

RMS Queen Mary

On 21 March 1944, the men of the 48th Fighter-Bomber Group boarded the RMS Queen Mary, bound for an unknown and uncertain service in World War II. After a week of sea travel, the contingent arrived at Gourock, Scotland. From there they traveled by train for two days to their first overseas base, RAF Ibsley in Southern England and were assigned to the Ninth Air Force.

RMS Queen Mary was an ocean liner that sailed primarily on the North Atlantic Ocean from 1936 to 1967 for the Cunard Line (known as Cunard-White Star Line when the vessel entered service). Built by John Brown & Company in Clydebank, Scotland, *Queen Mary* along with her running mate, the RMS *Queen Elizabeth*, were built as part of Cunard's planned two-ship weekly express service between Southampton, Cherbourg, and New York City. The two ships were a British response to the superliners built by German and French companies in the late 1920s and early 1930s. *Queen Mary* was the flagship of the Cunard Line from May 1936 until October 1946 when she was replaced in that role by *Queen Elizabeth*.

Queen Mary sailed on her maiden voyage on 27 May 1936 and captured the Blue Riband in August of that year; she lost the title to SS *Normandie* in 1937 and recaptured it in 1938, holding it until 1952 when she was beaten by the new SS *United States*. With the outbreak of World War II, she was converted into a troopship and ferried Allied soldiers for the duration of the war.

Following the war *Queen Mary* was refitted for passenger service and along with *Queen Elizabeth* commenced the two-ship transatlantic passenger service for which the two ships were initially built.



Embarkation - March 21 to March 27

Embarkation/Debarkation: New York, NY to Gourock, Scotland

Units on Board: The 48th Fighter Bomber Group, 34th Reconnaissance Squadron and others (total of 12,072 troops & 1,099 crew)

Convoy Number: None known

Source: R. Faulkner and S. Harding - *Gray Ghost: The RMS Queen Mary at War*

Notes: The following is a transcript of notes from the memoir by the 34th Squadron unit commander:

Under cover of darkness on 21 March 1944 "Shipment 5254-Y" bedecked in full battle dress, detrained once again and marched aboard our "North Atlantic Cruise Ship". And would you believe it! We had drawn the "Pride of the Seas", the Queen Mary. Approximately 350 strong we represented the finishing touch to some 17,000 other warm & crowded bodies already aboard and waiting. We were the last full unit to board. Our enlisted men were immediately escorted directly below to the bowels of the ship, "E Deck"! And as one of the newly appointed "E Deck" commanders I had the honor of joining them.

With "no delay" the "Queen" steamed from her berth out of the narrows of New York harbor during the night hours and was well to sea by the time we saw daylight once again. It was a rough but rapid crossing. With 17,000 plus troops aboard there was little time or room for parading the upper decks. It was a mass of mankind in a relatively confined area. Even the seasick, and there were many, had to elbow their way to the rail--few making it. But I assure you, the "Limey" outfit running this "show" really knew what was going on and what had to be done. It was organized to a "T".

Other than the gales and continuous high seas the only incident occurred on the third night out. Rumor had it that a German "wolfpack" was hard on our tail. At any rate during the night the "Queen" did make a sudden 90 degree turn to the North and drawing full steam must have headed direct for the "Ice Pack" before turning eastward once again. If one dared stick his nose out for a bit of fresh air it was cold, cold, cold. (Incidentally, one of the least publicized but also more reliable post-war secrets attributed that Hitler had posted a \$1,000,000 reward for the "U-boat" skipper and crew that nailed the "Queen" on one of her fully-loaded east-bound crossings--Pleasant Dreams.)

No matter how fast or uneventful our crossing was it wasn't fast enough. It was, indeed, a great relief when we heard the rattle of anchor chains running out on the morning of the sixth day in the Firth of Clyde just outside Glasgow, Scotland. The disposition of the 17,000 troops was executed expeditiously. With minimum delay the 34th had said goodbye to the "Queen of the Seas" and boarded English Coaches for a final train ride south.

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The 34th had sailed from NYC enroute to Chalgrove, England. They were to have sailed as part of a later convoy to the MED. Fortunately they were bumped in schedule, due to accelerated training and the proficiency of the squadron members, and sailed out of NYC. Had they not sailed on QM...they would have died. It seems the squadron that sailed to the MED, in their place, was KIA by a U-Boat attack enroute. All hands on the cargo/troopship perished.

