

# D-Day: Stories from the Walls



## Hospital Ships that Docked in Southampton

During the Maritime Archaeology Trust's National Lottery Heritage Funded D-Day Stories from the Walls project, volunteers undertook online research into topics and themes linked to D-Day, Southampton, ships and people during the Second World War.

Their findings were used to support project outreach and dissemination.

This Research Article was undertaken by one of our volunteers and represents many hours of hard and diligent work. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our amazing volunteers.

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# Notes on a Selection of Hospital Ships which Docked at Southampton

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## Introduction

For the D-Day landings, America did not immediately have the necessary numbers of hospital ships for evacuation of casualties from Europe, and therefore UK provided, inter alia, the *Dinard*, the *Naushon* (although of American origin), the *Lady Connaught*, and the *Prague*. The American vessels were *Frances Y. Slanger* (ex-Italian *Saturnia*) and *Jarret M. Huddleston* (ex-*Samuel F. B. Morse*).

There are differences between UK and American terminology relating to “Hospital Carriers”. The Americans characterise them as “*smaller vessels adapted to transport casualties and several were packets*” [WW2Talk] whereas the British characterise them as “*with shallow draught to go close inshore to evacuate casualties*” [Quaranc]. There were also “Water Ambulances” or “Ambulance Boats” which were flat bottomed, could go ashore if required, and stretchers could be carried. Until the French harbours were fit to receive the hospital ships or carriers (hereinafter termed hospital ships), they stood offshore – wounded soldiers were transported by the “Ambulance Boats”, some of which may have been the hospital ship’s lifeboats, and lifted onto the waiting hospital ship. Transfer of the wounded in the period immediately after D-Day was also effected by Landing Craft used to take the invasion forces ashore, some of which were modified accordingly.

The hospital ships, several of which were converted British ferries or coastal steamers, started soon after D-Day shuttling between Southampton and the Normandy beachheads. The ships were heated inside and provided with bunks, and with the necessary operating rooms and personnel for handling medical and surgical cases. They were more comfortable for patients than the LSTs, although without ramps, lacked easy boarding facilities. Once aboard the hospital ship, stretcher cases had to be manhandled from top deck down ladders and narrow passages and transferred from stretchers to bunks, not an easy operation.

Southampton was the primary destination of evacuated casualties from hospital ships, discharging their patients at its Outer Dock which had quayside railway lines. From Southampton, casualties were dispersed all over the south of England, many to country houses that had been converted into hospitals. Medical staff onboard were, depending which Task Force they were servicing, from the Royal Army Medical Corps or the US Army. The hospital ships were painted white, with large red crosses, and identifying numbers were painted on bow and flanks [WW2Talk].



**Figure 1: Evacuating Casualties by Sea**

British army casualties are evacuated through No 32 Casualty Clearing Station at Revers in Normandy to a hospital ship anchored off 'Juno' Beach for despatch to the UK.

Source: © IWM A70 57-1 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008457>

*“At Southampton, the American Casualty Reception Center operated with the help of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Medical Gas Treatment Battalion, supported by elements of its own organic companies, as well as 1<sup>st</sup> Medical*



*Sanitary and 2<sup>nd</sup> Motor Ambulance Companies. After debarkation, the patients were distributed to holding units and transit hospitals. Between 6 and 22 June 1944, over 6,000 wounded disembarked at Southampton. The British relied on Hospital Trains to transport the wounded from the wharves to the transit hospitals, whereas the Americans mainly used ambulances for the first stage of land evacuation. Non-transportable patients were sent to the holding units of the 28<sup>th</sup> Field and 46<sup>th</sup> Field Hospitals in Southampton” [WW2 Hospital Ships].*



**Figure 2: Casualty Transfer at Sea**

Off Utah Beach, Normandy, casualties are transferred from a DUKW to a Water Ambulance (British LCA) for embarkation on the British Hospital Carrier "Prague".  
Picture 10 July 1944. Source: US National Archives.

<https://www.med-dept.com/gallery/evacuation-of-wounded/>



**Figure 3: Casualties in an LST**

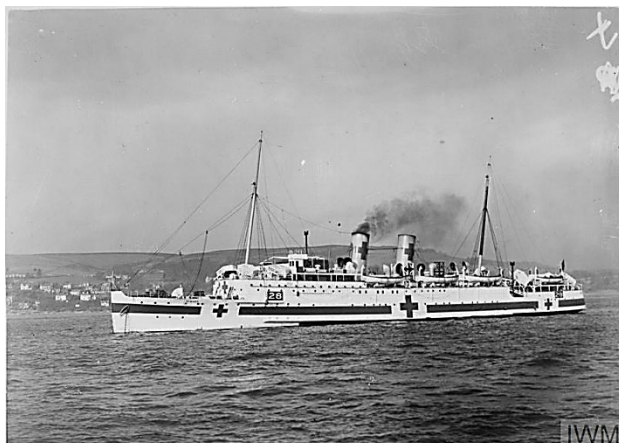
Wounded Marines are being evacuated by LST. The vessel's tank deck has been turned into a hospital ward for casualties, with separate operating room and sick bay. Source: US Marine Corps.

<https://www.med-dept.com/gallery/evacuation-of-wounded/>

## HMHS *Dinard*

(Not to be confused with similarly named French MV *Dinard* launched at Hessle on 12 November 1946 or the SS *Dinard* (1921)).

Launched on 2 May 1924 and completed on 16 July 1924 by William Denny & Bros., Dumbarton from their Leven yard for the Southern Railway Company, Southampton, *Dinard* was registered at Southampton, ON146991. It was 96.3m long with 12.5m beam and 4.57m deep, 2,291grt, capable of 19kts but 13kts in normal service, driven by twin screws from two pairs of single reduction geared steam turbines made by William Denny [Scottish Shipbuilding Database]. It was built for the Southampton–St Malo passenger service with a capacity of 1,500 passengers although it was converted in 1947 to carry 900 passengers and up to 80 cars. Originally intended to be coal fired, during construction revisions were made to oil fired.



**Figure 4: HMHS Dinard off Greenock**

Source: © IWM A 15151

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205119640>

\* \* \*

S.S. "DINARD" HAS SAVED MANY LIVES.  
One day we shall have great pleasure in relating some of the thrilling exploits and experiences of S.R. seamen which have led up to the following commendation:—  
"Major General Sir Ernest Cowell, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.D., F.R.C.S., Director of Medical Services, Allied Forces, wishes to thank the Master, Officers and Crew of H.M. Hospital Carrier "Dinard" for their devotion and loyal service which has resulted in the saving of many lives and the alleviation of much suffering".  
"HALLIARD".

**Figure 5: Appreciation of Dinard's Crew prior to D-Day**

*Dinard*, soon to be used at the Normandy landings is lauded by Major General Sir Ernest Cowell.

The Southern Railway fleet used in WW2 were still manned by Southern Railwaymen.

Source: <https://twitter.com/SunnySouthSam/status/1096685100681625600>

The ship had a busy and varied wartime history. On 1 October 1939, it left Le Havre for Southampton and was requisitioned the next day as Hospital Ship No. 28. At stand-by at Cherbourg until early January 1940, it subsequently rescued wounded there and in early June from Dunkirk. Between December 1940 and April 1941, it operated between Belfast and the mainland, then was lent to the Royal Navy based at Scapa Flow as a floating hospital for merchant sailors, then throughout 1942 operated as a medical shuttle between Scapa Flow and Aberdeen. Refitted at Glasgow for Mediterranean service, *Dinard* arrived at Gibraltar on 30 June 1943 and participated in the Sicily and North Africa invasions shuttling between Sicily and Sodra, Italy. Arrived back in Southampton on 20 April 1944 and readied for the Normandy landings, with a complement of five officers, five nurses and 49 enlisted men, rated for 62 stretcher and 146 ambulatory patients, *Dinard* commenced on D-Day but suffered serious mine damage off Juno beach the next evening. Apparently not having kept to the swept channel, the order to abandon ship was given but two naval trawlers enabled *Dinard* to reach the Isle of Wight, and with additional pumps installed, reached Southampton where repairs side-lined it for over a week. It then embarked 236 casualties off Juno [WW2Talk].

Thereafter until March 1945, *Dinard* ran a shuttle service between Southampton and either Cherbourg or Dieppe into which *Dinard* was the first hospital ship to enter on 16 September 1944, plus three trips between Ostend and Southampton in late 1944. *Dinard* shuttled US casualties for two months between Boulogne and Dover and then was posted back to Southampton on 23 May 1945 to be converted to a troop transport – troopship duties were between Newhaven and Dieppe, then Antwerp and Tilbury for six crossings before being allocated from Calais to Dover [Dover Ferry Photos].

Returned to Southern Railway Company, it was rebuilt by Palmer's of Hebburn-on-Tyne as a car ferry, for use between Dover and Boulogne although cars had to be craned on and off. Ownership changed to British Transport Commission, Southampton in 1948. In 1952, it was fitted with hinged stern doors at Falmouth. Ownership changed on 7 April 1959 to Rederi A/B Vikinglinjen, it was renamed *Viking*, and in 1966 sold to Rederi A/B Solstad. Refitted in 1959 at Ålborg, Denmark, it voyaged in the Baltic between Finland and Sweden until 12 August 1970 when it was laid up at Mariehamn before being scrapped at Helsinki in the autumn of 1973. There is a plaque from the ship on display at the National Railway Museum.

### USAHS *Frances Y. Slanger* ex USAT *Saturnia*

Launched in 1927 as an Ocean Liner named *Saturnia* by Cantiere Navale Triestino, Monfalcone, Trieste, the ship was 192.4m long with 24.23m beam, 9m deep and 23,940 grt designed to carry 1,502 passengers in great luxury, requiring a crew of 502. The ship was capable of 21kts with service speed of 19kts driven by twin screws from two Burmeister & Wain diesel engines and departed Trieste on 21 September 1927 for a maiden voyage to South America, commencing its regular Mediterranean to New York service 4.5 months later. In May 1935, the ship was used as a troopship for the Abyssinian campaign [Wikipedia: Abyssinia] and in December 1935 was re-engined with two new Sulzer diesel engines with grt increased to 24,470 and marginal increase in speed [Italian Lines]. Ownership transferred to the Italia Line in 1937 [Troopships: 55] [The ShipsList].

The *Saturnia*, and sister ship *Vulcania*, were opulently finished – interactive slide shows displaying successive images of construction from keel to sea trials, and also of the various state rooms together with deck and general arrangement plans can be sampled at <https://www.italianliners.com/saturnia-en>

During 1942, *Saturnia* and sister ship *Vulcania* undertook voyages from Italy to Eritrea via Gibraltar and Berbera for the repatriation of Italian civilians in the period April to June with senior British Naval Officer, Naval Party and Military Guard on board [naval-history.net]. There are references to the ship

being interned in 1940 at New York but following the armistice with Italy, *Saturnia* was taken by its crew to New York in October 1943 to prevent the ship from being destroyed by wartime conflict in the Mediterranean. The Wartime Shipping Administration (WSA) leased the ship and its Italian crew during 1944 for use as a troop transport between New York and Europe, operating as the US Army Transport USAT *Saturnia*. At the time, the only US crew aboard were US Navy Armed Guard unit members. Infantry troops were successfully ferried to England and France in 1944.



**Figure 6: USAHS Frances Y. Slanger**

Source: <https://www.italianliners.com/saturnia-en?lightbox=i121eie>

At the end of 1944 the *Saturnia* was converted into an Army hospital ship at the Todd-Erie Basin shipyard in Brooklyn, the medical aspects being overseen by a number of 235<sup>th</sup> Hospital Ship Complement (HSC) who were to embark later, consisting of approximately 400 people with 60 nurses, commanded for much of the time by Col. Gilbert Saynes, a surgeon from the University of Pittsburgh. The patient capacity was approximately 1,600 and it incorporated operating rooms, dental surgery suites, X-Ray, lab services, pharmacy and commissary and recreation room accommodations. As a hospital ship, the *Saturnia* was re-named on 13 February 1945 as the USAHS *Frances Y. Slanger*, and was operated under the US Army Transportation Corps from June until December 1945, crewed by the US Merchant Marine. Four trips were made to Europe to carry patients back to the US between June and November 1945, between New York and 14<sup>th</sup> Port Southampton or Cherbourg, France. The Aberdeen Evening Express and the Gloucester Citizen of 10 July 1945 both reported *Frances Y. Slanger's* arrival the previous day in Southampton as the “former Italian luxury liner reconverted in the United States as the world’s largest hospital ship to take on its first load of casualties”. The name of *Frances Y. Slanger* commemorates the first American Red Cross nurse killed in Europe, about whom much has been written [Together We Served].

In December 1945, the ship assumed its former name as USAT *Saturnia* and from February 1946, undertook several voyages from Southampton repatriating service men and their dependents, and exchange of prisoners. Back with the Italian government from November 1946, it eventually was laid up in April 1965 and broken up at La Spezia six months later.



### USAHS *Jarrett M. Huddleston*

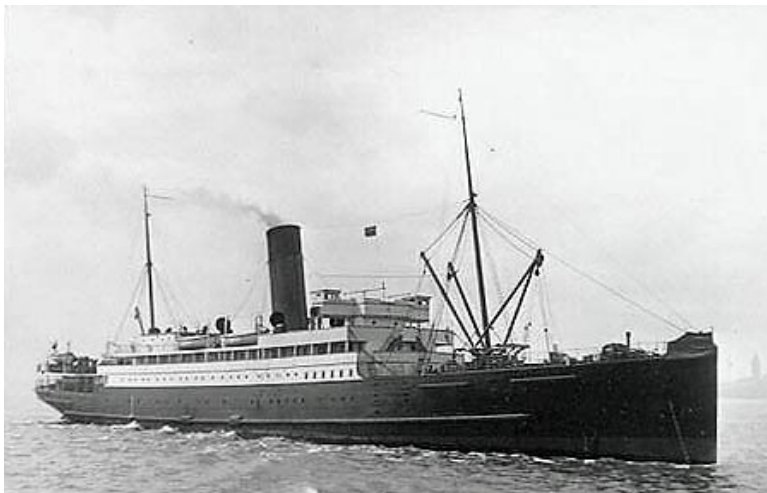
Launched as the *Samuel F. B. Morse*, a Liberty type EC2-S-C1 freighter on 28 September 1942, just 6 weeks after its keel was laid, and completed on 9 October 1942 by Kaiser Permanente No. 2, Richmond, California, [Kaiser] *Samuel F. B. Morse* was 134.5m long with 17.3m beam, 7.3m draught and 7,933grt. It was capable of about 11kts driven by a reciprocating engine. It was involved in two collisions in 1943, repaired both times, then was transferred to the War Department in November 1943 [Wikipedia: Liberty ship].

It was reassigned as an Army hospital ship named USAHS *Jarrett M. Huddleston*, with 589 patient capacity, and converted at Brewer Drydock Company, New York which lasted until August 1944. Departing on 2 September 1944, on its first voyage to Europe, it was to make several voyages from Charleston to mainly Avonmouth, Cherbourg and Falmouth but during the period 13 January 1945 to 10 March 1945, it shuttled 13 times between Cherbourg and Southampton with sick and wounded troops. In September 1945, it made two more voyages, from New York to Cherbourg and Southampton [Troopships: 41, 339], then was designated to transport military dependents, and decommissioned as a hospital ship on 7 January 1946 [WW2 US Medical]. Alterations were effected in New York resulting in a capacity for 326 women and 150 children. Three trips were made as of late April 1946, the first to Cherbourg, Le Havre and Southampton, the second to Bremerhaven, and the third to Southampton. It was decommissioned in the summer of 1946 and scrapped in 1971.

A brief video of General Eisenhower visiting USAHS *Jarrett M. Huddleston* at Cherbourg is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-W-T2vJVMY>

### HMHS *Lady Connaught*

This ship had a varied past, including being a troop ship in the First World War, before being converted to Hospital Ship No. 55 prior to D-Day. Originally named *Patriotic*, it was launched as a passenger ferry



**Figure 7: *Lady Connaught* sailing as *Patriotic***

Source: Simplon. Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License  
[http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/BSS\\_Patriotic.html](http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/BSS_Patriotic.html)

on 7 September 1911 by Harland and Wolff from their North Yard in Belfast for the Belfast Steamship Company, delivered on 28 March 1912 destined initially for their overnight Liverpool to Belfast route. Registered in Belfast, ON132019, *Patriotic* was steel hulled, 99.1m long with 12.65m beam, 4.9m deep, 2,254grt, and capable of 18kts driven by twin screws from a triple expansion steam engine [Harland and Wolff].

After serving as a troopship, *Patriotic* returned to the Liverpool-Belfast route but was withdrawn in 1930, being replaced by more modern vessels, and was given an extensive refit, including a longer boat deck and new funnels, increasing the grt to 2,284 with unchanged overall dimensions. Transferred to the British and Irish Steam Packet Co., it was re-registered at Dublin, renamed as *Lady Leinster*, to serve on the Liverpool-Dublin route, but was quickly renamed again, as *Lady Connaught*

(2). At the outbreak of the Second World War, *Lady Connaught* reverted to the Liverpool-Belfast route, striking a mine in late 1940 near the Mersey Lightship. Badly damaged but without casualties, it was towed to Liverpool and was laid up until 1942 when Coast Lines bought the vessel for £8,500 and rebuilt it as a cattle carrier until January 1944 when it was reconstructed by Barclay Curle in Glasgow as a hospital ship [Simplon].

Rated for 95 stretcher and 246 ambulatory cases, with an American medical complement of 5 officers, 5 ANC nurses and 49 enlisted men, *Lady Connaught* was stationed off Utah beach on 7 June 1944 onwards and sailed for Southampton on 9 June with 450 patients. *Lady Connaught* continued an uninterrupted shuttle service until June 1945 from off the beaches until the French harbours were available, sailing for Southampton each time it had a full complement of casualties. On the first two trips to Normandy, *Lady Connaught* had taken and discharged “*First United States Army Medical Detachment “B” comprising the “station and litter bearer platoons of the 502<sup>nd</sup> and the 427<sup>th</sup> Medical Collecting Companies (31<sup>st</sup> Medical Group); six Surgical Teams of the 4<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary Surgical Group; one Advance Depot Platoon (31<sup>st</sup> Medical Depot Company); six Medical Corps Officers of the 662<sup>nd</sup> Medical Clearing Company (134<sup>th</sup> Medical Group); and ten Liaison Officers from various medical units, including one Officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Command. Also, during the night of D+2 and D+3, personnel of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Hospital plus three Surgical Teams were brought ashore after their ship had been sunk and most of their personal and a part of their organizational equipment lost*” [Utah Beachhead Operations].



**Figure 8: HMHS Lady Connaught - 14.10.1944**

Taken by Sgt. Laing departing Dieppe waters bound for England with a load of wounded soldiers. Source: © IWM B 10825  
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205125966>



**Figure 9: HMHS Lady Connaught Flag  
 “A Blue Ensign Flat”**

Source: © The D-Day Story Portsmouth  
<https://museumcrush.org/ten-objects-from-the-newly-opened-d-day-story-in-portsmouth/>

From June 1945, *Lady Connaught* was laid up at Belfast and it was not until 1948 that the vessel was rebuilt as a small cruise ship, renamed *Lady Killarney*, voyaging between Liverpool and Western Scotland for Coast Lines subsidiary, Langlands. Another refit was carried out in 1952 but it was withdrawn in 1956 and scrapped at Glasgow.

An amusing anecdote by one of *Lady Connaught*'s crew, Dewi Browne, a New Zealander who joined the ship when it was under conversion in Glasgow and sailed to Utah beach can be accessed at <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/d-day-memories-dewi-browne>

An account of one of the 4<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary Surgical Group, mentioned above, with *Lady Connaught* can be accessed at [https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir\\_esc=y&id=lbd7IGP9meYC&q=connaught#v=snippet&q=connaught&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir_esc=y&id=lbd7IGP9meYC&q=connaught#v=snippet&q=connaught&f=false)



## HMHS *Naushon*

*“Just after midnight on July 9, 1942, steamship officials were notified that they had less than 24 hours to turn over their largest and fastest steamer, the beloved Naushon, “Queen of the Island Fleet,” to the U.S. government for war service”* [MV Times]. A similar account was reported by the *Vineyard Gazette* of 10 July 1942 [Time Machine: 1942]. Both accounts make effusive reference to its background serving the islands off Massachusetts, including Naushon, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket.

Launched on 7 May 1929 and delivered on 29 May by the Bethlehem Steel Company, Quincy, Massachusetts for Island Fleet of the New England Steamship Co., *Naushon* was a passenger/cargo ship rated for 1,978 passengers, and could carry cars. Reported as being 76.2m long and about 18.3m wide, capable of about 15kts, it was a steel hulled steamer.

With SS *New Bedford*, another of the Island Fleet, *Naushon* crossed the Atlantic with other ships in a convoy designated RB-1 – this was not easy as both vessels had shallow draughts, not exceeding 4.3m [MV Times] more suited for their inshore service, but was one of the reasons they had been requisitioned to serve the shallow waters off the Normandy beaches. An account of this crossing appeared in a 1945 newspaper and is transcribed in the attached Appendix. For the crossing, the *“promenade deck of the ornate Naushon was closed in with heavy timbers, gutted of most of the passenger accommodations, stripped of most of its lifeboats, mooring chocks were plugged, and the hull painted wartime grey. To defend itself at sea, the ship was equipped with a 3-inch calibre ‘12-pounder’ gun, four 20mm autocannons, four parachute-and-cable rockets, and a rifle for sinking floating mines. To raise the water line, the lower decks were filled with heavy 40-gallon drums of fuel oil, crippling the vessel’s speed and navigational performance, and causing it to develop a nauseatingly top-heavy roll”* [MV Times].



**Figure 10: HMHS *Naushon***

Source: <https://www.med-dept.com/articles/ww2-hospital-ships/>

The conversion of the *Naushon* to Hospital ship No. 49 included sectioning off the car deck into wards with bunks for up to 300 casualties, being 124 stretcher and 176 ambulatory cases, converting the outer staterooms into quarters for the nurses and part of the promenade deck for the officers, with the hull painted white with Red Crosses. Manned by a British crew, the medical complement, as for the *Lady Connaught*, comprised Americans, five officers, five nurses and 49 enlisted men

but were also assigned to Hospital Train No12 [WW2 US Medical]. The *Naushon* was active off Utah beach from 7 June 1944, returning to Southampton on 8 June with 150 patients, and continued shuttling casualties from France to Southampton until May 1945, when with the *New Bedford*, they were assigned to shuttling troops across the Channel until laid up at Le Havre in late 1945, having conveyed over 40,000 troops.

The *Sunday Mirror* of 1 October 1944 reported on nurse Kathleen MacCormack of Renfrew who, found being in a hospital *“too tame”* and joined the *Naushon* as a stewardess, and reportedly was the only woman in the Merchant Navy to take part in D-Day operations. The newspaper quoted her – *“I made fourteen return trips to France and was in the first ship to bring back wounded. I helped in major operations on the deck, working twenty-four hours a day”*.

The original owners did not want *Naushon* which was sold to the Meseck Steamboat Company, and renamed *John A. Meseck* in 1947 for excursions in the New York area. By 1969, *John A. Meseck* was in a Delaware junkyard and was scrapped in 1974 [Bethlehem Steel].

### *HMS Prague*

Launched on 18 November 1929 and completed the following February by John Brown & Co., Clydebank for the London & North Eastern Railway Co., Marylebone Station, London N.W.1 [Scottish Shipbuilding Database], *Prague* was a 2-masted steam Passenger Ferry rated for 548 passengers. *Prague* was 106.9m long with 15.27m beam and a depth of 7.92m, and was registered at Harwich on 15 February 1930 with ON161036 and 4,220grt and was equipped with twin screws driven by four steam turbines SR geared built by John Brown [CLIP] for a service speed of 21kts [Harwich & Dovercourt].



**Figure 11: HMHS Prague anchored off Omaha Beach**

**Source: The Mighty Endeavour Veterans' Legacies**

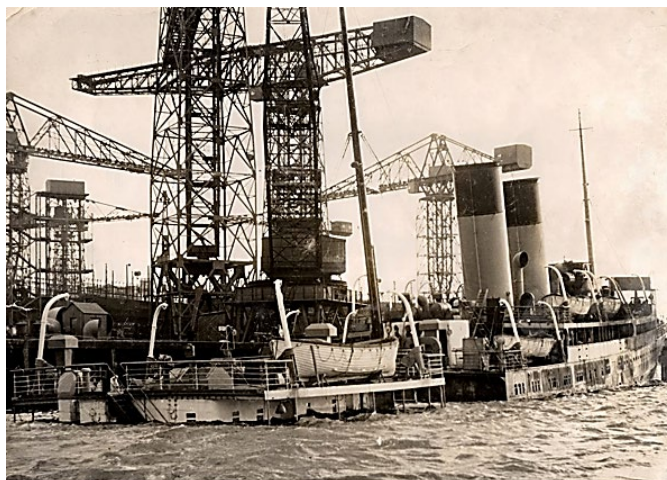
<https://www.themightyendeavor.com/media/hospital-ship-off-normandy-14492/14141>

*Prague* served the Harwich to Hook of Holland route from 1 March 1930 until requisitioned in 1939 and then returned to the same ferry service from 14 November 1945 until late 1947. Deployed for the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, *Prague* was damaged by German bombers at 09.27 on 1 June 1940 13 miles at 115° from North Foreland – destroyer *Shikari*, sloop *Shearwater* and minesweeper *Queen of Thanet* came to its rescue and *Prague* was towed then beached on Sandwich Flats. It was refloated on 6 June and anchored in the Downs until tugs arrived to tow it to London (On 1 June 1940, 64,429 troops were evacuated from Dunkirk) [naval-history.net].

On 28 March 1944, *Prague* departed Aberdeen for North Shields where it was converted to Hospital Ship No. 61 and equipped for 194 stretcher and 228 ambulatory cases [WW2 Medical]. As with similar hospital ships serving the casualties from landings on the American beaches, HMHS *Prague* was manned by a British crew and American medical staff comprising five officers, 6 nurses and 49 enlisted

men and arrived at Omaha Beach soon after the landings commenced. *Prague* continued shuttling between the beachheads, then from both Dieppe and Cherbourg to and from Southampton, and was paid off after reaching there on 11 June 1945, reverting to L.N.E.R.

As mentioned above, *Prague* had reverted to the Harwich-Hook of Holland service but having subsequently returned to Clydebank for a refit, it sank on 15 March 1948 following an explosion and fire the previous day. Refloated on 6 May 1948, it was taken to Barrow-in-Furness arriving on 14 September 1948 to be broken up.



**Figure 12: SS Prague after Explosion and Fire 1948**

Source: Harwich and Dovercourt

<http://www.harwichanddovercourt.co.uk/harwich-ships/london-north-eastern-railway/>

Footnote: American war correspondent Martha Gellhorn, wife at that time of Ernest Hemingway, contrived to stow away on *Prague* and witnessed the D-Day landings, and is believed to have been the only woman to go ashore on D-Day. There are several references on-line for Martha Gellhorn including a video of that first landing. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Su2NzSZM4Uk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Su2NzSZM4Uk) and this extract from <https://blog.genealogybank.com/martha-gellhorn-war-correspondent-reporting-from-d-day.html> :

*'Her report of what she saw was published by Collier's under the title "The Wounded Come Home." Her article described the nurses who tended the injured and dying, as well as what she saw when she reached the beach – but it did not reveal what she had to do to get to France:*

*"Then we stopped noticing the invasion, the ships, the ominous beach, because the first wounded had arrived. An LCT drew alongside our ship, pitching in the waves. A boy in a steel helmet shouted up to the crew at the aft rail, and a wooden box looking like a lidless coffin was lowered on a pulley, and with the greatest difficulty, bracing themselves against the movement of their boat, the men on the LCT laid a stretcher inside the box. The box was raised to our deck, and out of it was lifted a man who was closer to being a child than a man, dead-white and seemingly dying. The first wounded man to be brought to that ship for safety and care was a German prisoner".'*

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## Appendix – *Naushon* Atlantic Crossing

### Transcribed from the *Sunday Post* of Sunday 20 May 1945

Courtesy of the British Newspaper Archive – Accessed April 2020

Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000566/19450520/023/0003>

### ***Our Craziest Fleet!***

#### ***DECEIVED GOEBBELS AND FOUGHT U-BOATS***

*The truth about one of Goebbels' greatest boasts— that three troopships of the Queen Mary class had been sunk—is revealed by the Ministry of War Transport today. It is one of the most remarkable stories of the war.*

*D-Day planners in July 1942 had to find vessels suitable for use as cross-Channel personnel and hospital ships. No such ships could be found in this country.*

*When London learned from their emissaries in the United States that the only steamers that had been chartered were frail inshore or lake ships – ‘skimming dishes’ with enormous superstructures designed for holidaymakers – they received the news with mixed feelings.*

*There was no difficulty in getting British crews to volunteer for the job, but getting the ships made ready for the voyage was a heartbreak.*

*The work had to be done with the utmost speed, for the season of equinoctial gales was approaching, and it was important to get the ships to Britain before the weather broke. An Atlantic gale might prove disastrous.*

*On September 21, 1942, the fleet sailed from St. John, N.S. It included the Boston, New York, Northland, Southland, Yorktown, President Warfield, New Bedford, and Naushon.*

*With their enormous superstructures timber blanketed and their slim hulls fortified for the voyage, these ships must surely have been the weirdest fleet ever to brave the Atlantic crossing.*

*Many a lookout, observing their progress – rolling heavily, with short, quick movements, in the confused swell – must have rubbed his eyes and wondered whether he was dreaming.*

*On the fourth day out, when 700 or 800 miles west of Ireland, a Commodore signalled, 'Enemy submarines in vicinity!'*

*Early in the afternoon of the fifth day the Boston was struck by two torpedoes, and sank rapidly by the stern.*

*Then began a battle between the frail pleasure craft and the U-boat pack that will be remembered as long Britons use the sea. Even Goebbels was forced to pay tribute.*

*Announcing the action, and incidentally claiming to have sunk 'several ships of the Queen Mary class' (naming as probable the Duchess of Bedford and the Reina del Pacifico), Berlin radio stated – 'The defence was so fierce that it could not be observed whether two or more of the transports hit sank or not.'*

*The Southland was the first to into action, firing 14 rounds from her 12-pounder at a periscope that appeared on the starboard quarter. The periscope disappeared.*

*Another emerging on the port quarter was greeted by 18 rounds from the gunners and vanished. 'After that,' Captain John Williams reports, 'nothing more was seen of the enemy.'*

*Meanwhile the President Warfield was being attacked, a torpedo being seen approaching abaft her port beam. The helm was put hard a-starboard, and the torpedo passed 30 feet away.*

### **'Cor, Look!'**

*Two minutes later, sighting the outline of the submarine close on his port quarter, the master opened fire with his 12-pounder, and signalled by steam whistle to H.M.S. Veteran, which went in to the attack. It is considered unlikely that submarine returned to its base.*

*The Naushon, commanded by Captain J. J. Murray, a genial Irishman from Waterford, did not use her guns, but took successful evasive action by bold alterations of course and steaming to maximum speed.*

*As she passed the stricken Boston one of the Naushon's crew was appalled by the floating stores with which the sea was littered. 'Cor,' he exclaimed regretfully, 'look at all them good chickens going to waste!'*

*The New York, carrying the vice-commodore, Captain C. Mayers, was the next casualty. She was torpedoed at dusk, and began to settle slowly.*

*The New Bedford and the destroyers performed miracles of rescue work in the gathering gloom, Chief Officer Kay, of the New Bedford, sacrificing his life to save his comrades.*

*Captain Mayers, the well-known Irish passenger line skipper, went down with his ship.*

*The escort did not escape unscathed. While still searching for survivors of the New York, H.M.S. Veteran was hit and sank. With her, amongst many gallant men, went the Commodore of the convoy, Captain R. S. Young, who had been picked up from the Boston. Like Captain Mayers, he had been in Irish passenger liners in pre-war days.*

*The Yorktown was torpedoed about 9 p.m., and sank in three minutes. Says Captain W. P. Boylan. 'I was hauled on board a raft by the chief engineer and fireman. We then rowed here and there, wherever we heard shouting, or saw any of life, and finished up with 19 men the raft.*

*'Next morning, I saw a raft which had the chief and third officer on board, one raft with three men on it, and also, a lifeboat in the distance.*

*'About noon we observed four-engined bomber, which came down and circled round us for about two hours. Finally, he dropped provisions to each party and made off. Only one party retrieved their provisions.'*

*The men were on these rafts for 46 hours, in rough seas, and with a bitter wind blowing strongly, but their morale never wavered.*

*One by one the gallant surviving ships made port—Naushon and Northland into Londonderry, President Warfield into Belfast, and thence to a repair port, Southland and New Bedford into Greenock.*

*All the masters and chief engineers, together with fourteen officers and other ratings, received decorations from the King, a much-appreciated tribute to a great adventure.*

The National Archives – T335/63 – includes two Merchant Navy awards listed in the London Gazette of 11 May 1943 for the *Naushon*. James Henty Harrison, Chief Engineer was awarded the OBE, and Joseph James Murray, Master, was awarded a Commendation.