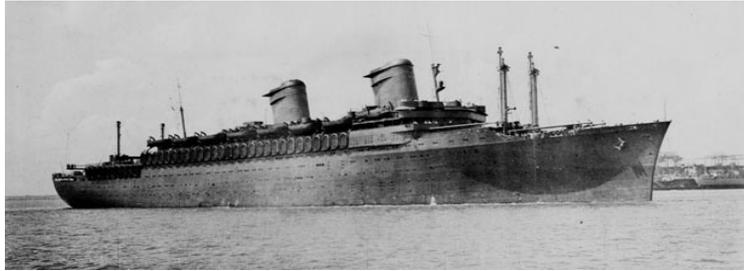


AMERICA's First Transatlantic Crossing



Not as a Carefree Luxury Liner...but as a Naval Transport on a Mission

Excerpt from the Navy's Official History for the USS WEST POINT

Although initially slated for the North Atlantic trade, America was deployed instead on the New York to West Indies cruise routes in the summer of 1940, because the war in Europe had resulted in the invocation of the Neutrality Act banning American ships from sailing in war zones. She made several voyages to the West Indies and two to California through the spring of 1941.

Hurriedly recalled from a pleasure cruise in late May 1941, America moored at Norfolk and was acquired by the Navy on 1 June 1941 for conversion to a troop transport. Renamed West Point and designated AP-23, the erstwhile cruise ship which had once been the "last word" in luxurious ocean travel, entered her builder's yards on 6 June for conversion. On 15 June 1941, West Point was commissioned at Newport News, Capt. Frank H. Kelley in command. The same day, AP-23 steamed across Hampton Roads to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for additional work, including installation of antiaircraft weapons.

West Point soon proceeded to New York City and, while anchored off the Staten Island quarantine station on 16 July, took on board 137 Italian citizens and 327 Germans from the consulates of those nations in the United States which had been closed. West Point got underway at 1455 on the 16th, bound for Portugal, and arrived at Lisbon on the 23d.

While there, the ship was visited by Portuguese naval and diplomatic dignitaries; and she transferred supplies to the Coast Guard cutter Ingham, the "station ship" at Lisbon. After her final passenger had been debarked on the 24th, West Point commenced taking onboard 321 Americans and 67 Chinese - consular staffs and their families - on the 26th.

Returning to New York on 1 August, West Point discharged her passengers and headed south for an overhaul at Portsmouth, Va., followed by a series of tactical exercises off the Virginia capes.

That's the bland, official version. Here's the rest of the story about one of the most unusual missions ever assigned to the crew of a United States naval vessel.

The idea of utilizing the WEST POINT to repatriate German and Italian consular staffs/families was first raised in a letter from the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox dated June 26, 1941. She was a logical choice because her staterooms had been left largely intact during her conversion work earlier that same month. In addition, a shakedown cruise would aid her mostly naval reserve, youthful crew to get acclimated to operating such a large and powerful ship at sea.

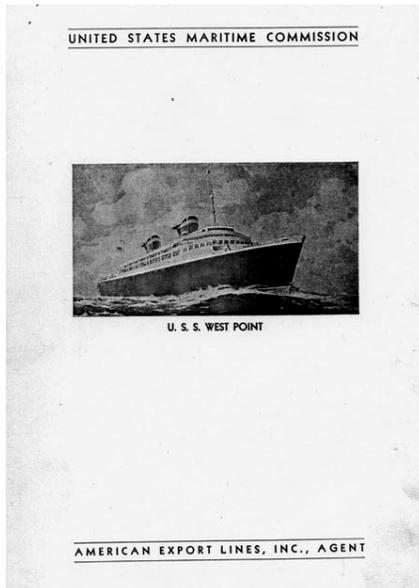
But before leaving port, as crew member **Bill Burns** remembers: *“The ship had to take on provisions from a lot of box cars parked on the pier, next to the ship. We carried and carried, and carried some more, day and night. Finally, when the ship was fully loaded, we went to sea.*

“When we got to New York, we took onboard German diplomats and other undesirables.”



A few US Lines’ officers, members of AMERICA’s initial civilian crew, who held Naval Reserve commissions were called to active duty to help with the transition from passenger vessel to troop transport. Most notably, Giles C. Stedman, first Captain of the AMERICA, remained onboard as the transport’s Executive Officer for several months.

However, the needs of civilian passengers for the planned repatriation mission required some additional, specialized personnel. For this purpose, the Navy arranged for American Export Lines to not only serve as booking agent, but also to provide personnel with titles not normally found onboard a commissioned naval vessel. When the WEST POINT left New York on 16 July 1941, her crew included 164 civilians with job descriptions such as Stewardess, Child Nurse, Bartender, Sous Chef, and Kennel Attendant.



This sample menu cover was created beforehand by American Export Lines and submitted to the Navy for approval. Curiously, the illustration chosen was a pre-construction artists’ perception of the WEST POINT in her peacetime garb, which also erroneously depicted the ship with her original short smoke stacks. A matter of convenience or expediency, one supposes.

The contents of the menus published onboard the ship during her first transatlantic crossing rivaled those previously provided during her short career as a luxury liner. Instead of standard navy fare, such as spam, spam and more spam; the offerings for that trip included such delicacies as Poached Biscay Sole, Filet Mignon, Sauce Chavalier and Mountain Brook Trout, Belle Menniere.

But no WEST POINT navy crew member that made that trip remembers such fare! However, plank owner **John Dion** has some very distinct ‘white hat’ memories of that trip, thanks to a diary he kept; something that was in violation of the ship’s regulations). Hopefully, the statute of limitations has long run out on such revelations.

As he recently recounted: *“We arrived at United States Lines’ pier 86 on July 12th. It was an easy pier to remember because of a huge gas tank off the bow and across the West Side Highway.*



“During the four day stay in New York the ship boarded Italian and German citizens from consulates of those nations in the United States which had been closed. Last to arrive was Fritz Wiedemann from the consulate in San Francisco. A suspected spy, he had been Adolf Hitler’s company commander during World War I, and later a political aide-de-camp to Hitler!”

Underlining a more-cruise-than-warship atmosphere onboard WEST POINT at that time, a one page “Information for Passengers” handout refers to the availability of the ship’s beauty and barber shops, swimming pool, library and rental of deck chairs. But that publication also specified what spaces were restricted, a prohibition on the use of personal cameras during the trip and the unavailability of radiogram service. Perhaps an indication of how authority was usually and universally respected in those days, access to the ship’s vital operating areas was maintained by the simple expediency of roping off ladders and doorways, and posting “Restricted Area” signs.

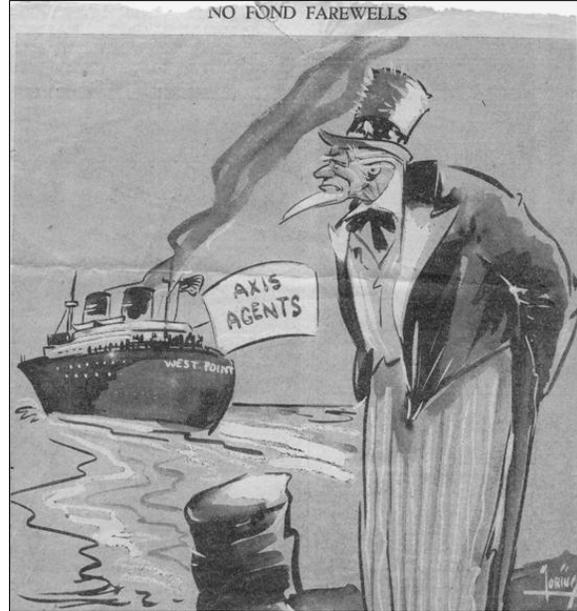
To commemorate the start of the trip, the ship’s well-equipped print shop produced a keepsake. Apparently using US Lines’ stationary stock left behind, this colorful bit of memorabilia depicts the ship – again – not as the WEST POINT, but as she appeared when first placed in service. But this time, pictured with her raised stacks and bold ‘neutrality’ hull markings. In addition, this cachet was made even more unique by the application of a commemorative stamp that depicts the vessel’s namesake – the United States Military Academy at West Point.



The Italian passengers reportedly were very appreciative of the treatment and services provided to them on the way to Lisbon. On the other hand, John Dion noted: *“The navy crew had little contact with the passengers, but those who did said they had to put up with loud, demanding and very obnoxious Germans who asked for all kinds of services.”*



In addition, not only were a number of the Germans onboard less gracious than the Italians, they even boasted that their U-Boats would sink the ship on its return voyage; never mind that America was still a neutral nation at that time. NOTE: The WEST POINT's first mission took place several months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. 



No wonder, even today, that some crew members disdainfully refer to that trip's passengers as 'the undesirables'. Their feelings were also reflected by the popular press in those tension-filled days of 1941 in various articles and by plain-spoken political cartoons such as this one.

THE POINTER
Daily Paper of the U. S. S. West Point
CAPTAIN FRANK H. KELLEY, USN
Commanding Officer
COMDR. GILES C. STEDMAN, USNR
Executive Officer
LT.-COMDR. D. O. HURLING, USNR
First Lieutenant
LT.-COMDR. C. H. LAMBDIN (C)C
USNR — Editor

NOTICE TO PASSENGERS
Please keep all dogs on "Sports"
Deck.
Please do not go below "A"
Deck.

TODAY'S MOVIE PROGRAM
For Passengers in Movie Theatre
4:00 p.m.—"Spring Parade"
9:30 p.m.—"Topper Takes a Trip"
For Crew — Upper Deck Aft
6:30 p.m.—"The Sea Wolf"
8:15 p.m.—"The Sea Wolf"

LIBRARY
The Fiction Library will be in operation shortly and notice will appear in THE POINTER. It is necessary to do a lot of preparatory work on books before a Library can be placed in service. These preparations are now going on, and it is hoped that we will have this added facility for the use of the crew in several days' time. It is possible for passengers to borrow books now.
The Library is located on the Sun Deck aft, starboard side.
Library hours—9:30-11: 2-4; 6-7.

SODA FOUNTAIN
The Ship's Service Soda Fountain is now in operation, it will be open from 10:30 until 12:00 noon and in the afternoon from 3:00 until 5:30.

The WEST POINT's outbound trip was largely uneventful, even though she sailed unescorted and fully illuminated at night through the sub-infested Atlantic. During her second day underway, the crew of WEST POINT produced the first of many weekly ship's newspapers. Entitled *The Pointer*, Volume I, Number 1 was issued on July 17, 1941. Here's the 'masthead' for that first issue, along some announcements that provide further indication that the ship was more like a passenger liner than warship, at that time, in spite of her grey exterior.

Perhaps coincidentally, or perhaps not, the movie available for the crew to watch that day – *The Sea Wolf* – was tinsel town's version of Jack London's classic story of the sea that had its world premiere onboard the ship when she was the SS AMERICA. On 21 March 1941, the star of the film, Edgar G. Robinson, and other cast members were onboard the ship off the California coast  for the event, which was billed as a Hollywood first - the first movie ever premiered onboard a ship at sea.

The location of this film's initial viewing was in the beautiful First Class Lounge, referred to in *The Pointer* as the Movie Theatre. This two-deck high space was also utilized to show military training films to both crew and military passengers throughout the war. In addition, the stage at the aft end of this magnificent space was often utilized for live entertainment. But in 1941, the navy crew watched *The Sea Wolf* in the open, on the ship's stern.

The ‘smooth’ logs for United States naval vessels, while quite factual and detailed, do not often make for very interesting reading. The WEST POINT’s logs between July 16th and the 23rd are largely no exception. However, following landfall at 0435 hours on Wednesday, 23 July 1941, and docking by 0935 that morning in Lisbon Harbor; the reading gets a bit more interesting:

16-20 Moored as before. 1645 Italian passengers disembarked. 1753 Captain returned aboard, having called officially on American Minister to Portugal Mr. Bert Fish, American Consul General Mr. Samuel H. Wiley, Chief of Staff of the Portugese Fleet Vice-Admiral Alfredo Batcho do Sousa, Chef de Cabinet of the Minister of Morini Americo Rodrigues Thomas, Captain Commandant of the Navy Yard, Lisbon, Captain Manuel Edazar. 1830 Last remaining Italian passenger disembarked.

G. C. FOLLY
G. C. FOLLY, Ensign, U.S.N.R.

These somewhat laconic entries do not reveal something that John Dion also remembers well; the German passengers and some German officials on the pier exchanged the Nazi arm salute when the ship arrived in Lisbon. Apparently, by that time, the WEST POINT’s skipper, Captain Frank H. Kelley, USN had already had quite enough ‘fun and games’ when it came to dealing with German consulate staff members; both onboard his vessel and those stationed in Lisbon.

When WEST POINT pulled into port, a number of Americans who were scheduled to make the return voyage was still unaccounted for; their time of arrival unknown. Captain Kelley was not about to take the word of local German officials that the missing people would be safely escorted to his ship when they did arrive.



Frank Kelley was regular United States Navy, and a veteran of World War I, and it showed in his stern demeanor and absolute resolve.

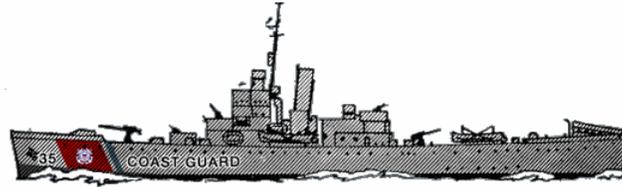
So, giving them a dose of their own imperious medicine, he adamantly refused to allow any Germans onboard the ship to disembark until he could be assured that all of his return passengers were out of the hands of the Axis. He also ordered that a “strict gangway watch” be maintained by armed Marines; underscoring his seriousness about this matter.

While everyone waited for that to happen, a number of members of the navy crew were granted Liberty in Lisbon, their first foreign liberty port. John Dion’s memories include mention that the sailors had a little trouble with the local money – the Escudo, and endured some wild taxi rides over many hills.



Russ McKeen, another of WEST POINT’s plank owners, must have figured out the exchange rate, for he attended a bull fight. It was presumably his first, since Russ was a twenty year-old New Englander at the time. He surely must have been impressed, for he saved this bit of memorabilia from his day ashore there.

During that in-port period, the crew of WEST POINT transferred a large amount of food stores to the United States' station ship in Lisbon, the US Coast Guard Cutter INGHAM.



The crew of the INGHAM received several tons of basic foodstuffs, plus some 960 pounds of fresh oranges and grapefruit. And a thousand pounds of that good old navy staple – coffee. Included in the materials transferred were the following items destined for personal use; all meticulously listed on the log sheets of AP-23.

Candy bars, assorted	1152
Cigarettes, Tax-free, Chester- field	1500 pkg.
Cigarettes, Tax-free, Lucky Strike	1500 pkg.
Combs #5112	72
Hair Tonic, Vaseline	12 bots.
Hair Tonic, Vitalis	24 bots.
Listerine	12 bots.

By 1900 hours on Thursday, 24 July 1941, the American Legation in Lisbon had determined that everyone on the list of people destined to make the return voyage in WEST POINT from Lisbon to the United States were safely under Allied forces' care. Then, and only then, Captain Kelley allowed his disgruntled German 'guests' to depart.

Just before midnight, the last of the German passengers had disembarked. There is no record of them providing any message of appreciation for their safe and luxurious passage.

It was not until noontime on Saturday, 26 July 1941 that all passengers for the return trip had been processed by the American consulate and the ship's staff had created a trip manifest and assigned staterooms. Staterooms on Main, Upper and Sun Deck were utilized, with entire families assigned to larger spaces. Single men were generally placed in groups of two or three in staterooms on the Upper Deck. Likewise, single ladies were assigned to similar spaces on Main Deck. Ranking State Department personnel and Nationalist Chinese diplomats were accommodated in preferred spaces on Sun Deck which had large windows offering an unobstructed view of the sea; not just portholes, like the rooms on Main and Upper Deck.

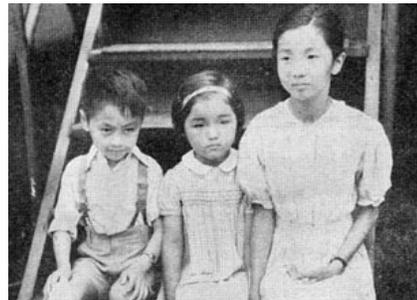
Civilian passengers started to board the WEST POINT at 1245 hours that day, a process that was not completed until 1803 hours. Some of them came aboard with a considerable quantity of luggage. Others arrived from being interned in Occupied Europe with little more than the clothing on their backs.

Meanwhile, the ship was made ready to depart, with gun crews standing by their weapons. According to the ship's log it was just thirteen minutes after the last passenger embarked that the traditional call "*All clear fore and aft*" rang out, and AP-23 set sail for America.

Although the official navy history only mentions American and Chinese consular staff members and their families, the WEST POINT's passenger manifest for the return trip reveals some interesting statistics:

- Other nationalities listed on the passenger manifest included Swedish, Greek, French, Ecuadorian, Belgian, Brazilian and Croatian. There also were fourteen individuals listed whose nationality was marked as "STATELESS". But they all gave addresses in America. In some cases that designation may have simply implied a lack of formal documentation, because four of them were employees by the State Department. Others in that same 'stateless' category apparently were family members of passengers whose nationality was listed as "U.S.A."

- A total of 49 children under the age of twelve were listed, including eight infants (classified as being under twelve months). Fourteen of the individuals in the overall classification of children were Chinese. There also was a sizable contingent of teenagers present, mostly the children of American and Chinese diplomats that had recently been displaced from Europe.



- The eldest person on the list was 69; several more adults were in their 60s. Most of the senior members of the State Department onboard for the return voyage were in their late 40s to early 50s. A number of the passengers were family members, such as a husband, wife and four children named Stevens. The children's ages ranged from 5 to 17. The parents and their offspring were berthed into two adjacent staterooms; U-3 and U-5, respectively.

Of greater interest than statistical data are some of the personalities that boarded the ship in Lisbon, and their unique experiences:

- **Alfred Thompson**, American Consul General at Hamburg, who openly discussed his experiences in a German city that was bombed repeatedly by the British. He candidly reported that damage in Hamburg "*Lies somewhere between the assertions made by the Germans and the claims in British communiqués.*"
- **Prince Charles Bernadotte**, of Sweden, age 29; nephew of King Gustav V. Rumors swirled that the Prince was on his way to America to discuss the possibility of Sweden entering the war on the Allied side. But like most rumors, nothing of that nature ever transpired, and Sweden remained neutral for the duration.
- **Marian McGill**, American Red Cross nurse, who had survived the torpedoing and sinking of the Dutch transport SS MAASDAM by a German submarine 300 miles south of Iceland in June 1941. Rescued by the British, she managed to make her way to Lisbon a month later and became a very happy WEST POINT passenger.



- **Dr. Chen Chieh**, Chinese Ambassador to Berlin, who lectured frequently and openly onboard the ship, and later on a New York pier that growing cooperation between Germany, Italy and Japan was strengthening Japan's appetite for expansion in the Pacific.
- **Philip Faversham**, Civilian Ambulance Driver, who was on his way to volunteer in England with eighteen other American volunteers onboard the neutral Egyptian freighter ZAMZAM when their ship was sunk by a German raider vessel. Briefly interned in Occupied France, Faversham made his way to Lisbon along with Millie and Muzzie; pets entrusted to his care by two Americans who had leaped out of a train window in France to avoid a worse fate that the Axis apparently had in store for them.



Numerous others were simply American civilians caught in the middle of the war in Europe, who just wanted to go home. The navy crew of the WEST POINT provided the means. The Maritime Commission and American Export Lines established a flat rate charge for each adult's passage: \$319.60. Children were charged half-price, and infants' fare was \$22. The owners of dogs were charged \$25 per pet. By comparison, just a couple of months earlier, first class, adult passage on the AMERICA for a carefree Caribbean cruise would have cost \$250.

Passenger Ben Robertson, who had been a war correspondent in London, later wrote a feature story about what he chose to call "*A Strange Voyage Home*" with a subtitle: "*Nazis Deliberately Held Up Departing Americans*". In that article, published in New York newspapers on Sunday, September 3, 1941, he recounted how cooperative the German officials in Lisbon became after it was made abundantly clear to them by Captain Kelley that "*not a single Nazi onboard the WEST POINT would be let ashore in Portugal until every American has safely crossed the Portuguese border*".

Here's a few more telling, even poignant passages from Robertson's story:

"I arrived in Lisbon on Saturday morning, July 26th. I, for one, am here to say it was a thrilling experience once again to see a big American flag flying from an American ship's flagstaff and to see the competent-looking, friendly faces of American sailors and officers, and United States Marines.

"At six o'clock that afternoon, a bugler whom Benny Goodman ought to know about blew a series of bell-like beautifully jazzed notes, and the WEST POINT started off on the voyage home.

"As the WEST POINT moved down the Tagus River, we were saluted by the crew of the Coast Guard cutter INGHAM, a white little ship, shining in the late afternoon sunlight.

“We had very little faith, initially, in the German official promise that our ship would be unmolested, but we had no doubt about our crossing, for we had Captain Kelley and Commander Stedman on the WEST POINT’s bridge, and the men of our navy standing by the ship’s guns.

“The food, at first, left us non-plussed – there was so much of it; it seemed wasteful to be able to eat eggs and fish and meat all at a single sitting. Few of us had had fresh fruit in months and none of us had had so much butter and milk. The stewards said we were eating almost nothing, they said we were not eating half as much as the Germans.

“The stewards also said that some of the Germans had accused the Marines of spying on them – Marines they said kept passing through the dining room during meals. The Marines had said ‘nuts’ to that charge, they had clocks or something to punch.

“We sailed on, two days of sunshine, two of rain and wind, a final night through fog. Then we arrived in New York – home again and glad of it, and nearer than ever to war.”

Log entries for that largely uneventful crossing covered all the basics associated with ship navigation, plus notations of when General Quarters conditions were established (at sunrise and sunset), when various drills were conducted, and when watertight doors were closed remotely, from the bridge, to verify that vital capability. One scary event was logged mid-ocean; a small mattress fire in stateroom B-29 that was swiftly extinguished. No real damage was done, but fire at sea always strikes fear in the hearts of those who sail.

Typical of any navy ship manned by several hundred young and carefree sailors, the logs also recorded several instances of misbehavior while the ship had been in Lisbon. Punishments for returning late from leave and/or returning intoxicated; or bringing back intoxicating liquor were meted out in Deck Courts during the return voyage.

Names recorded in the ship’s log sheets are not included here...to protect the guilty, and those who still stoutly protest their innocence, even after six-plus decades.

The voyage from Lisbon to New York, a distance of 2988 nautical miles, took a little over five and a half days. No signs of U-Boats or other threats were encountered during the entire trip. The WEST POINT steamed at a nearly constant rate of advance of 23 knots during this time period, except during the afternoon and evening of July 31st and early the morning of August 1st, when dense fog slowed the vessel to 15 knots.

Volume I, Number 12 of *The Pointer*, dated Thursday, 31 July 1941 announced that Docking Time the next day in New York was expected to be about 1 PM, DST. Other announcements provided instructions about filing Customs Declarations and advising when stateroom baggage should be made available for removal from the ship the next day. Plus this notice:

NOTICE

Will the person who found the Necco Candy Box, with money, in the Crew’s Movie Hall, please return the same to the Master At Arms’ Office.
Reward.

C.M.A.A.

By 0340 on the morning of 1 August 1941, the fog that had slowed the WEST POINT's advance had dissipated. Her speed was increased to 18 knots, enabling AP-23 to dock as planned, as the following deck log entries for that day attest:

0932 Sighted Ambrose Lightship.

0955 Stopped to take on Pilot.

0957 Pilot aboard, vessel underway, pilot conning, Captain and Navigator on the bridge.

1040 Stopped to embark State Department officials from USCGC HUDSON.

1107 USCGC NAVESINK alongside with party of Immigration officials and newspapermen.

1200 Docking pilot aboard, proceeding towards dock; tug EUGENE MESECK assisting on starboard bow.

1205 Five additional tugs assisting on port and starboard bow and quarters.

1251 Moored starboard side to Pier 61, North River, New York with ten lines.

1255 Passengers commenced debarking.

WEST POINT crew member and plank owner **Jack Moats** recalls that one of the newspapermen that came onboard that day was Walter Winchell of "Mr. and Mrs. America, and all the ships at sea" fame.



The caption of a photo of Winchell taken onboard the WEST POINT explains way he was in uniform, having recently become a Lieut. Commander in Naval Intelligence. The caption also noted that Winchell donated his training pay to Navy relief. What was not mentioned was that Winchell had previously predicted that the ship would be sunk on its return trip; a comment that still somewhat irritates Jack Moats to this very day.



According to contemporary newspaper reports, more than 2,400 relatives and friends welcomed the arrivals. Various headlines read as follows:

**Navy Liner Returns
with Strange Cargo
from Darkest Europe**

**Ship Laden With War
Adventure Returns**

**Temporary 'West
Pointers' Arrive in
New York**



But this picture, taken that happy summer day after WEST POINT had delivered its precious cargo to freedom, is even more telling...



Once ashore, many of those ‘Temporary West Pointers’ provided much copy to newspaper reporters. State Department officials present to greet the ship ‘discouraged’ passengers from talking about their experiences, but a number of private citizens ignored that entrée and openly discussed, largely in unfavorable terms, their experiences in Occupied Europe with a throng of eager journalists.

One much-photographed young man, who had his broken arm in a sling, told of ‘accidentally’ falling down a flight of stairs while interned by the Germans. Two others, a professional singer and his wife, related their experiences of being caught in the middle of the war in Belgium. They fled to France, only to be trapped again by the invading forces. For ten days, they lived in a cave not far from the Dunkirk waterfront during the historic British evacuation from that port city. Somehow, they made their way to Lisbon, accompanied by their Pekinese dog.

But one of the people returning to freedom didn’t talk much to reporters that day. Not because he intended to abide by the State Department’s request, but because he was a 23 year-old, Brooklyn-born United Press Correspondent who filed a story two days later under his own byline –

Richard C. Hottelet.



A relative unknown in 1941, Richard C. Hottelet later became a household name in American broadcast journalism. But in March of 1941, he was living in Berlin, reporting on the war for a now-long defunct New York newspaper, called “PM”. Early one morning, the Gestapo took him into custody and for four months he languished in jail. He was never formally charged, but questioned repeatedly and had his eyeglasses taken from him - to prevent suicide, he was told.

After repeated pleas on his behalf by the American Consulate, and long after he had all but given up hope of being freed; he was released in early July. The American Embassy staff in Berlin arranged for his transportation to Lisbon in time to come home on the WEST POINT.

Following his return to America, Mr. Hottelet became a charter member of “Murrow’s Boys” a World War Two-era group of broadcast journalists tutored and encouraged by CBS’ Edward R. Murrow. Today, he is the last living member of that elite club. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, he covered that historic event and broadcast a dramatic shortwave report of the action during a flight over the Normandy coast.



After the war, he twice sailed again on the WEST POINT, after she had become the SS AMERICA again. His second peacetime trip, ironically enough, ended in Germany in 1950. In a recent interview, just before he turned 90, Mr. Hottelet mentioned that he well knew about the ship and the part she and her crew played in his return to freedom. In 2002, he participated in the official opening of George Washington University's Media and Public Affairs Building; dedicated to his famed tutor. 

Reminiscing about his first voyage onboard the ship, Mr. Hottelet recalled that a dining room steward apologized because there was no fresh grapefruit left; he said it had all been eaten by the Germans on the outbound leg of the voyage. Undaunted, Mr. Hottelet says he tried to eat everything else listed on the expansive menu.  recalled that the most memorable event during the trip was seeing Lady Liberty of the ship’s port bow, upon arrival in New York harbor. But then he amended that thought, adding that an even more memorable was the sight of his Mother on the pier, waving wildly.

He also remembered, albeit not in very much detail, the many kindnesses of the WEST POINT’s crew, and asked that they be given his much belated, but more profound thanks at the next possible crew reunion. That request was fulfilled on 21 September 2007.

Mr. Hottel concluded his interview by recounting an intriguing story about another of the refugee/passengers. That remarkable 'sea story' goes something like this:



He shared a dining room table during the trip home with, amongst several others, an attractive lady (and, at the time, her British nobility title was, indeed, "Lady") named **Alice Duckworth**. She was born Alice Hammond, granddaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt. By mid-1941, she was 35, had married a British nobleman and had two daughters; and then had become divorced.

She managed to somehow get from bomb-ravaged England to Lisbon in time to be repatriated onboard AP-23.

When Alice Duckworth arrived in New York, her brother John Hammond met her. John was in the music business. John had an associate that was a close friend. John soon introduced his sister to his friend - **Benny Goodman**.



She and Benny were married in the spring of 1942. But a few months before they became man and wife, she and her brother John were in Chicago, where Benny's orchestra was playing at a night club. They all were staying at the Ambassador Hotel. There, Alice heard a very young, but talented singer sing in, of all places, the hotel's coffee shop. Impressed, Alice took Benny to hear the girl perform.

Benny Goodman, then the world's most famous bandleader, was similarly impressed, and quickly hired the young girl. Born in a North Dakota farm town, her given name was Norma Deloris Egstrom. But the world knows her far better as - **Peggy Lee**.

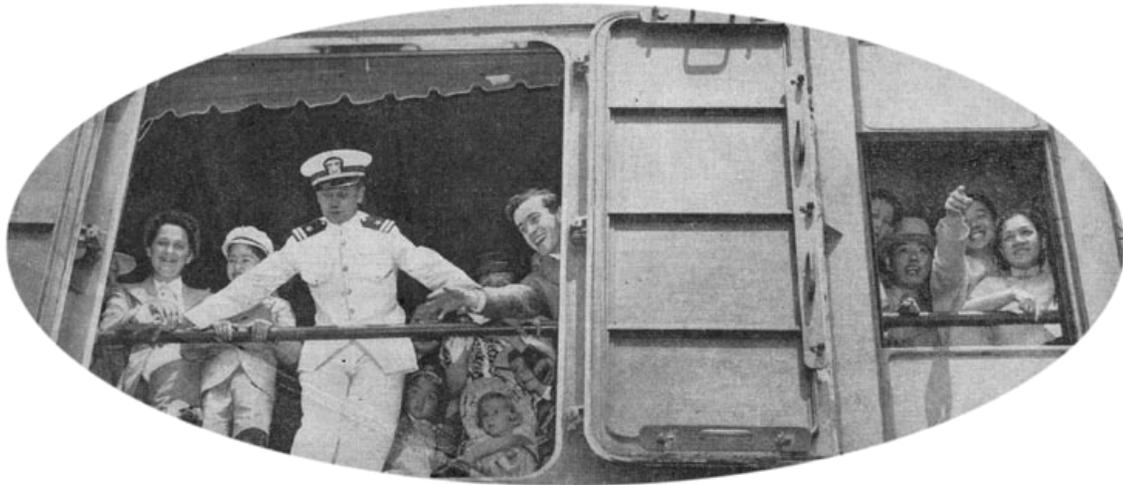


If not for WEST POINT, would Alice have met Benny in time to be with him in Chicago? And, if not, would Benny have somehow otherwise discovered Peggy Lee??

Who knows???

Suffice to say, not only did the crew of WEST POINT bring Alice safely home from Lisbon, but they had a role in this previously unrecorded story of the events that preceded the discovery of one of the sweetest singers in all of swing.

WEST POINT truly opened the doors to freedom for that group of very lucky Americans, when she brought them home on August 1, 1941.



Eventually, WEST POINT would not only transport hundreds of thousands of troops and support personnel to war zones all over the world; she would also bring many of them safely home. During her 56 ½ months of service in the United States Navy, AP-23 steamed 436,144 nautical miles and ferried over half a million souls to and from battlefronts around the world. Significantly, she did so without the loss of a single soldier to enemy action! 

WEST POINT, affectionately known as “*The Grey Ghost*” by her 785-man navy crew, was the largest USN transport in WW II. She carried more troops to more places than any other of our ships. And she did all that by mostly sailing alone. 

Well, not quite alone.

Without her crew to care for her, none of this could have happened.



Bill Lee
October 2007

~ **POSTSCRIPT** ~

...when contributions and meticulous research are aided by dumb luck

*During the 2006 Crew Reunion, Plank Owner **Russ McKeen** not only shared with me his memories of the Lisbon trip, but also kindly loaned me a number of newspaper clippings and other artifacts (which constitute a large part of this story's illustrations). I had long known the 'official' story of that first Atlantic crossing by the ship under any name, but was not aware of the intrigues that were interwoven in that 'war story' that actually preceded America's official entry into World War Two by several months.*

Excited by the materials that Russ lent to me, I then searched the Internet, obtained copies of the ship's logs from the National Archives, and dug through scores of related reference materials for the best part of a year. But most importantly, and significantly, I was fortunate enough to be able to gather additional memories from other WEST POINT navy crew members who were onboard for what I like to call AMERICA's First Transatlantic Crossing.

A kind soul at the National Archives found a list of passengers appended to the log sheets I had requested, and was astute enough to also send me a copy of them. That's where luck came in. Studying the list, I recognized one name – Richard C. Hottelet. A quick check on the ever-useful Internet revealed not only that he was still around, but also his address and telephone number.

Shortly thereafter, just minutes as I recall, - I was conversing directly with him, and enjoying hearing his still-strong 'broadcast' voice. His memories led me to learning all about Alice Duckworth, and...well, you've already read the rest of that part of this story!



The icing on the proverbial cake, for me, was discovering that the 'station ship' in Lisbon when WEST POINT pulled into port that day in July of 1941 is still afloat. And then remembering that I had been aboard INGHAM a few years ago, not knowing, then, of her brief interface with AP-23.

The INGHAM holds the longest service record in the history of the nation's Coast Guard; starting in 1936 when she was commissioned and chased smugglers along the east coast of the United States. When America entered World War Two, the INGHAM left her station ship duty in Lisbon and searched for U-Boats in the North Atlantic during the so-called "Bloody Winter" of 1942-43. She sank a U-Boat, then moved to the Pacific; serving as a flagship for several amphibious landings.

Her long history includes dozens of naval gunfire support missions in Vietnam. In 1980 her crew rescued at least twenty Cubans in the waters between Florida and Cuba. Her 52 years of continuous service ended when she was decommissioned on May 27, 1988.

Happily, she achieved national historic landmark status and became a museum ship at Patriots Point in Charleston, SC, when she currently rests near the USS YORKTOWN (CV-10), built at Newport News on the shipway immediately adjacent to where the WEST POINT was constructed. But that's another story...

