

AT SEA.

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A WORTHY SHIP.

HIS Majesty's Troopship, which carries us on our way to what, for most of us, will be our first experience of overseas service, has a proud record in the present conflict. In fact she bears the scars of battle, and the curious will be able to find on her hull evidence of the effects of a near-miss from an enemy bomb aimed at her in an attack off the Irish coast in 1940. In that episode - the closest threat she has survived during the war - she was holed in several places above the water-line, and, before the day ended, she beat off three more enemy attacks without suffering further damage.

Built at Belfast for the P. & O. line by the famous shipbuilding firm of Harland & Wolff, our transport is now 21 years old. Until the outbreak of war, she carried passengers and mail between the United Kingdom and Australia, and in that service she acquired so high a reputation for her sailing qualities that passengers who were subject to the agonies of sea-sickness frequently made a point of arranging their journeys so that they could travel on her. She is, in fact, one of the best sea-boats the Company has ever owned. Her gross tonnage is close to 21,000, her length is 625 feet, and she has a beam of 82 feet. She has twin screws and her engines are of the reciprocating type.

It was a tribute to the worthiness of the ship in which you travel that she should have been chosen by the Admiralty immediately on the outbreak of war for service as an armed merchant cruiser. Commissioned in October, 1939, and equipped with a formidable armament, she went to sea substantially changed in appearance, for her "dummy" after funnel had been removed.

Subsequently, however, it was replaced for purposes of ventilation. It is worth while also to interpolate at this stage that she has not always had a single mast. The removal of her after mast was also one of the changes wrought in her appearance during her service as an armed cruiser.

The ship's early war service was given in convoy duty between West Africa and the United Kingdom, and she continued in convoy duties after the damage received in the air attack had been repaired.

Three years ago she was converted for duty as a transport. She began this phase of her war service with several trips to the Middle East via the Cape, and then she was selected as one of the transports employed in the historic North African landings. On this occasion she carried American troops to a point near Oran, forming one of a convoy of about 50 vessels. No major incident occurred during the week in which she remained there, but those on board had their share of excitement on the return journey when an enemy air attack was made on the convoy. She remained unscathed, though ships all round her were attacked. In her subsequent career as a transport, she is said to have carried troops of all the warring nationalities except the Japanese. She made her first trip to New Zealand to embark this reinforcement.

The master of this vessel, who lives in the traditional seclusion on an upper deck which is, of course, out of bounds to troops is a man whose very appearance inspires confidence. He may be said to be truly
(Continued overleaf)

representative of the men who have preserved the qualities that have enabled the British Merchant Service to fulfil so faithfully the vital duties which it must perform in time of war. He began his training for the subsequent 35 years of his seafaring career in H.M.S. "Conway" in 1906 and has been for 32 years in the service of the Company to which his ship belongs. He served throughout the last war, and in this war just 18 months ago, was torpedoed off the South American Coast. His troops officer had a similar experience in this war on a ship carrying troops. On that occasion there was loss of life, some of the victims being nurses. The master has with him a number of officers and men with eventful war careers, and one of his junior engineers wears the ribbon of the M.B.E. which was awarded to him for sailing one of the ship's boats for a period of seven days after she had been torpedoed.

It only remains to add that our transport, with her continuous decks is well adapted to the purpose which she is now serving. Her value in this service is also great in view of the losses of vessels of her type and the importance which amphibious warfare has assumed. If there is a tendency to allow one's thoughts to dwell upon congestion below decks, some consolation may be found in the fact that there have been occasions when the ship has carried many more troops than are at present on board.

KETEER FELOOSE SWEEP.

"What are you going to do with the money?"

"Send it home to Mum."

"What, all of it?"

"Most of it. I might spend some at the next port."

"What on?"

"Oh! this and that and a good feed of steak and eggs and the local newspaper, and -"

"And -"

"Well, yes, I might have one or two with the boys."

"Ah," I said ingratiatingly, and promptly invited W.R. Ladbroke of Invercargill the winner of the £50 prize in the Keteer Feloose Sweep to drop in at the office just before he goes ashore. Some of us would like to accompany him Yes, he would contribute to our new fund for Poor and Needy Soldiers, provided "Down the Hatch" subscribed pound for pound on the spot. Yes, he said bitterly, he had won one lottery, - Bob Sample's.

C.S. Guin, Hawera, winner of the £30 prize, said he was practically a teetoteller, but open to conviction. We smiled. We know Taranaki:

"Are you also a T.T.?" I asked WO II Walter Baty, D.C.M., Auckland, ex-All Black, as he pocketed his £20. There was a burst of laughter from the boys in the Pay Office. Embarrassed we went off to congratulate H.A. Jones of the rainy Catlins, and F.H. Challis, Dunedin, who shared the ticket for the tenner. One of them had been down to his last shilling, but the other "had been doing well at housey housey."

HOW THEY WERE DRAWN.

ON a table were five rows of numbered counters. Behind these stood five nurses. Opposite the nurses sat five "other ranks" each of whom held a little canvas bag.

The first row of counters was numbered 1 - 34, the numbers of the prizes. The next row of counters represented the thousand figures of the Sweep tickets, while the other three rows, each of 0 - 9 represented the hundreds, tens and units.

When Lieut W.D. Lund, Master of Ceremonies, gave the word each row of counters was checked into its corresponding bag and shaken vigorously under the eagle eyes of Officers and WO's.

Sister Healy, looking nervous (she is more used to operating theatres) drew out the first counter, prize no 25, worth £2. Then the second sister drew a two from the thousands bag, the next drew a five from the hundreds, the next a zero from the tens, and the next a six from the Units. So prize No 25 went to No. 2506. The suspense was awful. Twentyfour numbers were drawn before the big fish was caught. Your reporter mopped his brow, scanned his regged ticket and sighed.

TURN OF THE TIDE - STALINGRAD

TWO names, Stalingrad and El Alamein, will forever be associated in histories of the World War. At each of these places, one a proud city, the other a barren desert waste, the seemingly invincible German armies suffered their first crushing defeats. The turn of the tide had arrived at last, and the Allies swung over to the offensive after nearly three years of bitter defensive fighting.

Stalingrad before the war was a city of 149,000 inhabitants, situated on the West bank of the Volga, approximately 200 miles north-west of the Caspian Sea. The city's importance rested upon its vital communication centre and heavy industries. Along the Volga passed the oil from the rich Caucasian oilfields on its way to Moscow and Northern Russia. Factories that formerly produced much of the farming machinery for the rich Donets Basin were now turning out endless streams of tanks and other weapons. The loss of this vital centre would mean the capture of the last direct line of communication between north and south Russia.

In October, 1942 the German armies were nearing Astrakhan at the Volga delta and their right wing was practically at the Grozny oilfields in the Caucasus. Towards the end of October the battle for Stalingrad commenced. The strength of the Russian defenders is not known, but behind them lay the steep banks of the river - there was to be no retreat.

The Sixth German Army, comprising at least 22 divisions under Field-Marshal Von Paulus and the armoured division expert, Field-Marshal Von Manstein, invested the city from the three sides. Under cover of terrific artillery barrages and devastating air raids, the Germans forced the outer suburbs of the city. The Russians fought fiercely for every street, every building, but were forced slowly back by the terrific weight of armour and men opposed to them.

A deadlock was eventually reached when, on a narrower front, the Russians managed to stem the enemy onslaught. The Germans, with air superiority, then began systematically to wipe out the city, block by block, by heavy air bombardments. Still the Russians fought on.

During those thirty terrible days the Russians repulsed 117 tank and infantry attacks, were shelled for eight hours by massed artillery, and perhaps worst of all, for 320 hours the Luftwaffe, unopposed at times devastated the heroic city.

The Russians, under Generals Popov, Vatutin and Rokossovsky repelled all attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

Then, about the middle of November, the Russian relief armies which had been massing behind the Volga struck. Under the supreme command of Rokossovsky they forced crossings of the Volga north and south of the city. After terrific battles in which Von Manstein's armoured divisions were badly mauled, the Russian pincers closed behind the German Sixth Army and all escape was cut off. Meanwhile, a general Russian offensive had opened all along the southern line. Von Manstein refused to surrender to avoid further bloodshed, so Rokossovsky's forces steadily closed in, and early in January 1943 the remnants of the German Sixth Army were mopped up. Close on 200,000 Germans had been eliminated and enormous quantities of war materials captured. Stalingrad was free, but little was left of this once proud city.

The courage of her defenders will forever be remembered and enshrined in the new city already arising from the smoking ruins.

Gallant Stalingrad, recipient of the Sword of Honour, we of El Alamein salute thee!

A.N.

INFORMATION SERVICE

ARE you seeking information? AERS will undertake to give an authoritative answer to any genuine question you care to jot down and hand in to Cabin 54, or to your Group Education Officer. Number, rank and name with group of enquirer are necessary. If the answer can't be given immediately, you will receive an acknowledgment and in due course the information required will reach you by post. AERS.

THE KIWI CONCERT PARTY.

MOST people on board will have noticed that the Kiwi Concert Party is with us, that is to say, those of the party who have survived the Battle of New Zealand. Of the original 28 who returned from the Middle East on furlough only six remain. The rest have been graded out or have clung to their wives and children - one even became an expectant father.

Wally Priotor, the famous blonde soprano, being Grade IIIp is now in civvies, minus the wig, of course. Phil Jay, the brunette, is awaiting another board and may yet return to the fold, but that "terrible child" Tim Bonner is definitely out. That fine upstanding chorus is reduced to Tony Rex and Bill Nichol to carry on the good work, and, of the orchestra, only the Sax team remains.

However, 2nd Lieut Terry Vaughan, the Kiwi producer, has already started rebuilding the show. The orchestra now contains some of the best players in New Zealand, and the stage personnel is boosted up with Ted Quill, baritone, Bill Moore, light comedian and that first-rate "magician" Ces Morris. The company now numbering only fourteen, intends to do its best to keep people amused on board with music and odds and ends on deck - "weather permitting."

2nd Lieut Vaughan would like to meet anyone on board who thinks he has suitable qualifications for the Kiwi Concert Party as under:: Singers (not necessarily solo voice but good appearance), trumpet players, sax players violinists and what have you. Call at Cabin 47 or when the orchestra is rehearsing.

NEWS BRIEFS.

WITH flares and the booming of guns, Russia has been celebrating the success of a great Soviet offensive on the Leningrad front. Here the Russians have killed 25,000 Germans in a week and have captured some of the big guns which had been shelling the city.

New Zealand and Australian ministers who have been conferring in Canberra have agreed upon a policy for the disposal of man-power in the light of recent developments in the war and also upon a policy for the future defence in the Pacific.

In Italy the Fifth Army has made further advances, and the guns of the Eighth Army are bombarding Cassino.

In an Allied air attack on Rabaul five Japanese ships were sunk and three others probably sunk at a cost of 12 planes. 18 Japanese aircraft, for certain, and probably 15 others were brought down.

Berlin has again been heavily raided by the R. A. F.

HEARD IN THE ABLUTIONS.

AT the height of the gale the other day, some of the troops were chatting with a member of the crew who had been serving in her for only a few months. "She seems a pretty good sea-boat," commented a soldier. "Well, I don't know," replied the seaman, gazing out over the wave tops. "I haven't been on her in rough weather."

From ship to shore at a certain port. "Where's Nabel?" "Swap you a kiwi for a kangaroo." "Where do you folks go when the tide comes in?" "Who's keeping the pub here now?" "What won the Cup back home?"

Those who will see the Kiwi Concert party only from the fringes of the crowd may take comfort. The date has not yet been announced, but we understand they are arranging for a show in the Berlin State Opera House this year.

Security: As the furlough draft's transport was drawing close to the Hobart wharf on the way home six months ago, a passenger on a passing ferry yelled, "where are you going?" A security-minded Kiwi replied, "Hobart."

No doubt the humorist who removed 20 dollars and a watch from his cobbler's clothing in O4 Moss only meant it as a joke. But we kind of miss the point.

We are asked to deny the rumour that the beams rigged at the bridge are used to lower members of the crew in a basket two at a time for their morning shower.

2nd KEMPER FILCOSE SWEETSTATE.

1st Prize, No. 3234; 2nd prize No 3252; 3rd prize No. 3250.