

Origins of the Hulks

When the U.S. entered WWI in 1917, they embarked on a program of shipbuilding to offset heavy losses to merchant shipping from German U-Boats. As steel plate was in such great demand, government support was given for the building of seagoing ferro-concrete ships.

The WWII concrete ship-building program was more successful than its WWI counterpart. Construction was much stronger due to better cement and more steel reinforcements. Concrete bottoms, which eliminated condensation issues in steel ships, were well-suited for carrying dry cargo. These vessels handled well but were only capable of a maximum of 10 knots. All of the dismantled hulks were proud ships in their day - some fought battles of freedom, while others carried full cargoes along the world's trade routes.

In the late 1940s, after rust and rot holed many of the original steel ships, Macmillan Bloedel settled on the collection of concrete vessels as a more permanent solution to their breakwater dilemma.



Did you know?

Powell River is known for having some of the largest octopi in the world, enticing many divers to come explore the Hulks and discover the artificial reef it has created. During a hulk maintenance job, divers once had to remove a twelve-foot octopus from an anchor before repairing a chain.



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The Giant Hulks Tourist Information

*The world's largest floating
breakwater*

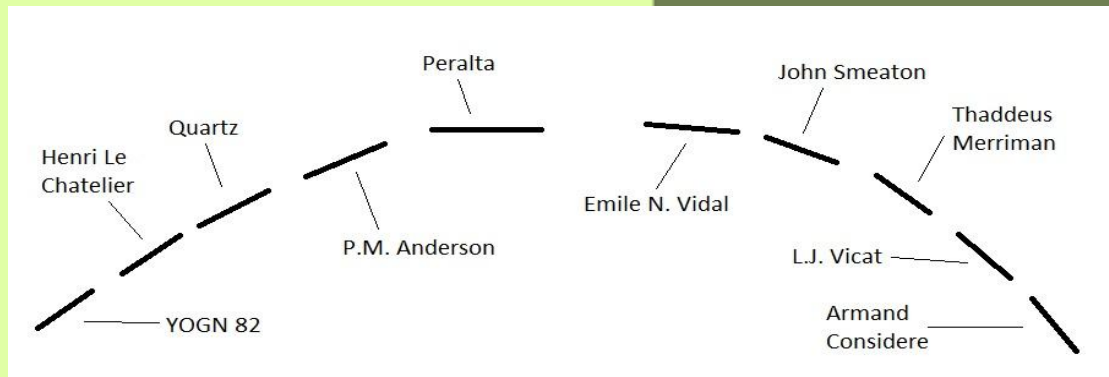


The Giant Hulks

Powell River has the largest floating Hulk breakwater in the world. The breakwater is used to protect the mill's log storage pond. A rock breakwater in such deep water would have cost millions of dollars to construct, while the present Hulk breakwater was assembled for a fraction of the cost.

The ships are ballasted, some with gravel, but mostly with water in their tanks. This places the Hulks 12-15 feet under water, making them stable enough to break heavy waves. They are anchored at a depth of 150 feet with 16-ton concrete anchors, with 8-10 anchors per ship. During storms the ships pull the anchors shoreward, such that every 5-10 years the ships must be repositioned. Divers use electric arc-cutting tools to replace corroded segments on the bottom of the ships.

The floating breakwater was created in the Powell River Company's early days, originally using floating booms, Davis Rafts, Floating Timber Cribs, wooden ships, and steel ships before installing the concrete vessels. The view of the hulks, which can be experienced easily from Marine Avenue's viewpoint in Townsite, is often accompanied by the barking of nearby sea lions. Here is a brief history of each of the present ships, in their order from north to south:



S.S. Armand Considere was built in 1944, delivered to the U.S. army four months later and used as a store ship.

S.S. L.J. Vicat was built in 1944 and used as an army store ship.

S.S. Thaddeus Merriman was built in 1944 and used as a store ship in the South Pacific.

S.S. John Smeaton was built in 1943 and used to trade sugar, and later used as a store ship.

S.S. P.M. Anderson was built in 1944, and was laid up after being used for only one trip from Manila to San Francisco.

S.S. Henri Le Chatelier was built in 1944, operated trading sugar, and was later used by the US Army as a store ship in the South Pacific.

S.S. Emile N. Vidal was the last concrete ship built and launched in 1944. She was used as a store ship in the South Pacific and had to be towed back to the United States after losing her propeller. She was converted to a barge and used for storage.

The **Quartz** was built in 1943 and used as a barge as she had no engines. She also participated in the first atomic bomb tests, "Operation Crossroads," at the Bikini Atoll. After the testing, the Quartz was taken to Kwajalein where she was monitored, examined, and declared free of contamination. The ship was purchased by Powell River on October 23, 1947.

S.S. Peralta was an oil tanker built in 1921. She is the sister ship of the Palo Alto, and was converted into a sardine factory. She is the largest hulk at the paper mill operation and the oldest American-built concrete vessel still afloat.

The **YOGN 82** was one of 22 un-powered B7 A2 barges built in 1944. The YO stands for "yard oiler," the "G" for "gasoline" and the "N" for her lack of engines.

A few of our earlier ships that either sunk or were sold are the **Huron, Charlston, Malaspina, Cardena**, and the **Island Carrier**. The Malaspina was once the pride of the Canadian Fishery Patrol. During WWI she assisted in the navy patrol of British Columbia.