

Horses at Sea



Horses arrive in Southampton Docks from the Romsey Remount Centre

Horses played a vital role in the First World War, headed to the fighting fronts in their hundreds of thousands. To get there, they had to cross the sea. This article explores maritime horse transport and the dangers and difficulties associated with it. This article has been researched and written by MAT volunteer Roger Burns.

Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War







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Research Report

During the Maritime Archaeology Trust's Heritage Lottery funded Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War project, scores of volunteers undertook online research into vessels that were lost off the south coast of England during the First World War.

Their findings were used to populate the project database and contributed to Site Reports. Both are publicly available via the Forgotten Wrecks website.

This Research Report 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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Equine Tragedy & *Japanese Prince* Written and researched by MAT volunteer Roger Burns

When you think of the First World War, you probably don't think of the essential contribution of horses and mules to the war effort, and even less of the related staggering statistics. MAT volunteer Roger Burns writes of this enormous contribution and sacrifices made by horses and mules during the war and looks at associated maritime equine transport.

There are many available sources of statistics but a summary extract (Wikipedia) illustrates the sheer numbers:

World War 1 in Photos: Animals at War [Alan Taylor 2014] depicts the many uses of animals including horses and several fascinating images are included. *Animals and War* [Matthew Shaw: British Library 2014] gives a detailed background of animals in the First World War including:

- "Railways, trucks and ships transported munitions for much of their journey, but they also relied on hundreds of thousands of horses, donkeys, oxen and even camels or dogs for their transport.
- Horses helped to distribute 34,000 tons of meat and 45,000 tons of bread each month. The animals themselves needed feeding and watering, and British horses had to carry some 16,000 tons of forage each month.
- The resupply of horses and other animals was a major concern.

Transport and Supply During the First World War [Mark Whitmore 2018] makes the point that "the fodder for the horses alone took up more transportation capacity than food and ammunition for the men".

Historically, equine maritime transport is mentioned by the Greeks in 1500BC [Museum of the Horse]. *Think Like a Horse* [Rick Gore 2004] states that *William the Conqueror of Normandy put approximately 3,000 horses on 700 small sailing ships and headed across the channel to England.* Gore continues his narrative with the estimated logistical statistics required for water, fodder, horseshoes and the like required for this undertaking, and the figures are truly eye catching! He continues with one



explanation of the derivation of the "Horse Latitudes" although there are alternative derivations. (Wikipedia Subtropical ridge)

Maritime equine transport continued through other conflicts, such as the Boer War and some of the ships used in the Boer war were used in the First World War.

Experience of maritime transport of horses and mules had focussed the veterinary profession to improve the conditions for this type of transport (Birch Hill Station WW1 Memorial Ride). The *Atlantic Transport Line* took this on board at the very end of the 19th century and instituted new and improved methods of maritime shipment of horses including ensuring that conditions at the Royal Albert Docks were advanced providing purpose-built stables with the health of the horse uppermost (Atlantic transport Docks). The Atlantic Transport Line also moved an entire circus from New York to London but their 36-year-old stallion, Eagle, died en route and was buried at sea off Bishop Rock (Atlantic transport Circus). This fleet also operated SS *Mobile* which became USAT *Sherman*, 5,780grt and the SS *Manitoba* renamed USAT *Logan*, 5,670 grt, both of which could carry 80 officers, 1,000 men and 1,000 horses used mainly in the Pacific prior to the First World War and their inclusion here is to demonstrate the capacity for transporting horses at sea in bulk. (Atlantic Transport Mobile and Manitoba).

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, Canada responded promptly by sending a convoy, 1st Canadian Division, Canadian Expeditionary Force, on 3 October 1914 with 32 merchant ships belonging to a variety of shipping lines plus escorts from Quebec to Avonmouth, Plymouth and Southampton and included, inter alia, 7,679 horses and 705 horsed vehicles. (1st Canadian Troop Convoy).

During the First World War, there were many UK remount depots but the principal remount depots were Shirehampton (for horses received at Avonmouth), Romsey (for Southampton), Ormskirk (for Liverpool), and Swaythling (a collecting centre for horses trained at the other three centres for onward shipment overseas). (The Long, Long Trail).

Shirehampton Remount Depot – Shirehampton Remount depot was a key arrival point of horses shipped in from across the Atlantic, mainly from USA and Canada numbering nearly 500,000 but also from Argentina. *Built on the western outskirts of Bristol, it was opened in October 1914 as a stabling and training facility for horses and mules for the British army. The Depot's principal purpose was to provide two weeks' quarantine and training before the horses and mules were despatched to the Western Front*. (Shirehampton Remount Depot)

Romsey Remount Depot - Situated some 5 to 6 miles north west of Southampton docks, Romsey Remount depot was heavily utilised with at times, over 4,000 horses and mules being tended. *The length of stay was probably about a month, either for training or recuperation. A steady stream of*



horses walked from Romsey to Southampton Docks. In March 1917, 1,200 Romsey horses were embarked from Southampton in three days, and another 1,000 in the following week. (Romsey Remount Depot).

Ormskirk Remount Depot – This depot is associated with Lathom Park and the Remount depot established at the Park. Horses arriving at Liverpool docks were transported by rail to Ormskirk station and then walked to Lathom Park, as remembered by the Lathom & Burghscough Heritage Society. (LBMHS).



Swaythling Remount Depot – The Willis Fleming Historical Trust has an extensive website and mentions that Swaythling Remount Depot was *constructed at North Stoneham Park and Bassett, on the edge of Southampton, to collect, sort, and supply horses and mules for war service. The Swaythling Remount Depot was the centre from which nearly all horses and mules from England were given a 'final overhauling' and dispatched across the Channel to France. At the end of the war, the Depot also received the returning animals. Up until 11 December 1918, the Depot processed 390,741 animals, of which 386,194 passed out.* (Swaythling Remount Depot)

Horses at Southampton - MAT Volunteer & Artist Mike Greaves

Southampton is credited with embarking 51,434 horses on sea transport over six weeks between 9 August and 21 September 1914 as well as over 177,000 personnel, forage and other supplies, thus demonstrating with the Swaythling statistics the need for multiple voyages. (MAT Ports in WW1). Unfortunately, the wartime cargoes on board ships were often described as "General", or "Military Stores" which gave no clue as to whether horses or mules were on board. Despite this generality, over 160 British registered ships at some point carried horses or mules during the First World War, obviously many with multiple trips, and on other voyages, carried just forage or horseshoes and the like. As the war progressed, and U-boats were sinking so many merchant ships, the Cabinet reviewed the shortage of shipping at the end of 1916. There are several horse related documents in the National Archives and over 30 others concerning compensation for forage on board lost vessels.



Newport News was the principal port for exporting horses and mules from the USA and when the USA entered the war, it built there a 77-acre complex of pens and stalls to provide for their own



Loading a Horse https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/3rzzcu/loading_a_horse_onto_a_shipin_ww1/



expeditionary force, shipping nearly 50,000 animals in under a year. The USA landed much of their force at St Nazaire and Bordeaux in France. (Daily Press 26 November 2014)





An Unloading Brow at Bordeaux 8/12/1918 Horses in their pens waiting to be unloaded at St Nazaire **Courtesy of the USA Quartermaster Museum**

The images depict different methods of loading and unloading horses on and off ships, including slings, boxes and brows (chutes which were craned into place at the dockside where this was possible).







Two Horse Boxes used in WW1 at Tilbury to transport horses on/off ships, pale green and with padding still attached. Source The Horse Trust

Given the multiplicity of voyages from UK to mainland Europe, it would be reasonable to envisage that several ships carrying horses were lost within the Forgotten Wrecks project area, but this is not so. Only the SS Japanese Prince has been identified as sunk with an equine cargo within the Forgotten Wrecks project area, and SS Philadelphian with an equine cargo was sunk approximately 13 miles south of the Forgotten Wrecks project area. One ship, SS Boorara, a German ship captured by the British in 1914, was torpedoed in March 1918 within the Forgotten Wrecks project area off Beachy Head, damaged and again torpedoed and again only damaged 4 months later near the Tees - on both occasions, compensation was paid for 2 horses. The following ships which had either previously sailed with an equine cargo, or were carrying forage when sunk, were all lost to a torpedo or mine within the Forgotten Wrecks project area: SS Baron Erskine, SS Bellucia, SS City of Corinth, SS Mechanician, SS Pomeranain, SS Shenandoah, and SS Australbush (formerly Strathgarry). Except for SS Clan MacKay



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FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

which was lost in a collision with SS *Eurypylus,* other ships attacked (by torpedo and sunk unless otherwise stated) beyond the Project area with an equine cargo on board include:

Name of Ship	FromTo	Cargo	Fate & Location
SS Anglo-Californian	Canada to Avonmouth	927 horses, 20 killed.	Gunfire but escorted to Queenstown
SS Anglo-Colombian	Canada to Avonmouth	831 horses.	Sunk at 51 ⁰ 0N, 08.43W.
SS Anglo-Patagonian	New York to Bordeaux	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk at 46° 27'N, 2° 10'W.
SS Armenian	USA to Avonmouth	1,422 mules, 1,771 bales	Sunk at 50° 40N, 006° 24W but later
		hay, plus oats, bran etc.	found to be incorrect, and is 50 miles NW of Newquay.
SS Cameronian	Suda Bay to Alexandria	877 mules.	Sunk at 50 miles NWxN.1/4.N. of Alexandria.
SS Cestrian	Salonica to Alexandria	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk 4 miles SE of Skyros Island, Aegean Sea.
SS Clan MacKay	Liverpool to Calcutta	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk from collision with SS <i>Eurypylus</i> 520 miles SW of the Scilly Isles.
SS Crosshill	Toulon to Salonika	Unknown nr mules.	, Sunk 60 miles west of Malta.
SS Demerara	Liverpool to Buenos	Unknown nr horses.	Attacked 6 miles W of Sables d'Olonne,
	Aires		beached lle de Ré, re-floated.
SS Eloby	Not found	Unknown nr mules.	Sunk 75 miles SExE of Malta.
SS Fremona	Montreal to St Nazaire	Grain flour and lumber,	Sunk 10 miles NxW lle de Batz near
	& Leith	mentioned here as having carried horses in WW1 and on one voyage in Boer war, carried 1899 mules.	French coast.
SS Georgic	Philadelphia to Brest & Liverpool	1,200 horses, plus 9,500 tons of goods, including 98,000 bushels of wheat for animal feed.	Captured by German raider <i>Moewe</i> and scuttled when 500 miles ESE of Cape Race.
SS Hermione	Buenos Aires to Liverpool	Small unknown nr horses.	Foundered off SSE coast of Ireland.
SS Hyperia	Marseille to Port Said	Unknown nr mules.	Sunk 84 miles NWxN from Port Said.
SS Maizar	Clyde to Calcutta	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk 38 miles NxW of Cape Ferrat.
SS Marquette	Alexandria to Salonika	491 mules and 50 horses.	Sunk in Aegean 36 miles south of Salonika Bay.
SS <i>Nicosian</i> renamed as <i>Nevisian</i>	USA to Europe	250 mules.	70 miles south of Queenstown. Not sunk. "Baralong Incident".
SS Norseman	Plymouth to Salonika	1,100 mules, 740 saved.	Approaches to Salonika, torpedoed but beached at Tuzla Point.
SS Philadelphian	New York to London	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk at 49°10N, 4°51W.
SS Subadar	London to Port Said	Unknown nr horses.	Sunk at 112 miles NxW of Cap Roca.
HMT Wayfarer	Avonmouth to	763 horses and mules. 3	Torpedoed off Scilly Isles – damaged
	Alexandria	horses died.	and towed to Queenstown.
The above ships are all British registered and the next two are Italian registered:			
SV Santo Nicola	Not found	32 mules.	Scuttled by U-boat in Aegean Sea.
SS Palermo	New York to Genoa	858 mules and 163 horses.	Sunk at 25 miles off Cape San Sebastian (Cataluña), Mediterranean.





Excluded from the foregoing list but not forgotten is **SS Japanese Prince**. Built by William Doxford & Sons Ltd of Sunderland for the Prince Line and launched on 12 July 1911 when it was hailed as one of the most up-to-date boats afloat, *Japanese Prince* was a 4,876 grt general cargo steamer propelled by a single screw through a 526nhp triple expansion steam engine and was capable of 12 knots (*Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette -* 13 July 1911). James Knott had bought his first steam ship in 1881, founded the Prince Line in 1885 with most of his ships including "Prince" in its name, and the fleet expanded to be the third largest in the world, having slate grey hulls and black and red funnels with white Prince of Wales feathers, although during the First World War, the funnel was slate grey. James Knott was a man of many parts; he owned coal mines, became a ship's master, studied law and was called to the Bar in 1889, and in 1910, he served for a short time as MP for Sunderland. He retired in 1916 after the tragic loss of two of his three sons on the First World War battlefields and the Prince Line was sold to Furness Withy & Co. (Sir James Knott Trust)

Prior to the war, *Japanese Prince* carried cargo to and from a diverse range of ports such as Antwerp, Rosario, Las Palmas, River Plate, New York, Santos, Rio de Janeiro, New Orleans, Barbados, Bremen, Middlesbrough, Norfolk (Virginia), London, Victoria (Brazil), Bahia (Brazil), Trinidad, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires. (Multiple newspapers). In 1915, *Japanese Prince* voyaged from Lemnos to Alexandria. (Dumfries and Galloway Standard). The ship was also used as a troop transport ship for the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade from Egypt to the Dardanelles. (Great War Forum). On 3 November 1915, *Japanese Prince*, captained by Andrew Jenkins, un-armed and without wireless, was chased in the Mediterranean by a U-boat for 4 hours having 45 shells fired at her but there were no hits although a lot of shrapnel was found on the decks. (naval-history.net) Jenkins skilfully manoeuvred *Japanese Prince* throughout the chase and reached port with all crew and the considerable number of passengers unharmed. Jenkins was awarded £500 (approx. £49,000 in 2018) by the Prince Line Directors as evidence of their appreciation of his gallantry and ability, and also decreed that the same amount be divided amongst the crew. (Manchester Evening News). As further reward, Jenkins was commended for good service in the London Gazette and was granted a commission as a Lieutenant in the R.N.R. (The Berwick Advertiser).

On 24 January 1917, still unarmed and under the command of Captain Jenkins, *Japanese Prince* departed Newport News, Virginia with a crew of 50 men, 27 American muleteers and H.G. Kyte, an English Veterinary surgeon, carrying 400 horses, a large quantity of grain, and steel billets. This was the first time *Japanese Prince* was used as livestock transport, having just been fitted out at Virginia for carrying horses and was under private charter, and not under Admiralty service despite carrying war supplies. On 10 February 1917 at 12.20 pm, 24 miles SW of Bishop Rock, German submarine *UC-47* commanded by Kptlt. Paul Hundius (Pour le Mérite), fired a torpedo, and although the wake was spotted and the helm put over, *Japanese Prince* was struck on the starboard side just abaft the engine room, and it sank in 18 minutes. Its boats were manned and quickly left the scene, and although many on board were injured by the explosion, all were saved, being picked up by a British warship and



landed at Plymouth. The ship's confidential papers and codes were burnt, but sadly all the horses were lost. (Historic England *Japanese Prince*)

Three other instances are worthy of mention. The New York Times of 25 September 1915 published a

long article about the sparing of all personnel according

The facts as to the sinking of the Anglo-Colombian reached the State Department today in a cablegram from Wesley Frost, the American Consul at Queenstown, Ireland. The text of the dispatch follows: "British horse transport Anglo-Colombian, from Montreal to England, torpedoed off Fastnet after a chase of seventy-eight miles at 9:30 o'clock this morning. Fair warning was given in time to take to boats. Six Americans in

the crew. No casualties.

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to the Bernstoff Memorandum "Liners will not be sunk by our submarines without warning and without safety of the lives of noncombatants, provided the liners do not try to escape or_offer resistance."

Pledge to the American Government of 1 September 1915 (see inset), primarily relating to the 6 Americans on board, when the 831-horse laden steamer **SS** *Anglo-Colombian* was chased for 78 miles and eventually torpedoed by *U-41*. Sadly, the horses were lost. The same issue of the newspaper included the adjacent paragraph.

The SS *Anglo-Californian* which was carrying 927 horses from Canada to Avonmouth and on 4 July 1915 despite being attacked by a German submarine and hit by shellfire which killed its captain, managed with the help of destroyers to reach Queenstown, saving all but 20 horses. The captain was posthumously commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve and awarded a posthumous **Victoria Cross**, as approved by the King on 23 May 1919 (War and Security). The VC citation reads (naval-history.net):

Lieutenant Frederick Parslow, R.N.R.

For most conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in command of the Horse Transport "Anglo-Californian" on the 4th July, 1915.

At 8 a.m. on 4th July, 1915, a large submarine was sighted on the port beam at a distance of about one mile. The ship, which was entirely unarmed, was immediately manoeuvred to bring the submarine astern; every effort was made to increase speed, and an S.O.S. call was sent out by wireless, an answer being received from a man-of-war. At 9 a.m. the submarine opened fire, and maintained a steady fire, making occasional hits, until 10.30 a.m., meanwhile Lieutenant Parslow constantly altered course and kept the submarine astern.

At 10 30 am the enemy hoisted the signal to "abandon the vessel as fast as possible," and in order to save life Lieutenant Parslow decided to obey, and stopped engines to give as many of the crew as wished an opportunity to get away in the boats On receiving a wireless message from a destroyer, however, urging him to hold on as long as possible, he decided to get way on the ship again The submarine then opened a heavy fire on the bridge and boats with guns and rifles, wrecking the upper bridge,



killing Lieutenant Parslow, and carrying away one of the port davits, causing the boat to drop into the sea and throwing its occupants into the water.

At about 11am two destroyers arrived on the scene, and the submarine dived

Throughout the attack Lieutenant Parslow remained on the bridge, on which the enemy fire was concentrated, entirely without protection, and by his magnificent heroism succeeded, at the cost of his own life, in saving a valuable ship and cargo for the country He set a splendid example to the officers and men of the Mercantile Marine.

Additionally, Captain Parslow's son and Chief Engineer James Crawford were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on 10 September 1915. The citations are:

Sub-Lieutenant Frederick Parslow, R.N.R. For his services in the horse-transport "Anglo-Californian," which was attacked by a German submarine on the 4th July and subjected to heavy gun-fire for an hour and a half. Sub-Lieutenant Parslow steered the ship throughout the action, and maintained his post after his father, the Captain of the ship, had been killed by a shell, until some of our patrol boats arrived and drove the submarine off.

Engineer James Crawford, R.N.R. For his services as Chief Engineer of the same transport, in the escape of which he was largely instrumental by maintaining the vessel's maximum speed in spite of a shortage of firemen.



The third instance concerns the SS Armenian. Used in the Boer war, Armenian was deployed as a horse transport in the First World War. Carrying 1,422 mules, from USA to Avonmouth, in the early evening of 28 June 1915, a periscope sighted was northeast off Trevose Head and the Captain, James Trickey,

tried to outrun the *U-24* which having fired two warning shots across the bows, opened fire with its deck gun scoring several hits including the wireless room and killing some of the crew. Finally, Trickey surrendered and *U-24* allowed the crew to take to the boats then sunk the *Armenian* with two torpedoes 50 miles NW of Newquay. 29 lost their lives including 19 Americans. Of the 29, 12 were muleteers who refused to abandon ship because of their affection for their animals and went down with the ship and all the mules. The survivors were picked up next morning by the Belgian steamer





President Stevens. Referred to as the "Bone Wreck", SS *Armenian* was featured on the History Channel (Wikipedia) in an episode of Deep Wreck Mysteries entitled *Search for the Bone Wreck* where it was successfully located and identified by the archaeologist Innes McCartney. On 3 March 2017, the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels and Controlled Sites) Order 2017 (Statutory Instrument No. 147) cited the vessel known as SS ARMENIAN, which sank on 28 June 1915, as a designated vessel. (Pastscape Armenian).



Source: BBC News 8 June 2018. Image by Maureen McLean

The sacrifices of the horses who lost their lives in the First World War have not been forgotten. The War Horse Memorial was unveiled near Ascot racecourse on 8 June 2018, consisting of a 1.5 tonne bronze statue 2.6m high standing on a 2.74m high plinth of Portland stone, and has been named Poppy. (War Horse

Memorial). Memorials previously unveiled include one commemorating all animals of the First World War at Hyde Park in November 2004 (The Animals in War Memorial), and in June 1915, the Princess Royal unveiled a life-sized statue First World War horse memorial in Romsey (BBC News). And finally, Matthew Shaw in his book "Animals and War" (referenced at the beginning of this article) includes another astonishing statistic: *The RSPCA dispensary in Kilburn possesses a plague commemorating the 'deaths by enemy action, disease or accident of 484,143 horses, mules, camels and bullocks and of many hundreds of dogs, carrier pigeons and other creatures, on the various fronts during the Great War.'* (RSPCA)







Source: The Animals in War Memorial http://www.animalsinwar.org.uk/index.cfm?asset_id=1374



Source: BBC News 3 July 2015

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