

**Part 2 Continued from the last issue.**

## **CONVERTING SAIPAN TO ARLINGTON**

The \$11 million conversion included a number of subcontractors who would supply specialized support services not available at ADDSCO. The largest was the J. J. Henry of Philadelphia. A naval architect and marine engineering company. Space was needed to house the Henry employees (this was before Computer Assisted Drawings (CAD) so lots of drawing board space was required). Also, for others connected with the conversion. One of them being a company to deal with identifying the spare parts found on the ship. To get this space an old maritime building left over from WWII was reconditioned and we all moved in.

There were no USN personnel on site at this time except for the officers commuting from Ingalls-Supships and a few civilian Supship employees who would also commute daily from Pascagoula. The emphasis was placed on inspections and surveys of the hull items and machinery (electrical would come later) so Supships assigned a Quality Assurance Inspector to each and an ADDSCO Manager for the conversion and got to know everyone very well as a result of this assignment. I matured rapidly.

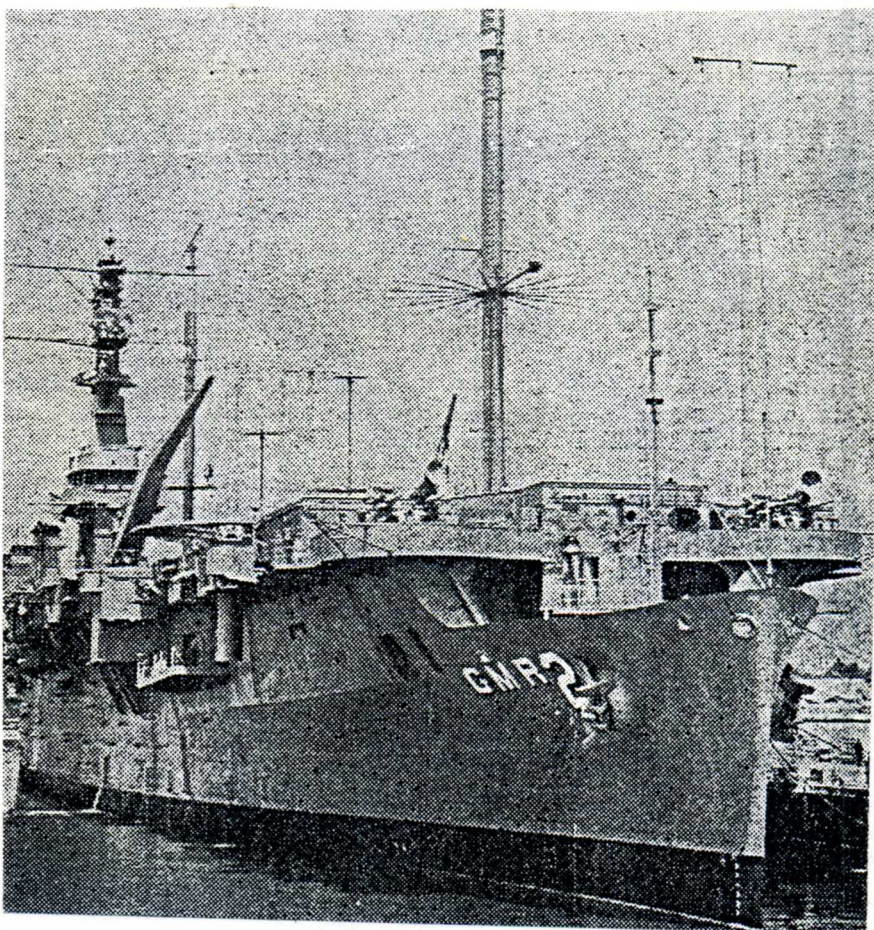
J. J. Henry's job was to provide finished designs as per the specifications for Supship's approval and eventually working field prints. Much of the design work would be based on the prints from the conversion of USS Wright CVL49 to CC2. As prints were verified it was determined what actually existed did not agree with the Saipan prints. In addition, huge amounts of spare parts and all kinds of gear were discovered aboard the ship, including lots of adult reading material. All of this material (except the reading matter) would be off loaded and moved to a dedicated warehouse to await its fate.

Work started on opening and inspecting every tank on the ship and certain machinery was also opened. Eventually, every tank would be entered, inspected, cleaned, repaired, painted and tested. The condition of the tanks was the first obvious reflection of the ship's age. Many cracks were discovered requiring a great deal of welding repairs. Accustomed to commercial work, the yard personnel were amazed at the number of tanks they had to work.

The Hangar Deck. The CC3 was to be loaded with communications gear (all vacuum tube) and other electrical and electronic mission support equipment with which Navy and national leaders could direct battles and even wars. The spacious hangar deck was the obvious location for the additional spaces the ship's mission would require. One of these unique rooms would house a large bulkhead mounted, mobile, situational boards and seating for the President and other leaders. On this level, 4 or 5 elaborate staterooms would be built for the President and those other leaders who might be aboard.

Other spaces would contain various support gear for the new level to function independent of other ship's services. Initial layout lines for bulkhead locations were put down on the hangar deck and bulkhead fabrication started in the shops. Future events would drastically impact this portion of the conversion.

The Flight Deck. Time, exposure and too many landings on the old flight deck had dealt it a serious blow. Because the conversion plans included using the flight deck as an antennae farm, a great deal of repair was required. The antennae plan included a number of antennae mounted on very tall fiberglass poles and microwave dish antennae. The forward and midships flight deck areas had to support these items as well as being waterproof to protect the new hangar deck space. The aft flight deck was to be utilized as a helicopter pad with no antennae in



**USS Saipan CVL 48 after the conversion to USS Arlington AGMR 2**

the area and the aft aircraft elevator was to remain operational. The new hangar deck spaces would require the forward elevator to be inoperable so it was to be welded closed. The deck drains were inspected and found rotted and full of pin holes so they were for the most part eventually replaced. Every attempt was made to salvage the teak deck by caulking but that failed and its fate was to be decided at a later date.

**End of Part 2. To be continued in future Saipanoramas**

## FROM CVL48 TO CC3 TO AGMR2

### Saipan conversion to Arlington, Part three

**John Hodges was an Engineer involved in the conversion of Saipan to Arlington. This is the conclusion to the series of articles he has provided us on the conversion.**

1964 would prove to be a pivotal year for the Saipan conversion. The ship had been at the ADDSCO Shipyard in Mobile, Alabama since March 1963, for conversion to a command ship (CC-3).

Various repairs and new system installations had proceeded for 111 months. The emphasis was on those lengthy jobs such as the installation of the new quarters and spaces for the command personnel and associated support items. Mechanical propulsion and electrical systems were being inspected and upgraded or renovated. Every tank and space had been opened, inspected, repaired and painted.

The CC-3 conversion was about 50 percent complete when on February 20, 1964, the work was suspended by the Department of Defense. The contract suspension came on the heels of the death of John F. Kennedy. The rumor mill was hard at work and a great deal of anxiety was felt by the project team and yard employees. A rumor circulating had President Johnson stating he was going to Texas and not to sea if a crisis happened. Project team members and support personnel were kept busy determining the completion status of the CC-3 conversion for the Navy. Layoffs were highly probable as the suspension continued.

In September 1964, the suspension ended with the announcement to continue the Saipan conversion. However, the Saipan was now to become a communications relay ship to be designated an AGMR. Revised estimates placed the new contract value at \$27 million.

The mission of the AGMR required the addition of electronics far beyond the CC-3 design. As a result, a contract was signed with LTV Range Systems Division to design, install and check out the myriad of electronics spelled out in the AGMR specifications. Eventually, 70 miles of electrical and electronic cables would be installed requiring 225,000 soldered connections. The increased electrical load would later create problems for the ship.

In April 1965 with the end of the conversion near, the Navy decided to rename the Saipan. It was renamed USS Arlington AGMR-2. (A new vessel design was entering the fleet at that time. The LHA. The LHA's were being named after WWII Pacific Island battles and the Saipan name was given to the LHA-2 that was under construction at that time.)

In October 1965, Captain Charles A. Darrah, USN (ironically a native of Alabama) assumed command of the Arlington. Fourteen Officers and 211 enlisted men reported to Mobile to participate in the final conversion steps and the sea trials. The crew had to live "off base" and received \$16 per day for "living" expenses. It was reported that the crew got to know Mobile rather well. \$16 would go a long way in the 60's.

The conversion proceeded to completion including the revision of the conning tower and dry docking in which the hull



John Hodges

was blasted and a new paint job was applied. The forward aircraft elevator was welded shut and became a part of the antennae farm site. The after elevator would remain operational for helicopters. The ship was in contact with another ship in the Southeast Asia area during tests of the communication system. (No small feat at the time.)

The Navy conducted several preliminary sea trials in 1966 before acceptance of the Arlington. During one of the trials the ship's engineering plant pushed her to 37 knots. The ship was later rated at 32 knots. These tests proved the ship was capable of fulfilling its mission but at times she showed her age and continued to be a challenge to maintain. The Arlington's engineering plant was basically good but old. This challenge would continue once into the fleet. Some plant parts were impossible to replace and had to be made by the crew.

The Arlington departed the Port of Mobile and ADDSCO on August 12, 1966 for delivery to the U. S. Naval Fleet at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard where official commissioning ceremonies were held on August 27, 1966.

Much like in her past life as the Saipan, Arlington would continue to make significant strategic contributions to our country. Besides serving in the Viet Nam conflict, she replaced the USS Pueblo following its seizure by North Korea. In addition, the Arlington played a significant role in several Apollo missions. Indeed she was a "can do" ship.

Please see [www.ussarlington.com](http://www.ussarlington.com) for excellent, detailed history for both the Saipan and Arlington.

My thanks to "JJ" Anderson and Roger Booth for their contributions to these conversion articles.

John Hodges

**Editor's Note: It has been a pleasure working with Mr. Hodges on these articles. He has given us information that we could never have found out on our own. It was also a pleasure meeting him personally and having him address our reunion in San Antonio about Saipan's life after we all had left her.**

It was great to hear him say that the ship had reached 37 knots on sea trials. Most people in the fleet did not believe that Saipan could actually go that fast. Those of us who were aboard in January 1951 can remember that Saipan hit 38 knots in speed trials at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Every nut and bolt was shaking but she held the speed perfectly. Captain Woods was in command at the time. Saipan always had great engineering crews and it is a tribute to them that the machinery was still able to perform after so many years. Saipan was actually rated at 33 knots.

The photos with this article were obtained by John Hodges from the ADDSCO Collection in the University of South Alabama Archives. Saipanorama wishes to thank the University for allowing us to use these photos.



## Work Stopped on Conversion

WASHINGTON—The Navy has ordered work stopped on the conversion of the auxiliary aircraft transport Saipan (AVT-6) to a command ship. This conversion was part of the Navy's Fiscal Year 1963 program. No decision has been reached on what will be done with the ship.

The contractor is Alabama Drydock and Shipbuilding Co., Mobile, Ala.

The action is in accordance with a Department of Defense decision not to include a third command ship in the defense program.

Two command ships are in commission in the Atlantic Fleet. They are the Northampton a converted cruiser, and the Wright, a converted aircraft carrier.

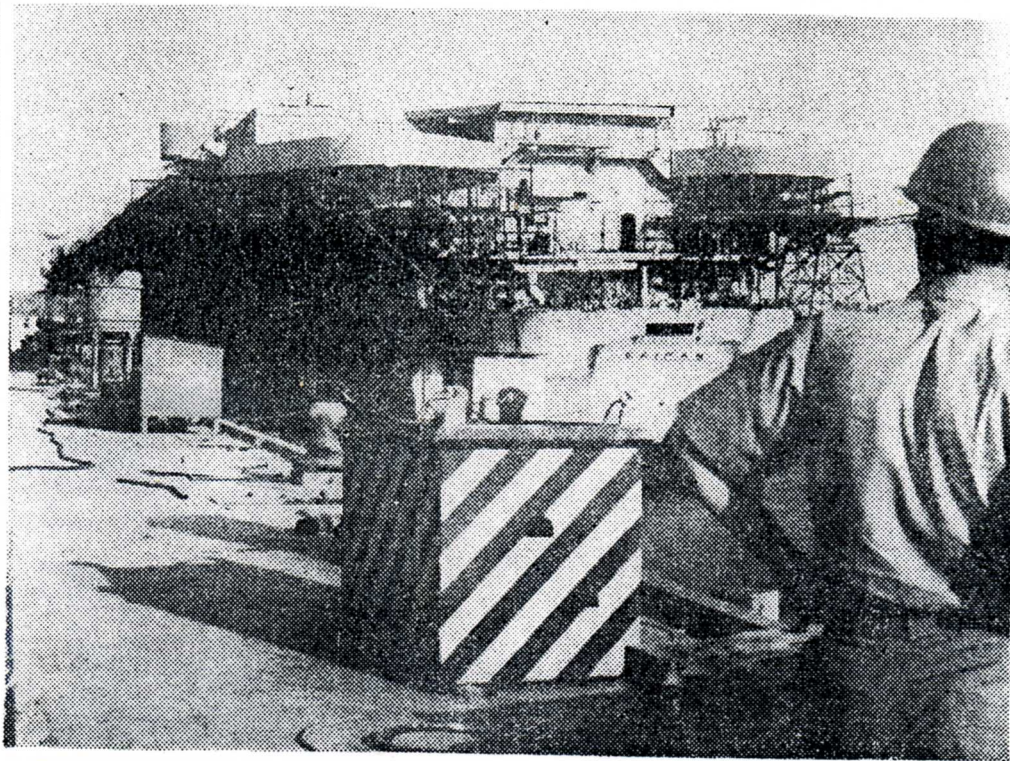
Conversion of the *Saipan* (AVT-6, former CVL-48) to a command ship (CC-3) has been halted. It has been unofficially reported that she may be converted instead to a major communications relay ship (AGMR) in place of the now scheduled conversion of the *Vella Gulf* (AKV-11, former CVE-111). e/ 164

## Saipan Listed As Relay Ship

WASHINGTON—A Navy Bureau of Ships contract for \$11,268,612 with the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co., Mobile, Ala., for the conversion of the auxiliary aircraft transport Saipan (AVT-6) to a command ship (CC-3) has been changed and approved to provide for conversion of the ship to a major communications relay ship AGMR. Amount of the contract has been increased by \$15,617,812 to a new total of \$26,886,424. Work will be done in Mobile.

In February 1964, the Navy ordered the contractor to stop work

on conversion of the Saipan to a command ship, in accordance with a decision not to include a third command ship in the Defense program.



**NEW ROLE**—The Navy is spending more than \$25 million to convert the aircraft carrier Saipan into the nation's most advanced floating communications center. The newly commissioned ship—renamed the USS Arlington—will have the ability to maintain immediate contact with Washington from any sea or ocean in the world.

## *New Role for 1945 Flattop*

### **Navy Making Saipan a Key Communications Center**

MOBILE, Ala. (UPI) — The Navy is spending more than \$25 million to convert one of its old aircraft carriers, the Saipan, into the nation's most advanced floating communications center.

When the job is done, the newly commissioned ship — renamed the USS Arlington — will have the ability to maintain immediate contact with Washington from any ocean.

Wars can be won or lost because of communications. With this in mind, the Pentagon authorized the project.

"The war in Southeast Asia has increased the burden on our communications," said Capt. Charles A. Darrah, commander. "The Arlington will be able to augment shore facilities by operating closer to the fleet."

#### **Never Saw Action**

The ship's main task will be to carry the voice of command and control from America's seat of government to naval forces.

The Saipan, an \$80 million ship launched in New York July

8, 1945, was a pioneer in jet aircraft operations. In 1948 it introduced the first complete squadron of jets into regular fleet service from a Navy carrier.

Although it never saw combat action, the Saipan launched 24 planes to the French in 1954 to aid in the futile defense of Dien Bien Phu in the Indochina war.

The ship is being changed from fantail to bow, from superstructure to engine room. Millions of dollars worth of elaborate equipment is being installed into rooms which once hangared airplanes.

The ship will be assigned to operate with the Pacific Fleet to assist existing communications services or to substitute for non-existent ones. It is scheduled to be completed in mid-January and leave for Norfolk, Va., for commissioning ceremonies.

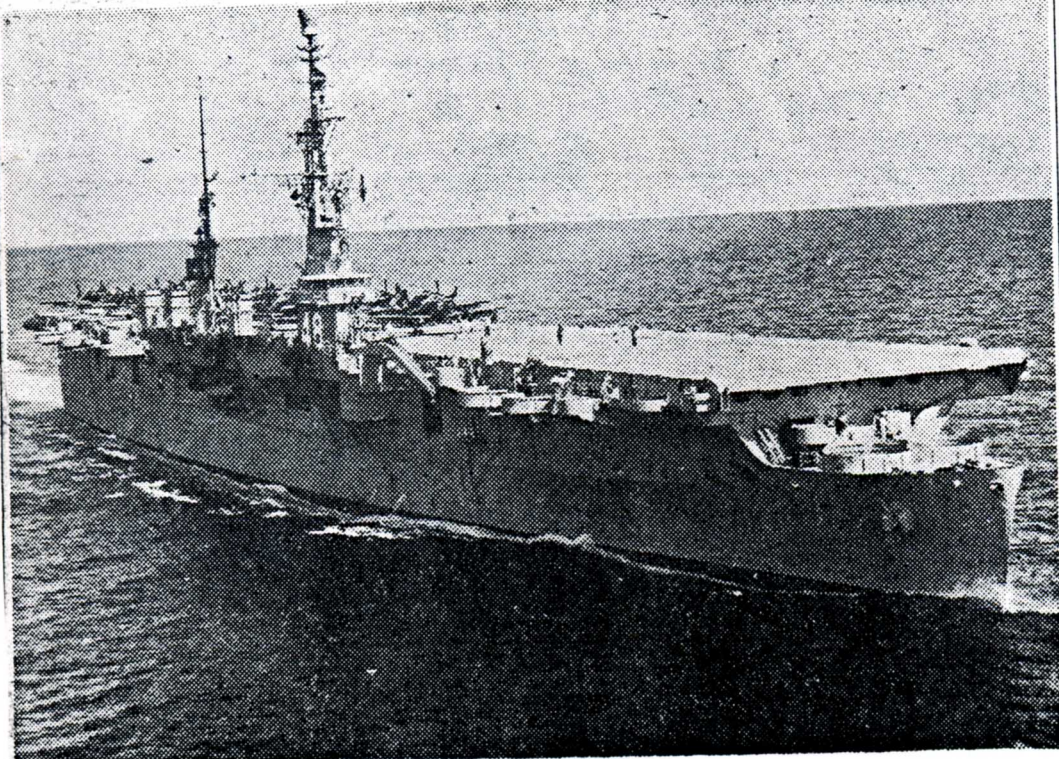
The Navy has big land-based communications centers at Guam, Pearl Harbor, San Francisco, Washington, the Azores and at Balboa. This leaves a tremendous area of the world's sea without major

communications to the United States.

In event of disaster or war, the new USS Arlington will be able to steam to the trouble point and take over.

The ship will carry a crew of 1,000 in air conditioned quarters. Among them will be 300 communications and electronics specialists.

## Navy Halts Big Addesco Job



**NAVY HALTS WORK ON CARRIER HERE** — The 683-foot aircraft carrier Saipan, which arrived in Mobile last March for conversion at the Alabama Drydock & Shipbuilding Co. into a command ship, is shown in this file photo. Addesco was low bidder on the project with an offer of \$10½

million. Thursday the Navy Department in Washington announced the work is being halted although it is 50.2 per cent complete. Addesco officials had not learned of the action Thursday and work at that time was continuing.

By ED LEE

Register Staff Reporter

The U.S. Navy at Washington, D.C., Thursday afternoon announced a halt has been ordered in the \$10½ million conversion of an auxiliary aircraft transport to a command ship at the Alabama Drydock & Shipbuilding Co. of Mobile.

Addesco officials, contacted about the report received from the Associated Press, said they had not been advised of any such action. Work on the carrier — the Saipan — was still in progress Thursday.

The officials said they can not comment on the action until they are "officially notified" by the Navy the work is to halt.

The 683-foot Saipan, with a width of 115 feet and drawing 25 feet of water, arrived in Mobile last March for the conversion. Addesco was low bidder on the project.

### JOB HALF DONE

According to the Navy announcement in Washington Thursday, the conversion was 50.2 per cent complete as of last month.

It was announced that the action halting the work on the ship at Mobile "is in accord with a Defense Department decision not to include a third

(Page 12, Col. 1, ADDSCO)

**12-A—Mobile Register**  
Friday, February 21, 1964

## Addsco

(Continued From Page One)

command ship in the defense program.”

The Navy now has two specially-fitted command ships in the Atlantic Fleet. They were identified as the Northampton, a converted cruiser, and the Wright, a converted aircraft carrier.

Command ships are loaded with communications gear and other resources with which Navy and national leaders could direct battles and even wars. In a dire emergency, the President could be flown to one of these command ships as a haven and command post.

### LAYOFFS EXPECTED

A Navy spokesman told the AP at Washington there will probably be layoffs among the 630 workers now on the project at Addsco. The spokesman was unable to estimate just how many will be laid off. Over-all, the yard employs 1,900 workers.

The Navy spokesman said the Saipan conversion is the only Navy project at Addsco and as of last month, there were no commercial shipbuilding contracts being performed at the Mobile firm.

There was no mention in the Washington dispatch of another multi-million dollar project at Addsco. Last February the firm received an \$8,200,000 sub-contract from the Martin-Marietta Corp. to modify a Liberty ship and install a 10,000-kilowatt nuclear power generating plant in the vessel. This work is still under way.

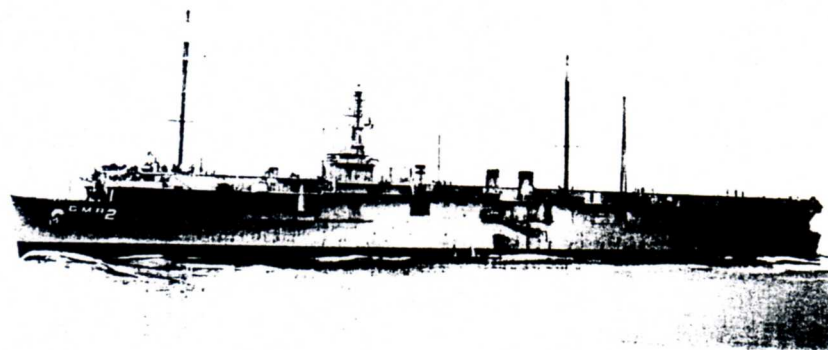
Martin-Marietta holds the prime contract for the project with the Army Engineers. The objective is to provide a ship-mounted system that could in time of an emergency be connected with on-shore distribution facilities and provide electrical power sufficient to support a civilian or military community of up to 20,000 persons. The Liberty is the Charles Cogle.

There are several other ships at Addsco for repair, maintenance or overhaul.

## THE ARLINGTON STORY



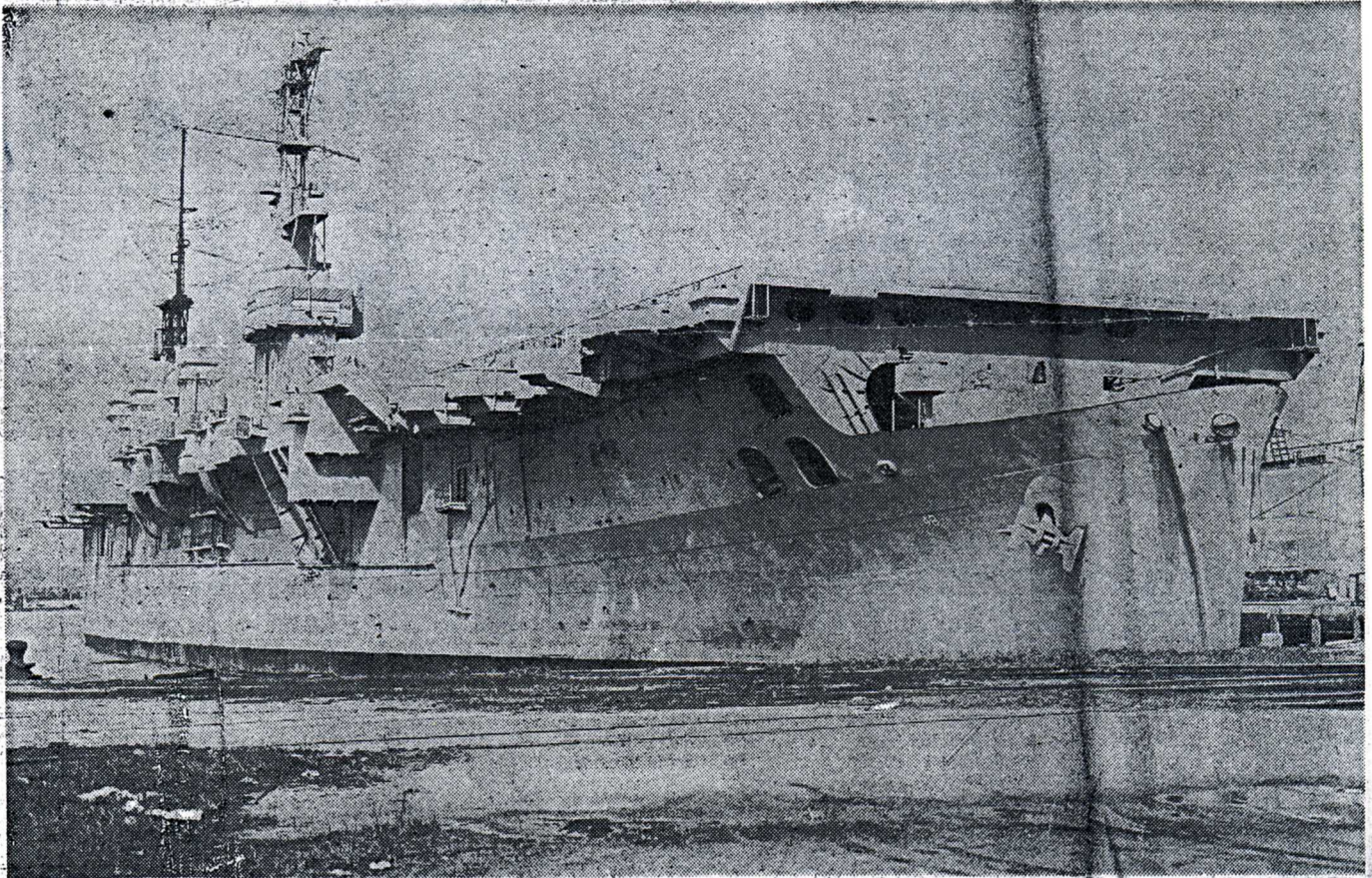
U. S. S. SAIPAN (CVL-48)



U. S. S. ARLINGTON (AGMR-2)

SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 17, 1966

# How Saipan Became USS



**ARRIVAL IN MOBILE**—Built during World War II, a veteran of early assignments to Viet Nam and honored for hurricane aid to Mexico in the early 1950's, the USS Saipan is pictured arriving at Alabama Dry Dock

& Shipbuilding Co. here March 20, 1963, after being towed from the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for a rebirth in a new role in the nation's defenses.

By ED LEE

Press Register Reporter

The USS Arlington, in the final stages of conversion from an aircraft carrier into a major communications relay ship, at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co. here, is to be turned over to the U.S. Navy later this month.

A group of Mobile leaders is being invited to inspect the multi-million-dollar ship Friday. An open house is planned for Saturday aboard the vessel for Addscos workers and their families and families of Navy personnel assigned to the Arlington.

This latest addition to the Navy has been in Mobile since March 20, 1963. She was the aircraft carrier USS Saipan, in the reserve fleet at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. Original plans were to convert the carrier into a command ship at a cost of about \$11 million.

## FIRST PLANS CHANGED

This work began, but was halted after 11 months and

later the plans were changed with the Navy having her converted into the major communication relay ship. Earlier estimates of this contract reached almost \$27 million.

Capt. Charles Alexander Darrah, 47, of Decatur, Ala., assumed command of the Arlington last October. He and 14 other officers and 211 enlisted men have been with the ship observing the conversion for a year.

The U.S. Navy representatives on the work are with the Navy's Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Bureau of Ships, from Pascagoula. They include Capt. J. B. Guerry Jr., Cmdr. A. E. Plow, project coordinator; Cmdr. E. D. Sanders, and Lt. L. W. Riedel.

Addsco's project manager on the three-year project has been T. W. Trawick, assistant vice president of the firm, President J. R. Maumenee said.

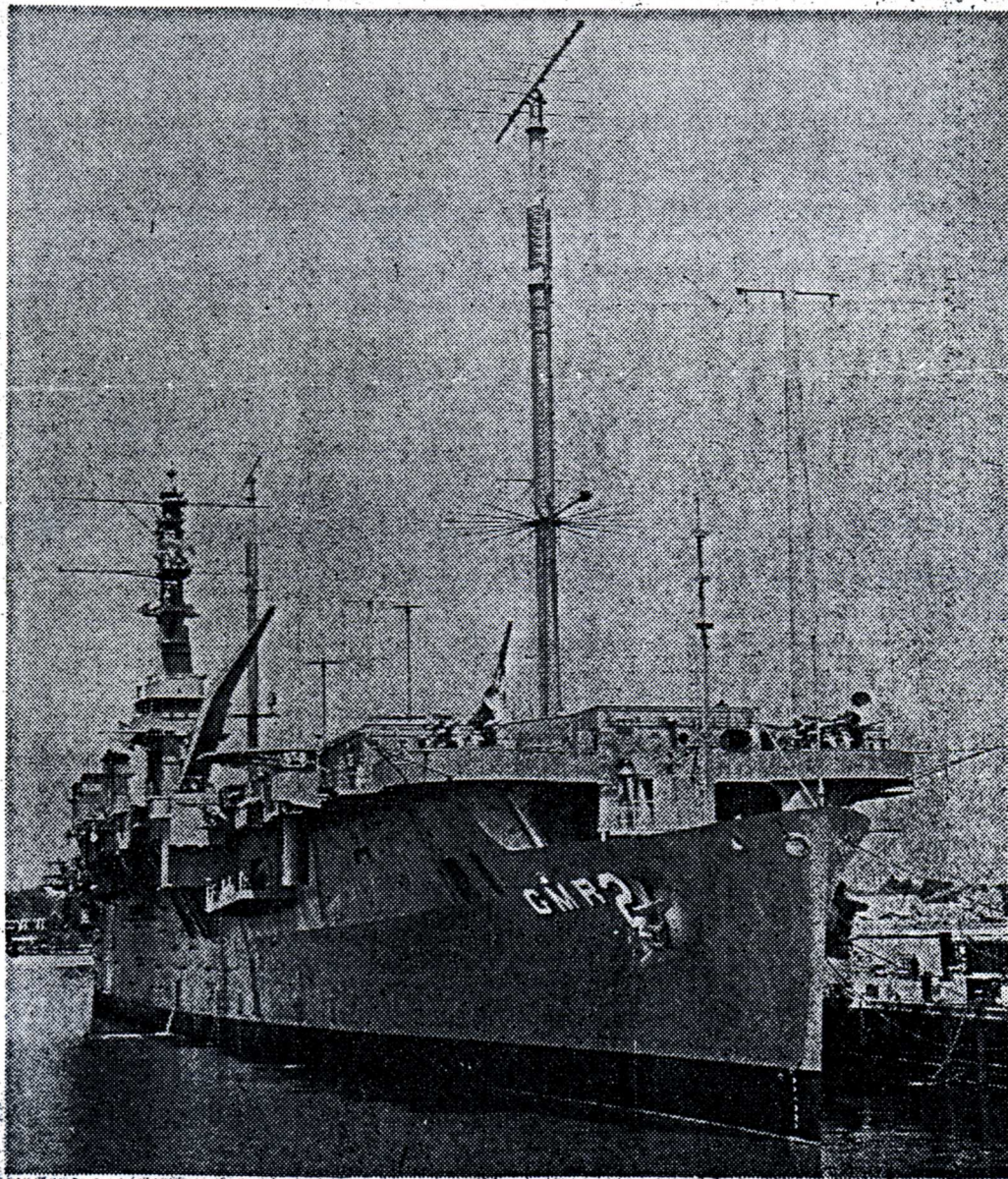
The primary function of the Arlington and the Navy's other similar ship, is to provide naval communications to the fleet and shore stations in areas with inadequate facilities. She will operate with a fleet to increase commu-

tions needed for speed to exercise command of a given situation.

When the Arlington is linked

(Continued on Page 3)

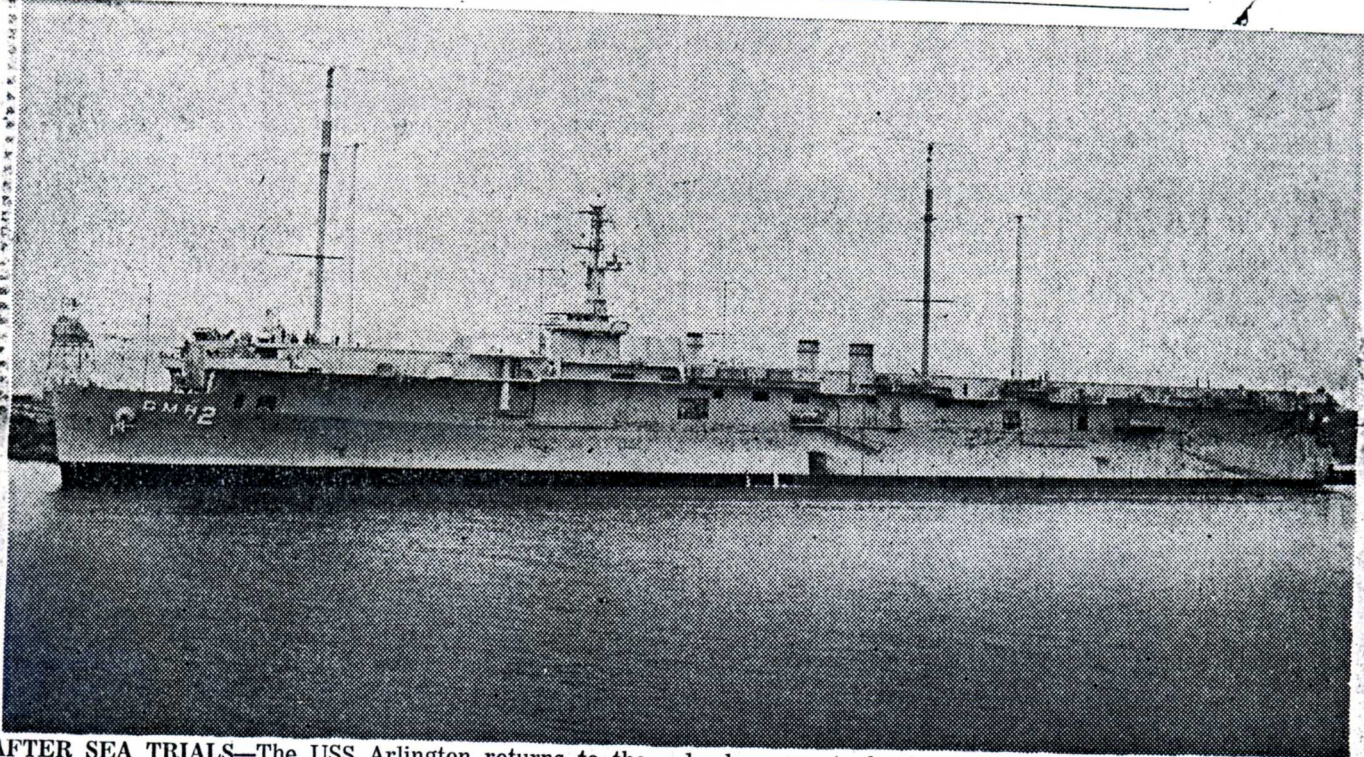
# Arlington Here



**NEW NAME AND DUTIES**—With a new name and new duties as a major communications-relay ship, the former aircraft carrier, now the USS Arlington, awaits recent preliminary acceptance trials conducted

by the Trial Board of the Bureau of Ships, USN, Washington. Many of the changes wrought in the Mobile yard are apparent; even more are not evident.





**AFTER SEA TRIALS**—The USS Arlington returns to the Addco yard in Mobile following successful sea trials. The ship is now being readied for delivery to the Navy at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard later this month. Mobile

leaders are to be invited to inspect her Friday and an open house for Addco workers, their families and friends of naval personnel is scheduled Saturday.

## More About Saipan

From Page 1

into the regular Naval Communications system, she will permit the sending and receiving of messages in any part of the world. In recent tests from Mobile, the ship was in contact with a ship in the Southeast Asia area.

### 69 MILES OF WIRE

Electronic equipment aboard the Arlington utilizes about 69 miles of wire and cabling and has approximately 225,000 soldered wire connections. The electronic systems de-

sign, installation, test and checkout on the ship were provided by Ling-Temco-Vought (LTV) Range Systems. This is a division of LTV Aerospace Corp. of Dallas, Texas. The division is an engineering and technical service organization also conducting operations at various Department of Defense and the NASA facilities.

J. J. Henry Co., Inc., of Philadelphia served as the naval architect and marine engineer for the conversion contract.

The ship which will leave Mobile later this month will go to the Naval Shipyard at Norfolk for final outfitting. This will take about two months. There the rest of the officers and men will be assigned. Many are already in training for service aboard the Arlington.

### COMPLEMENT OF 1,000

The full complement of the ship will be about 1,000 officers and men. The Navy has another major communications ship which was placed in service about three years

ago. She is the USS Annapolis. The Arlington is named in recognition of Arlington County, Va., the site of one of the Navy's finest wireless test stations.

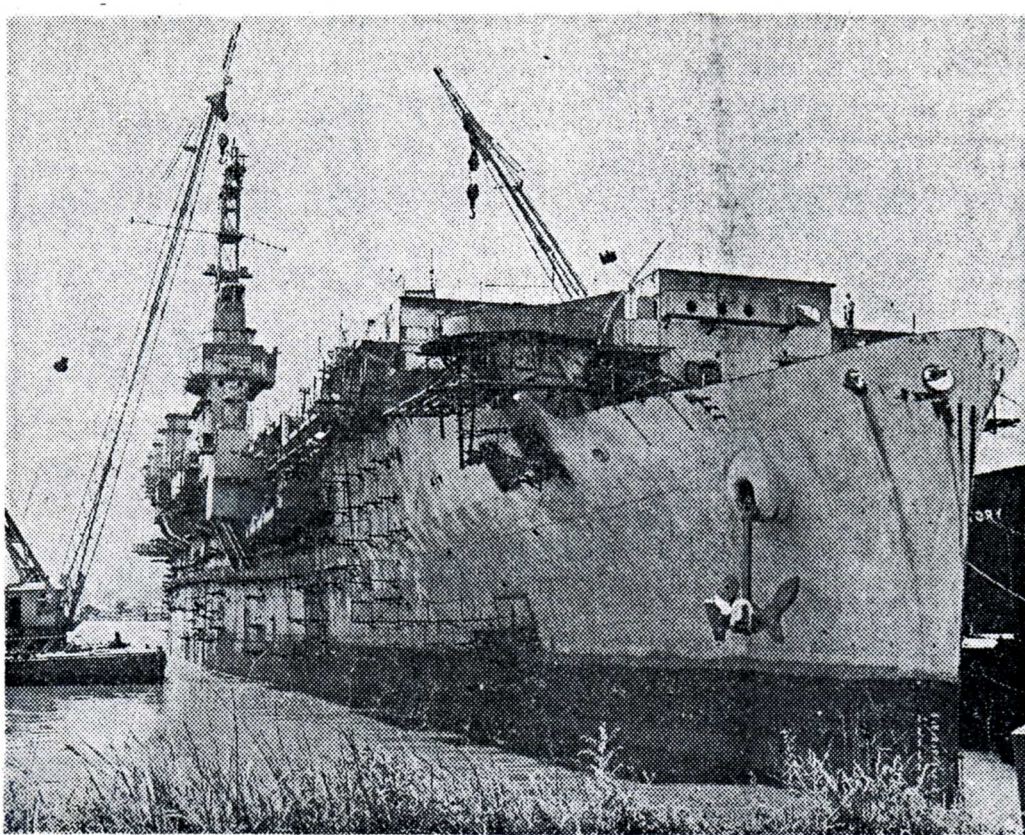
Measuring 683 feet in length, the Arlington has a beam of 115 feet and draws 25 feet of water. She was originally built on a heavy cruiser hull at New York Shipbuilding Corp., Camden, N.J. The keel was laid July 10, 1944, and she was launched July 8, 1945. Commissioning was a year later.

During active service as the USS Saipan, the carrier embarked the first fleet jet aircraft squadron, introducing

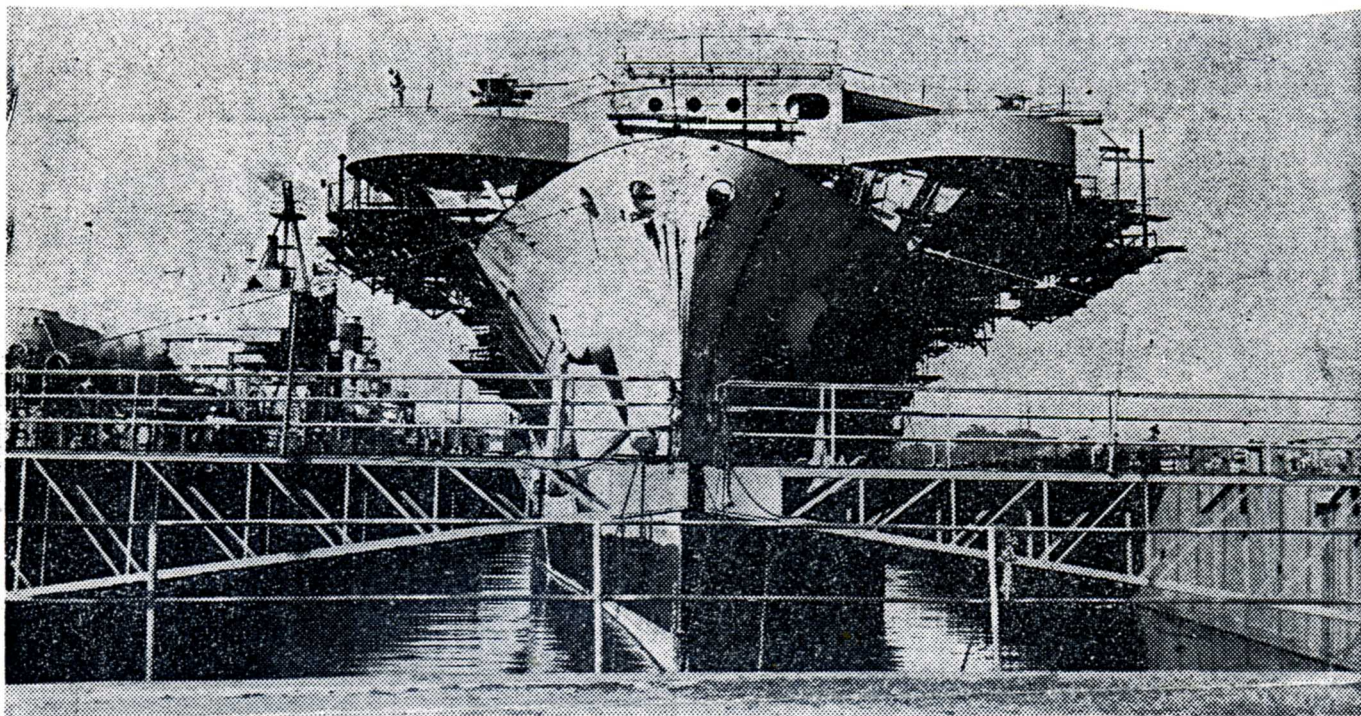
carrier-based jet fighter operations into the fleet.

Aircraft were transported to French Indochina to aid in the defense of Dien Bien Phu, during early fighting in Viet Nam. She operated out of Pensacola in 1955 and 1956 and has been awarded the Scroll of Honor and Merit for Aid to Humanity by the Mexican Red Cross. This was for hurricane relief and life-saving assistance in the Tampico area in the early 1950s.

The vessel was laid up and de-commissioned at Bayonne, N.J. on Oct. 3, 1957, and placed in the shipyard at Philadelphia until towed to Mobile.

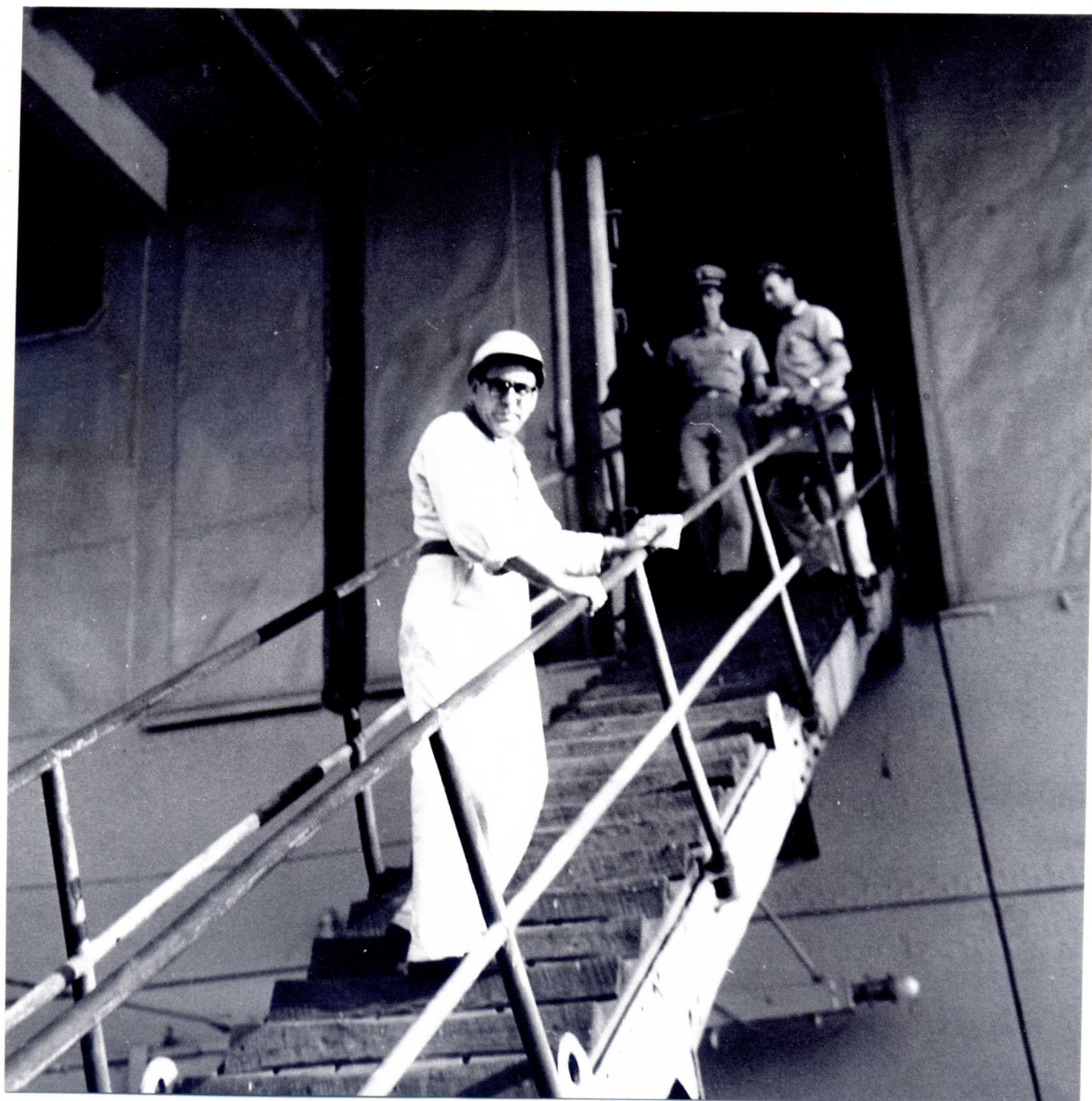


**BIG LIFT COMING**—A shipyard derrick barge is brought along the Navy vessel to enable a crane to remove a part of the conning tower so alterations can be made to the mast.



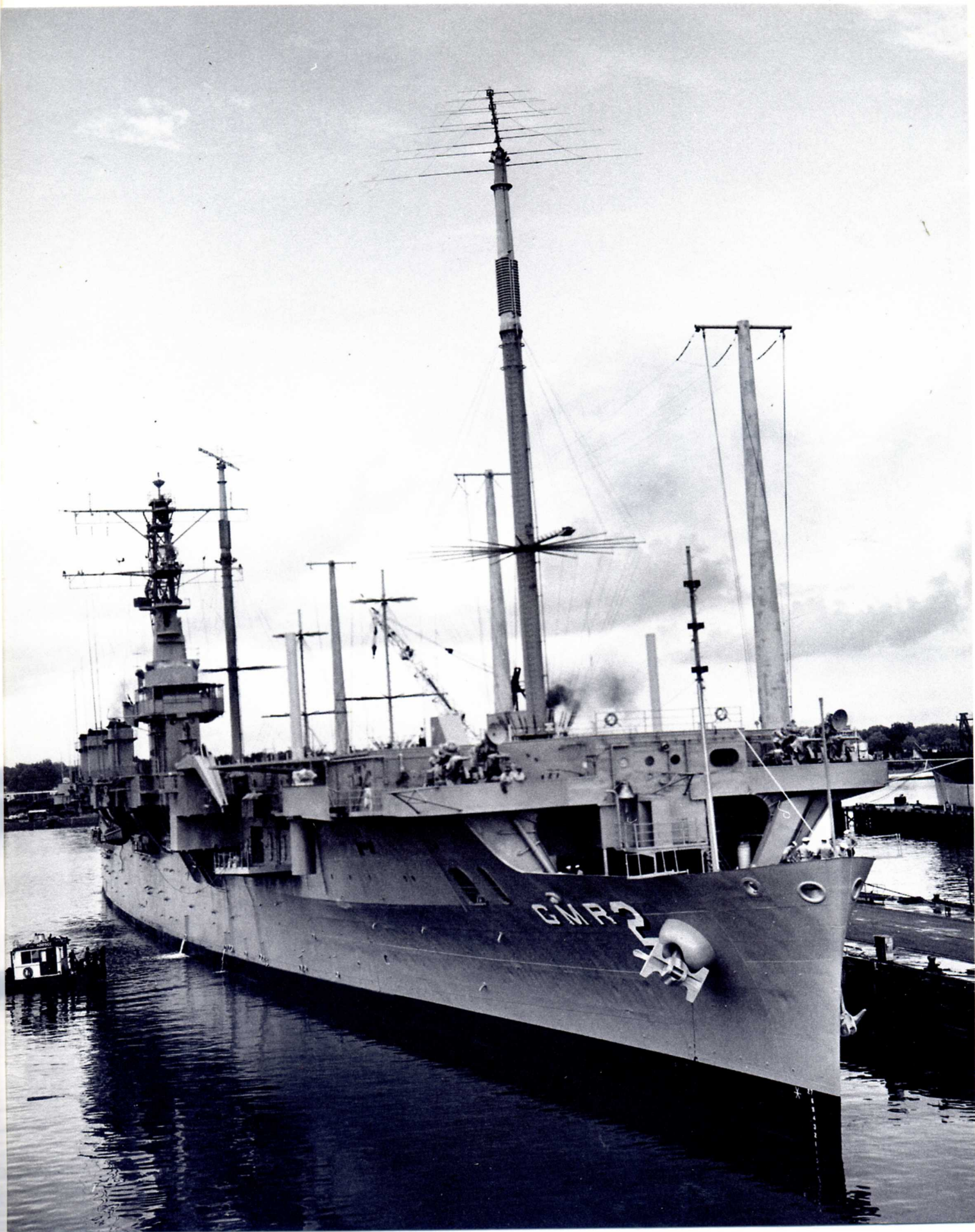
**THE MONSTER LOOK**—Bow-on and in the process of drydocking for tests and inspection, the Arlington looks in this photo like some eyed, futuristic insect with over-sized

antennae. Her new name appropriately recognizes Arlington County, Va., the site of one of the Navy's first wireless test stations.

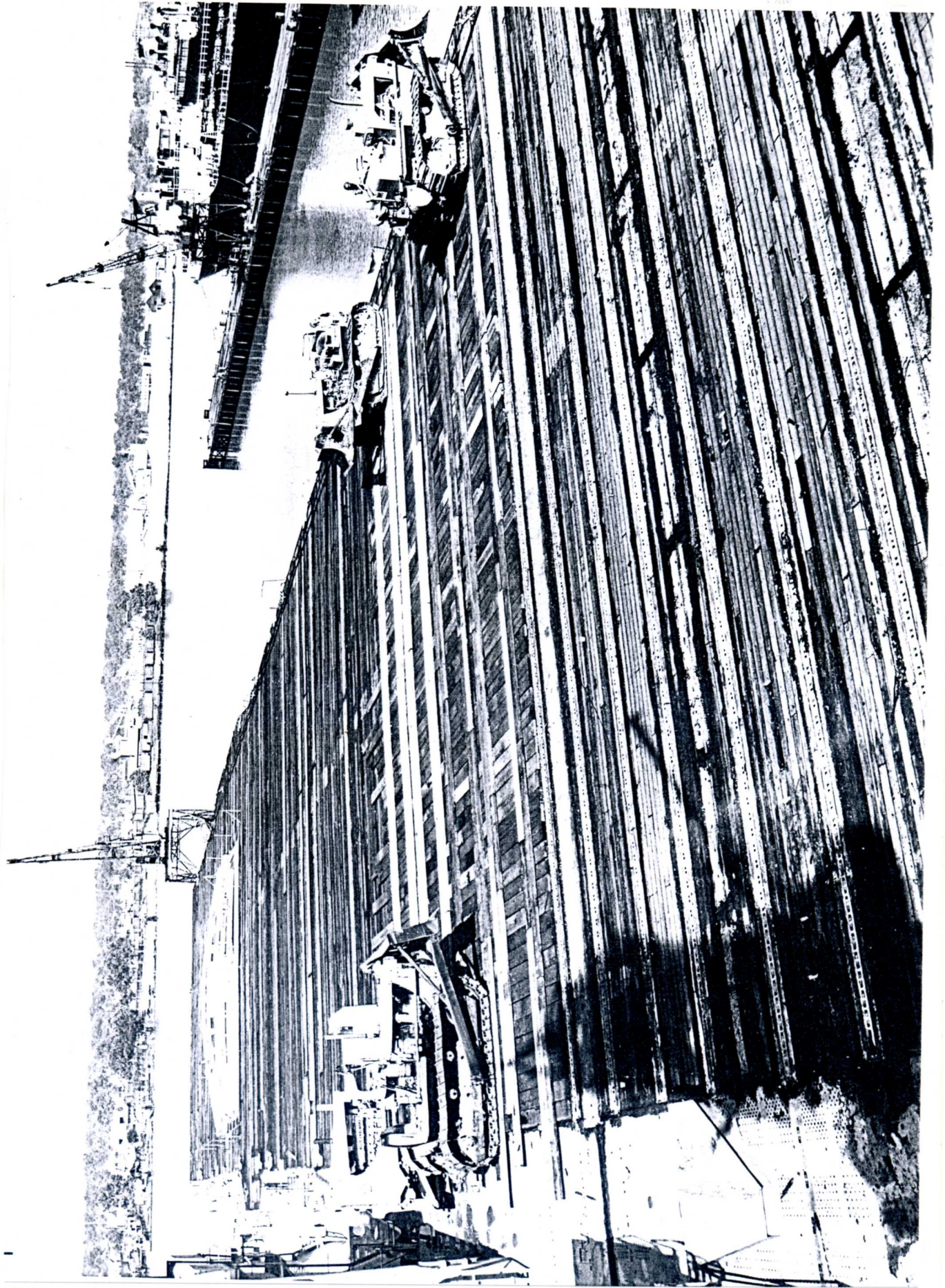


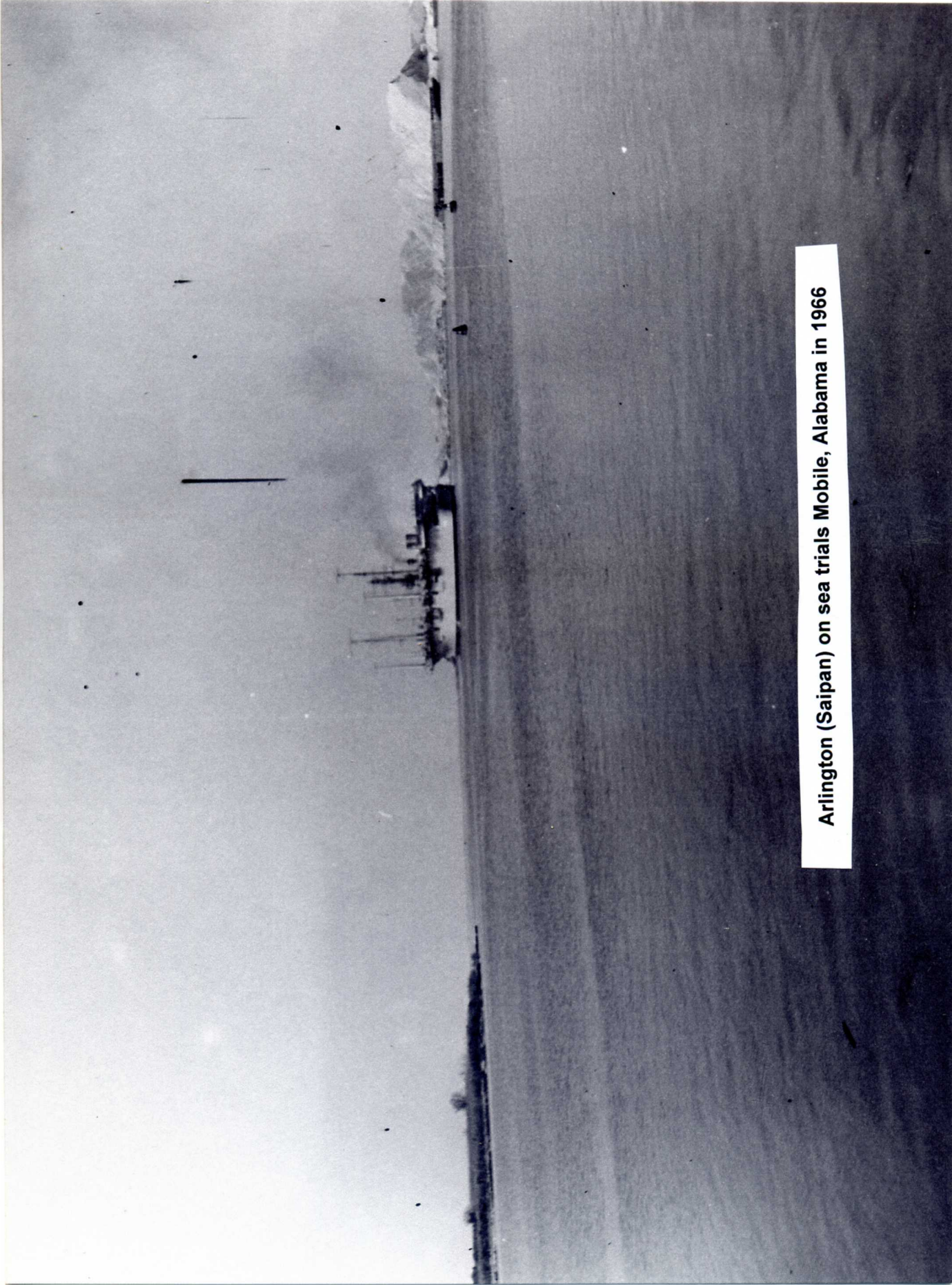
**Mr. J. D. Buffett, the Engineer in Charge of the conversion of Saipan to Arlington  
He is the father of the popular singer, Jimmy Buffett**

---



Wooden Flight Deck being removed during conversion





Arlington (Saipan) on sea trials Mobile, Alabama in 1966



Now described as an Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility, this is the San Diego reserve fleet as it looked in July 1969. To the far left is the stern of the USS *Begor* (APD-127), a fast transport conversion from a destroyer escort. She remained in the facility from 1962 until she was transferred to Indonesia in 1975. Across the channel is the USS *Arlington* (AGMR-2), a communication ship that was formerly the USS *Saipan* (CVL-48). She was stricken in 1975, a year after the USS *Kearsarge* (CV-33) (right) was broken up. *Courtesy L. Cote*

AIRCRAFT  
CARRIERS  
BY  
ANTHONY PRESTON  
1979 BISON BOOKS

Two more light fleet carriers were authorized in September 1943, but this time there was no attempt to squeeze a quart into a pint pot. Instead the New York Shipbuilding Company was asked to incorporate the general layout and conception of the *Independence* in a hull similar to that of the *Baltimore* Class heavy cruisers. Time was saved by using the *Baltimore* machinery, but with six feet more beam there was no trouble in coping with the topweight, and in any case the *Baltimore* design was bigger than the *Cleveland* Class. The two ships, *Saipan* (CVL 48) and *Wright* (CVL 49) were better than the *Independence* Class when finally completed post-war, but like them they were limited in the type of aircraft they could operate and were hardly worth the trouble and expense of building.

With the Korean conflict ended, the process of development continued. Modern jet aircraft reached a size and complexity that made the smaller carrier obsolete. Besides accommodating and operating the planes themselves, carriers had to provide space for workshops and spare parts stowage for their increasingly sophisticated engines and electronics systems, not to mention the larger numbers of men required to maintain them. Most of the CVL's remained in reserve during the postwar years; two of the *Independence* class saw service with the French Navy. *Cabot* (CVL-28), modernized after World War II, provided carrier training to reservists and student pilots. She was transferred in August 1967 to the Spanish Navy as helicopter carrier *Dedalo*. The larger CVL's *Saipan* and *Wright* were recently converted to floating headquarters ships for high-echelon command staffs. *Wright* is now a Command Ship (CC-2), and *Saipan*, renamed *Arlington*, is a Major Communications Relay Ship (AGMR-2).

Another wartime development, the light carrier (CVL) was devised early in 1942 to meet the sudden urgent need for fleet carriers. Nine light cruiser hulls, still on the builders' ways, were redesignated, and completed as carriers during 1943. These *Independence* (CVL-22)-class carriers helped to fill the gap between the carrier losses of 1942 and the later arrival of the larger *Essex*-class ships. Later in the war they were teamed with the larger carriers to form fast carrier task groups, providing fighter cover for the big carriers while their own aircraft were off on strikes. They also joined in attacks on enemy shipping and shore targets. Two more light carriers of the *Saipan* (CVL-48) class were built on heavy cruiser hulls. Somewhat larger than the *Independence* class, they were completed after V-J Day and saw postwar service.