

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

## Veterans and residents flock to homefront shore in Richmond for Veterans Day



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Contra Costa Times*

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RICHMOND -- Between the long procession of admirers, young and old, who thanked him for his service, George R. Coles took a moment to reflect as he stood tall on the deck of the SS Red Oak Victory.

"I'm just amazed right now that I'm alive and able to enjoy this," said the two-time Bronze Star recipient and 91-year-old veteran who survived several island landings in the Pacific during World War II.

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More than 250 people flocked to the city's historic waterfront to celebrate Veterans Day on Monday, where organizers put on a celebration at the site of one of the world's most productive wartime shipyards that blended nostalgic touches from the 1940s with nods to restored attractions that have become the hub for the city's Homefront National Park.

The event was billed as a salute both to the military and Bay Area homefront heroes, including the women who supported Richmond's vital role in World War II history. The celebration featured a reflection on Richmond's wartime contributions, a memorial flower toss, tours of the historic Riggers Loft, Red Oak Victory ship and surrounding attractions, musical entertainment and an advance look at how the Richmond waterfront is starting to be reborn.

Preceding the ceremony was a ribbon-cutting to dedicate the newly restored Riggers Loft, one of the historic buildings of the World War II Kaiser shipyards. The historical restoration represented a collaboration by the Rosie the Riveter Trust, Port of Richmond, the city and Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez.

Dignitaries including Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia and Chevron Richmond General Manager Kory Judd addressed the crowd, many of whom were aging veterans in crisp uniforms.

"It's awe-inspiring to be surrounded by American's greatest generation," Judd said.

Judd went on to pair adulation for the sacrifices made at home and abroad during World War II with what he called "a rebirth" of the Richmond waterfront, thanks in part to cultivating assets developed during wartime.

After the presentations, revelers scaled the wobbly, suspended steel stairs to the SS Red Oak Victory, an ammunition cargo ship built during World War II and berthed in 1944 that now serves as a floating museum.

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Veterans tossed a wreath of red flowers into the Bay in memoriam for the lives lost in war.

"It's really a time to remember, to bring attention to what this country can do," said Cliff Warren, a 65-year-old U.S. Army veteran. "(World War II) was a time when we were organized and came together as a nation for a purpose, and that is something that we've lost some of but we can get it back."

Coles, still standing on sturdy sea legs in his tenth decade of life, looked on as children scampered around the war vessel's deck. A U.S. Army veteran who served as a medic in some of the most hellish fighting of the war, Coles wore his impeccably pressed green "Eisenhower Jacket" and a persistent smile on his ruddy face.

"Why is it important to remember the history of the war?" he said. "Maybe so that we don't get ourselves in another one."

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