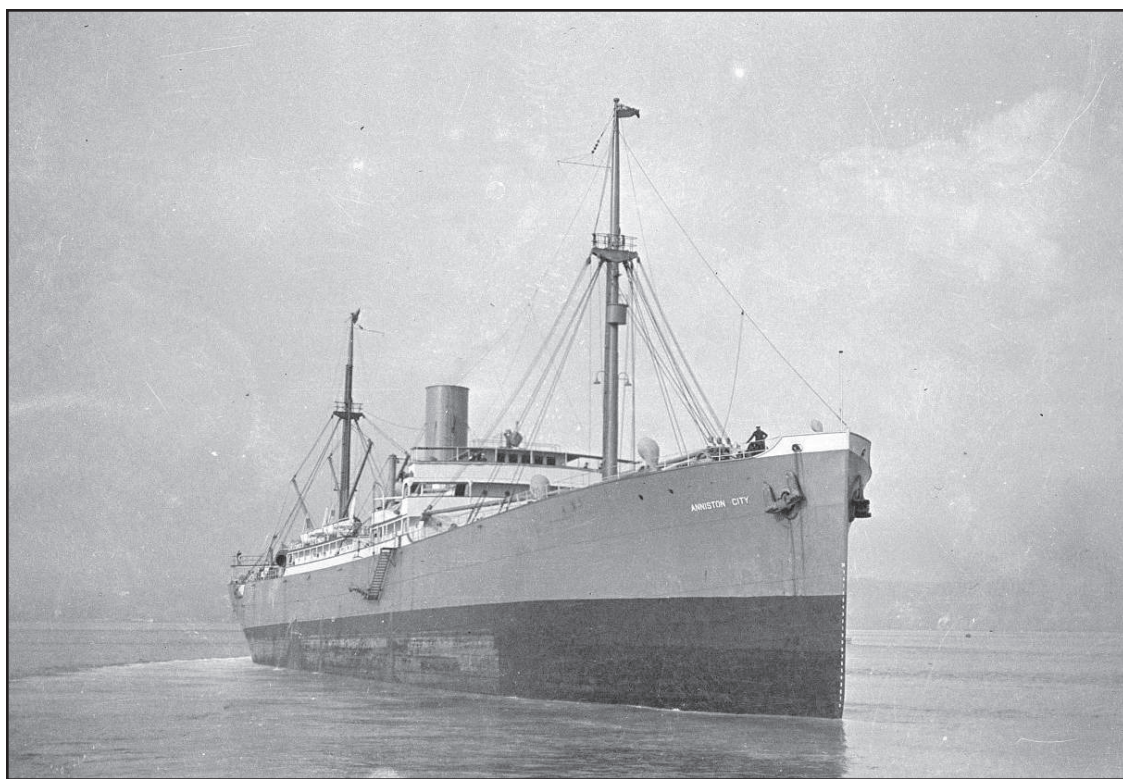


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# Anniston at sea: An Army town's floating history



File photos

ABOVE: The S.S. Anniston City. BELOW: The launching of S.S. Anniston City on May 7, 1921.



**BY PHILLIP TUTOR**

The Anniston Star

*Editor's note: This story was originally published in 2015.*

Boiled down, beneath its fat and gristle, Anniston is an Army town.

In their own ways, Anniston's founders were Army men. Anniston's leaders recruited the Army here. In Blue Mountain and the chigger-infested hills of McClellan and Pelham Range, soldiers trained for war in Cuba, the Philippines, France, Belgium, Germany, the Pacific, Korea and Vietnam. The Army shuttered Fort McClellan, but it didn't spoil the city's legacy as a through-and-through Army town.

Or as a Navy town, either.

Here's this unlikeliest of Veterans Day stories, as U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Kent Davis tells it.

Two years ago, the Anniston resident gave a local Rotary Club presentation on the Navy's history.

Up on the screen went a photograph of a ship.

He played trivia with the Rotarians. What's the name of this ship, he asked them.

Dead silence. No hands went up.

"Crickets," he said.

It was the USS Anniston, he told them.

"And people were shocked," said Davis, also the deputy superintendent at the Center for Domestic Preparedness. "Nobody had ever heard that. People were fascinated."

How about that? This certifiable Army town has a naval history, and quite an impressive one, to boot. We're not quite Annapolis, but who is?

According to military records, two U.S. Navy ships have carried Anniston's name. Both sailed during wartime. Neither remains. A third ship was a civilian-operated cargoliner that often gets misidentified on the Internet as a naval ship, which it was not.

Genealogy websites such as Ancestry.com and Fold3.com are

laden with obituaries of sailors who served on Anniston's namesake vessels. Yet, few people here remember how 20th-century Annistonians gushed with pride when these ships were launched.

Ask Anniston City Councilman David Reddick, a Navy veteran, about his service and you get a quick response: "Six years, three months, seven days." But when queried this week about the city's Navy history, he was as unaware as many others are — though glad to hear about it.

Of the three Anniston-named ships, the USS Anniston's history is the most complex. It began as the USS Montgomery, a lightly protected cruiser among the smallest in the Navy's Spanish-American War fleet. Completed in 1894 at a Baltimore shipyard, the Montgomery cost \$700,000 and took part in the Cuban blockade and the bombing of San Juan. For nearly 20 years after the war, the Montgomery sailed along the Atlantic seaboard as a cruiser and torpedo training ship.

In March 1918, just after the United States entered World War I, the Navy renamed the ship the USS Anniston and assigned her to the American Patrol Detachment, Division Two, under the command of W.G. Roper. (Military records don't say why the ship was renamed, but it wasn't unusual for congressional delegations to request such changes for cities that supported war efforts.) Until she was struck from the Navy's list in August 1919, the USS Anniston patrolled the Atlantic coast and U.S. interests in the Caribbean for enemy warships. She was sold for scrap Nov. 14, 1919.

Oh, and here's the best part: The Navy camouflaged the USS Anniston in the "Watson system" of alternating shapes and shades that's quite odd-looking today. The paint scheme was designed to confuse submarine captains when they aimed their torpedos.

The following summer, in June 1920, The Star announced that six 10,000-ton steel ships would be built in Mobile, each



bearing the name of an Alabama city. Thus was born the SS Montgomery City, Tuscaloosa City, Bessemer City, Fairfield City, Selma City and, yes, Anniston City. A year later, The Star's editorial board implored Annistonians to travel to Mobile to celebrate the launch of the city's new cargo steamship operated by Isthmian Lines.

"The naming of the steamship for Anniston is a distinct compliment to this city," The Star wrote. "It will prove a lasting and far-reaching advertisement for the city and it will do much to make known to the world that there is in Alabama a city worthy of its name given to a great ship."

What's more, "Other cities have appreciated the honor ... Anniston cannot afford to do otherwise."

The SS Anniston City shows up today in declassified Navy documents from World War II. In 1942, in the West Indies, the Anniston City reported that it had been attacked by an enemy submarine. "No subsequent transmission received," the Navy reported.

After several ownership changes and three renamings — to the Doris N, the Western Cay and the San Nazaro — the former Anniston City was scrapped in Italy in 1958, a rather inglorious end.

Roll back the calendar to the final months of World War II. Between February and August 1945, Anniston (a.) was training Army soldiers for the war and (b.) had its name carried on two ships, the SS Anniston Victory and the aforementioned SS Anniston City. It's safe to call those months the ultimate period of Anniston's omnipresent war efforts.

If you're into launching parties, the Anniston City's had nothing on that of the Anniston Victory, one of more than 500 cargo ships — named "victory" ships and equipped with high-speed turbo engines — built to supply the Allied war machine. Hundreds of American cities shared their names with these Navy vessels. Competition for that honor was high.

Anniston, as was her habit, went into overdrive to support the American military during the

war. Bond drive sales in Anniston, along with a campaign by local dignitaries, earned the city its victory-ship party. Throughout the fall of 1944, M&H Valve proudly announced in advertisements that more than 200 of its valves were being installed in the Anniston Victory. On Jan. 27, 1945, a crew of Annistonians — Iva Cook, The Star's society editor; Maj. Knox Spearman; Elise Ayers, daughter of Star Publisher Col. H.M. Ayers; and Ensign Martha Cleveland Craddock — attended the vessel's launch in Richmond, Calif.

At noon that Saturday, Cook smashed a champagne bottle against the Anniston Victory's hull. A Navy chaplain said a prayer for the ship and her crew. The Harmonettes, a girls choral group, sang "Smooth Sailing," a song written by a shipyard employee. The Anniston Victory slid into the San Francisco Bay. Shipyard whistles blew and workers waved their hardhats, The Star reported.

The Anniston Victory lasted 40 years. It was sold for scrap in 1985.



File photo

Launching day of the S.S. Anniston Victory.

## VETERANS DAY

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