



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Humans flock to the SS Palo Alto, commonly known as the Cement Ship, at Seacliff State Beach to witness what looks like an avian invasion on Thursday. The Palo Alto was a concrete ship built as a tanker at the end of World War I by the San Francisco Shipbuilding Company at the U.S. Naval Shipyard in Oakland. Launched on May 29, 1919, too late to see service in the war, the ship was mothballed in Oakland until 1929, when it was bought by the Seacliff Amusement Corporation and towed to Seacliff State Beach in Aptos. A pier was built leading to the ship, and it was sunk a few feet in the water so its keel rested on the bottom. There it was refitted as an amusement ship, with amenities including a dance floor, a swimming pool and a cafe. The company went bankrupt two years later and the ship cracked at the midsection. It was stripped of its fittings and left as a fishing pier. Eventually the condition of the ship deteriorated to the point where it was unsafe for use and was closed to the public. Today it remains at Seacliff Beach and serves as an artificial reef for marine life.