

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: ex-USS *Tulare* (AKA/LKA-112)



USS *Tulare* passes under the Oakland Bay Bridge in San Francisco, California, circa 1956. *Tulare* was the first U.S. attack cargo ship equipped with a helicopter platform. *Tulare*'s quadrupe masts support the standard contemporary radar systems of the day, the SPS-10 (forward) for surface search and SPS-6 (aft), for air search. Photo courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Vessel History

The attack cargo ship *Tulare* was launched on December 22, 1953 at the San Francisco shipyard of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation as the break-bulk cargo ship *Evergreen Mariner* (C4-S-1a).¹ Originally intended for commercial use, the ship was designated for conversion as an attack cargo ship prior to its completion. Bethlehem Steel converted the ship and turned it over to the Navy on January 10, 1956; it was commissioned USS *Tulare* two days later. Following its commissioning, *Tulare* was assigned to the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet. Other than one voyage to Pearl Harbor in 1956, *Tulare* spent the remainder of the year operating off the U.S. Pacific Coast.

¹ This is the Maritime Administration's design classification. "C" signifies ship type and length, in this case cargo ship, 500-550 feet. The "S" identifies the machinery type, steam with one propeller, and "1a" is the chronological design number and alteration (Version A of design 1).

Tulare and the Cold War

Tulare sailed from San Diego, California on its first East Asian cruise on February 11, 1957, and spent the next nine months in the Western Pacific based at Yokosuka, Japan. While there, *Tulare* visited the Japanese ports of Sasebo and Shimoda, as well as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Sydney, Australia. *Tulare* participated in landing exercises on the South Korean coast, the island of Luzon in the Philippines, and at Buckner Bay, Okinawa, Japan. It returned to the U.S. West Coast via Pearl Harbor arriving at San Diego on September 26, 1957. *Tulare* made a similar cruise to East Asia in 1958 returning to San Diego on March 16, 1959. In May it participated in Operation TWIN PEAKS, a large scale multi-ship amphibious exercise off Oceanside, California. It left San Diego for its third deployment to East Asia on October 13, 1959.

In 1960, as tensions escalated between Communist China and the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan, the U.S. launched Operation BLUE STAR, a joint U.S./Nationalist China amphibious training operation off of southern Taiwan. This was the largest amphibious landings in East Asia since the Korean War. *Tulare* participated in the training operations where U.S. Marines played the roles of both invaders and defenders of Taiwan.

Tulare returned to San Diego in April of 1960. It participated in exercises off the Pacific Coast until June 19, 1961, when it departed on its fourth East Asian cruise bound for Yokosuka with a stop at Wake Island. After two weeks in Japanese waters it proceeded to Inchon and later Pohang, South Korea where it participated in Operation SHARP EDGE serving as transport for 300 U.S. Army personnel and their equipment. That summer *Tulare* visited Hong Kong and several Japanese ports. It was enroute to Okinawa in October when it was diverted to assist two merchant ships, the U.S. Flag *Pioneer Muse* and the Lebanese vessel, *Shiek*, which had both run aground on Kito Daito Shima. *Tulare* was the command ship during the rescue operations. Marine helicopters from USS *Princeton* (CV-37) rescued 84 crewmembers from both ships.

Tulare participated in another amphibious exercise designated Operation WARM UP in the Ryuku Islands before leaving East Asia on November 16, 1961 and arriving in San Diego on December 12. *Tulare* was outward bound for East Asia on its fifth cruise in October 1962 when the Cuban Missile Crisis began to unfold. It was assigned the role of assault ship for Amphibious Squadron 3 replacing USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2), which was sent to join the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet. *Tulare* proceeded to Subic Bay to load ammunition and supplies that had been intended for *Iwo Jima* and remained on alert for two months. Returning to its normal schedule of training exercises, *Tulare* took part in SEATO Operation JUNGLE DRUM II off the coast of Thailand and then spent March and April of 1963 visiting several Japanese ports before departing for the U.S. West Coast. It spent the remainder of 1963 and the spring of 1964 operating on the West Coast based at San Diego. Training exercises in 1964 included Operations PINE TREE and CHERRY TREE. On June 16 *Tulare* sailed on its sixth East Asian cruise.

Vietnam War

Tulare was operating in Asian waters in early August when North Vietnamese torpedo boats reportedly attacked USS *Maddox* (DD-731) and USS *Turner Joy* (DD-951). Information obtained later indicated that there was no North Vietnamese attack that night, however, U.S. authorities were convinced that one had occurred and responded by sending planes from USS *Ticonderoga* (CV-14) and USS *Constellation* (CV-64) to hit North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and fuel facilities. Several days later, the U.S. Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, authorizing the government to use military force in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war.

Tulare was soon transporting U.S. Marines and equipment to the South China Sea where they would remain in readiness as part of the U.S. Navy's Task Force 76 (Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet). It continued to operate out of Okinawa until December when it was sent home to San Diego, arriving on December 18. In early 1965, *Tulare* participated in Exercise SILVER LANCE, a massive amphibious operation at Camp Pendleton, California involving 50 vessels and 10,000 Marines, intended as preparation for anticipated landings in Vietnam. In 1965, it made two more round voyages transporting military personnel and equipment to Japan.



USS *Tulare* coming alongside USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2) off the coast of South Vietnam in 1969.
Photo by H.R. Adams CSC USN. <http://www.navsourc.org/archives/10/02/100211205.jpg>



Left: U.S. Marines headed to Vietnam boarding *Tulare* at San Diego in 1967. **Right:** Troops preparing to go ashore at Danang, South Vietnam, June 1965. This was *Tulare's* first operation in the war zone. *Tulare* entered Danang Harbor without any identification (hull number) and was not flying the U.S. flag. <http://tulare.homelinux.net/troops.html>.

Tulare left the U.S. West Coast on February 12, 1966 bound for Chu Lai, Vietnam by way of Hawaii. The remainder of that year was spent ferrying military personnel and equipment between Japan and Okinawa and the Vietnamese harbors of Chu Lai, Camranh Bay, Phan Rang and Tuy Hoa. It steamed 43,397 miles, carried 2,076 men, 8,891 tons of cargo, 483 vehicles, and spent 50 days off the Vietnamese ports. Additionally, *Tulare* participated in 16 underway replenishment operations with ships in the South China Sea and made port calls at Hong Kong, Bangkok, Thailand, and Subic Bay, Philippines.

It returned to the West Coast for drydocking at Port Richmond, California, and later participated in training exercises through September 1967. In October it sailed for Subic Bay and Okinawa by way of Hawaii. On December 4, *Tulare* relieved USS *Washtenaw County* (LST-1166) off Vietnam as logistic support for Amphibious Ready Group Alfa. USS *Wexford County* (LST-1168) relieved *Tulare* on December 19. In late December *Tulare* supported Marines fighting in the area of Hue and Cua Vet. It sailed to Subic Bay at the end of January 1968 for an overhaul. Support operations in Vietnam continued through the summer until *Tulare* returned to the U.S. West Coast where it remained until January 1969.

On January 1, 1969 *Tulare* was redesignated LKA-112 (Amphibious Cargo Ship). It left San Diego for East Asia with a group of six vessels that included the *Mariner* conversion USS *Paul Revere* now designated LPA-248. It resumed ferrying supplies between Okinawa and Vietnam, which included operating for three weeks in July with the amphibious ready group in support of Operation BRAVE ARMADA. It then sailed from Danang to San Diego along with USS *Belle Grove* (LSD-2) and USS *Tortuga* (LSD-26) carrying the First Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion

and their equipment. The remainder of 1969 was spent in operations off the Pacific Coast including a visit to Acapulco, Mexico in early November. It sailed from San Diego for Danang on January 23, 1970, returning with Marines and equipment on March 2. *Tulare* was drydocked at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard from April 22 to May 21, before participating in training operations off the Pacific Coast through October.

Tulare sailed for Okinawa on November 2, 1970 to continue supporting operations in Vietnam. In early February 1971 it was one of a number of ships of the Seventh Fleet Amphibious Ready Group that embarked the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit for a diversionary operation off North Vietnam. It continued operating in Asian waters until the U.S. withdrew its troops in February 1973. Subsequently, *Tulare* continued supplying bases in Japan with periods spent on training exercises off the U.S. Pacific Coast.

Tulare was awarded 11 battle stars, one Navy Unit Commendation, and the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation for its service during the Vietnam War.

Maritime Administration

On July 1, 1975 the Navy retired *Tulare* as an active amphibious force vessel and re-assigned it to the Naval Reserve training fleet based in San Francisco. It served as a training vessel for Naval Reserve cargo handling battalions until February 19, 1980, when it was placed in the Maritime Administration's National Defense Reserve Fleet at Suisun Bay (SBRF) in Benicia, California.

Tulare, along with its near sister ship *Paul Revere*, was twice considered for conversion into a merchant marine training ship for the Massachusetts Maritime Academy.² In the first instance, in 1979, it was bypassed in favor of the former troop transport USNS *Geiger*, whose sister ships were in MARAD service as training ships at the New York and Maine academies. However, *Geiger* suffered a catastrophic engine room fire at the end of 1981 and was declared a Constructive Total Loss. In the ensuing effort to replace *Geiger*, the academy heavily favored *Tulare*. Although the *Tulare* stemmed from the commercial *Mariner* design, its conversion into a naval vessel employed standards of construction that required expensive retrofitting or replacement, and its conversion was ultimately determined to be uneconomic. The preliminary design work performed on *Tulare* proved of value later in the decade, when the modified *Mariner Mormactide* (ex-*Oregon*) was converted for the New York school. After the training ship interest ended, *Tulare* was never again considered for further use. It was struck from the Naval Register on August 31, 1992, and officially transferred to the Maritime Administration for final disposition.

² MARAD currently furnishes government-owned training ships to six state maritime academies (NY, MA, ME, TX, CA, and MI) under the provisions of the Maritime Education and Training Act of 1980, as amended. The program to furnish training ships originated in 1874, and was transferred from the U.S. Navy to MARAD's predecessor, the U.S. Maritime Commission, in 1940. Between 1942 and 1946, the program was administered by the War Shipping Administration.



On April 8, 2010, personnel at the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet removed *Tulare's* 9-ton twin 3"/50 caliber guns so that they could be installed on the museum/memorial ship *USS Hornet* (CV-12) located in Alameda.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/aheiden/4504047359/>

Historic Context

Ancient Greek literature, most notably in the Greek poet Homer's *Iliad*, describes amphibious operations during the Trojan War, which purportedly occurred about 1180 B.C. Later, at the Battle of Marathon, the ancient Persians unsuccessfully attacked the Greeks by way of the Aegean Sea in 490 B.C. Julius Caesar employed an amphibious operation during his Roman landing in Great Britain in 55 B.C. U.S. amphibious operations are a little more recent in the context of world history going back just a mere 235 years, when in 1776, about 300 Continental marines invaded New Providence Island in the Bahamas and captured several British forts as well as ammunition and supplies during the American Revolution. One hundred and sixty five years later, military operations multiplied to a size and scope that quickly over-shadowed earlier conflicts as World War II drew the U.S. far from its shores and ushered in a war of a magnitude the world had never known.

Other examples of amphibious operations throughout U.S. history include U.S. Marines landing in Canada during the War of 1812; General Winfield Scott's landing of U.S. troops at Veracruz in 1847 during the Mexican War; several amphibious operations during the American Civil War; and landings at Guantanamo Bay Cuba during the Spanish American War.

In the early 20th century, a young Marine Corps staff officer, Major Earl H. Ellis, saw the potential for war between the U.S. and Japan prior to the start of WWI. Sadly, Ellis did not live to see his prediction realized. In 1923, he died under mysterious circumstances on the Pacific island of Palau. At the end of WWI, Germany ceded its Pacific Island possessions to Japan. Ellis rightfully viewed this as a disadvantage for the U.S. in projecting its power in the Pacific. WWII would prove him right.

Beginning in 1939, and continuing throughout WWII, the Maritime Commission administered the largest shipbuilding effort in world history. Within six years, nearly 6,000 ships had been

built in U.S. shipyards under Maritime Commission contracts, averaging nearly three ships per day! Ship types included the ubiquitous Liberty ships, Victory ships, tankers, and other cargo ships. Due to the size and scope of the war, naval auxiliaries, particularly transports, were essential, predominantly in the Pacific. Many of the C2 and C3 cargo ship designs were converted for the Navy as naval auxiliaries such as attack cargo ships, attack transports, and fleet replenishment oilers.

In 1941, the U.S. Navy converted 16 cargo ships that were previously designated "AK" to attack cargo ships (AKA). Different from attack transports³ which carried the designation AP and later APA, these ships were specifically designed to carry troops, heavy equipment, and supplies, and were equipped with their own landing craft to transport troops and supplies to shore. The ships were also armed to defend against air and shore attack. Between 1943 and 1945, a total of 108 attack cargo ships were built by converting existing Maritime Commission cargo ships. The first such ship, USS *Arcturus*, was laid down on July 26, 1938 under a Maritime Commission contract and launched on May 18, 1939 as M/V *Mormachawk* (a standard C2 hull) at Sun Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Chester, Pennsylvania. The Navy acquired the ship and converted it to a cargo ship at the Philadelphia Navy Yard on September 20, 1940. It was commissioned as USS *Arcturus* (AK-18), on October 26, 1940. The Navy redesignated *Arcturus* as AKA-1 (Attack Cargo Ship) in February of 1943. *Arcturus* was 459-feet in length, its beam measured 63-feet, with a speed of 16.5 knots. *Arcturus* was one of 14 miscellaneous Maritime Commission design cargo ships (all had the same characteristics) converted to attack cargo ships between 1943 and 1945. The next three classes included *Andromeda*, *Artemis*, and *Tolland*. The *Andromeda* and *Tolland* classes were also 459 feet in length, with a beam of 63 feet and a speed of about 16 knots. The *Artemis* class measured 426-feet in length with a beam of 58 feet and a speed of 16.9 knots.

After the war, the U.S. government began construction of the new 564-foot long *Mariner*-class cargo ships. This was the government's first and only post-war attempt to build standardized

³ In the early 1940s, in response to the threat of involvement in World War II, the Navy acquired a large number of Maritime Commission cargo ships and converted them to transports. Some of these were outfitted with heavy boat davits and other arrangements to enable them to handle landing craft for amphibious assault operations. In 1942, when the AP number series had already extended beyond 100, the Navy decided that these amphibious warfare ships constituted a separate category of warship from conventional transports. Therefore, the new classification of Attack Transport (APA) was created and new numbers were assigned to 58 APs then in commission or under construction. As World War II continued, dozens of new construction merchant ships of the Maritime Commission's S4, C2, C3 and VC2 ("Victory") types were converted to attack transports, bringing the list of APA numbers to 247, although 14 ships (APAs 181-186 and APAs 240-247) were cancelled before completion. In addition, as part of the 1950s modernization of the Navy's amphibious force with faster ships, two more attack transports (APA-248 and APA-249) were converted from *Mariner*-class vessels.



Clockwise from top left: (1) USS Wasp (LHD-1). [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/USS_Wasp_\(LHD_1\).jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/USS_Wasp_(LHD_1).jpg). (2) USS Wasp, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/b0/USS_Wasp_LHD-1.jpg. (3) USS El Paso (LKA-117). http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0c/Amphibious_cargo_ship-Dvic081.jpg/300px-Amphibious_cargo_ship-Dvic081.jpg. (4) USS El Paso. <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/e/ee/USSEIPaso.jpg/300px-USSEIPaso.jpg>

cargo ships for the country's merchant marine. They were intended as replacements for war tonnage that was nearing its 20-year statutory life. The Maritime Commission began its fleet replacement program in 1936; by 1956, ships would no longer be eligible to receive subsidies and therefore had to be replaced. The *Mariners* were also intended to respond to changes in traffic patterns and requirements; the pre-war standard C3 and C4 designs were becoming obsolete. As discussed in the next section, the *Mariners* were faster and more modern than previous U.S. cargo vessels but did not represent any major advances in cargo ship design. They were, however, more sophisticated than the earlier cargo ships in that they were equipped with such features as hydraulically-operated hatches. *Tulare*, unlike its predecessors, was equipped with a helicopter platform. *Tulare* had the distinction of being the first post-WWII attack cargo ship. Six more AKAs, including *Tulare*, were built between 1954 and 1969. The USS *El Paso* (LKA-117) was one of five in the *Charleston* class. These ships were larger than *Tulare* measuring 576-feet in length, with a beam of 82-feet, and a speed of 20 knots. They were built to carry the LCM-8, a larger landing craft. Additionally, their engine rooms were completely automated and the propulsion plant could be operated from the bridge.

El Paso was decommissioned in 1994, thus ending the era of the Navy's attack cargo ship/amphibious cargo ship.

The Inchon landings during the Korean War marked the U.S. Navy's last major amphibious assault on enemy shores. Today's amphibious operations have evolved once again, adapting to the changing nature of war. Landing troops and equipment from sea is still necessary, however, instead of landing and capturing land in which to operate, troops are now supported from a "sea base." To that end, the Navy employs Amphibious Assault Ships, known as the "L-class." These include the following five classes: the *Tarawa* and *Wasp* classes, Amphibious Assault Ships (LHA and LHD), the *Austin* and *San Antonio* classes, Amphibious Transport Dock (LPD), and the *Whidbey Island* and *Harpers Ferry* classes, Landing Ship Dock (LSD). These ships bear little resemblance to the earlier attack cargo ships. USS *Wasp*, previous page top left, more closely resembles an aircraft carrier than a cargo ship. Like their predecessors, these ships carry troops, equipment, and landing craft; however, today's ships are much larger and in fact are some of the largest in the Navy's inventory. The Navy commissioned the *Tarawa* class in the late 1970s by combining the capabilities of several earlier classes of amphibious ships. These ships can transport troops, cargo, vehicles, as many as 30 helicopters, and the AV-8B Harrier short takeoff and vertical landing jets. To complement these ships, the Navy uses maritime pre-positioning ships, which carry enough cargo to support an expeditionary force for one month.

Photo # NH 96877 First invasion wave moving in at Inchon, 15 Sept. 1950



Photo # NH 42351 Landing craft approach Red Beach, Inchon, 15 Sept. 1950



Photo # NH 96876 Marines landing at Inchon, 15 September 1950



Clockwise from previous page: (1) First invasion wave moving in at Inchon, South Korea, September 15, 1950. (2) Marines landing at Inchon, September 15, 1950. (3) Landing craft approach Red Beach at Inchon on September 15, 1950. (4) LSTs unloading at Inchon September 15, 1950. *Photos courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.*

Photo # 80-G-420027 LSTs unloading at Inchon, 15 September 1950



Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Ship: ex-USS *Tulare*

Type: Attack Cargo Ship/Amphibious Cargo Ship

Hull Number: AKA/LKA-112

Builder: Bethlehem Steel Corporation, San Francisco, CA.

Length: 563.3 feet

Beam: 76 feet

Draft: 26 feet

Displacement: 9,190 long tons

Speed: 21 knots

Propulsion system: Geared turbine, single propeller

Armament: 6 x twin 3"/50 caliber guns

Crew: 393

The *Mariner* class was the U.S. government's first and only effort to build standardized cargo ships for the country's merchant marine after World War II. The basic plans were prepared by the Maritime Administration and the shipbuilding division of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. The *Mariners* were faster and more modern than previous U.S. cargo vessels, but did not represent any major advances in cargo ship design. They had the standard profile with a unified superstructure aft of amidships containing the navigating bridge, upper machinery spaces, and quarters for a crew of 58 and 12 passengers. There were four hatches forward of the superstructure and three aft, all served by the standard gear of kingposts, booms and winches.

They were 563.5 feet in length overall with a beam of 76 feet and a depth of hold of 44.5 feet. They were powered by high-pressure cross-compound steam turbines providing 17,500 horsepower for an operating speed of 20 knots.

The program called for the construction of 35 ships divided between several shipyards around the country. Some shipping companies operated completed vessels, but the *Mariners* were initially not a major commercial success. By the late 1950s, the leading companies were producing their own designs for replacement tonnage. Some orders for *Mariners* were cancelled in 1953 at the end of the Korean War. Partially completed vessels, including *Evergreen Mariner*, were made available for conversion. *Evergreen Mariner* was the first to be converted to a naval auxiliary. The design work for the conversion was done by Bethlehem Steel and Gibbs & Cox of New York. Two further *Mariners* were converted in fiscal years 1957 and 1959 to the attack transports *Paul Revere* (APA-248) and *Francis Marion* (APA-249).

After conversion, *Tulare* retained its original superstructure and five cargo hatches, three forward and two aft. Aside from two Samson posts at the aft end of the foc'sle head, the cargo gear was completely replaced. It now had two large quadrupod lattice masts located between hatches 2 and 3, and 4 and 5. The masts were fitted with three 60-ton capacity booms and six of 10-ton capacity. The forward quadrupod mast also supported an SPS-10 radar scanner for surface targets, and the after mast supported an SPS-6 radar scanner for aerial targets.

Tulare was designed to carry a large complement of landing craft; nine LCMs athwartship on the hatches, three LCPLs, and 14 LCVPs. Some LCVPs were carried in Welin davits on either side of the superstructure and others nested in the LCMs. *Tulare* had a helicopter platform at the stern, the first fitted on a U.S. attack cargo ship. It was armed with six twin 3 in. 50 cal. mounts located in pairs on the bow, the stern, and the aft end of the superstructure. *Tulare's* engines were rated at 22,000 shaft horsepower and its cruising speed was 21 knots. It had a crew of 393 and a troop capacity of 319, and could transport 4,476 tons or 450,000 cubic feet of cargo. Areas of its upper hold were adapted to carrying fueled vehicles.

Statement of Significance

Tulare has the distinction of being the first post-WWII attack cargo ship built for the Navy and the first to carry a helicopter platform. It had an active career and was awarded 11 battle stars, one Navy Unit Commendation, and the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation for its service during the Vietnam War.

Integrity of Characteristics/Features

The vessel was originally constructed in 1953 and was later converted to an attack cargo ship. Other than the conversion, *Tulare* did not undergo any substantial modifications during its service life. Certain pieces of equipment have been stripped from the ship since its layup at the

SBRF to support memorial ships such as USS *Hornet* at Alameda. Otherwise, the vessel retains its historical integrity, being substantially unchanged from original construction. The vessel's material condition is poor and degrading. It has been in the fleet for more than 30 years.

National Register Eligibility Statement

Tulare is an example of a standard *Mariner*-design cargo ship converted for use as a naval auxiliary. The class does not represent a revolutionary design and it did not influence the design of future attack cargo ships. In regard to Criteria A and B, it did support military operations during the Vietnam War and compiled an impressive record of service; however nothing extra ordinary was uncovered that would support eligibility based on Criteria A for this service. Moreover, *Tulare* is not associated with significant persons in our past history. Therefore, *Tulare* does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics necessary for listing.

Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Date: 03 June 2011

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