



FLASHBACK: REMEMBERING WELL THE EMPRESS

By A. Edward Pierce A/56

The truth of the matter is that I never truly met or knew an honest to goodness empress. Of course in this recollection, I am alluding to the troop ship, Empress of Australia, an extremely large converted passenger ship, whom I met back in September 1944 at what I believe was pier #13 in Brooklyn, NY. The members of the division had just been transported from Camp Shanks for its trip to the European Theater of Operations.

I remember well waiting at the pier and walking up the gangplank to board the Empress for our ultimate joining with other oceangoing vessels that made up our convoy to what was to have been France but ended up for us to be Liverpool and thence to Tidworth with a few days stop off at Hungerford Air Base.

Upon boarding the Empress, the second platoon of A company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was assigned to F deck which was situated well below the ship's waterline and just above the ship's inner bottom where the vessel's fuel is situated. To put it succinctly, we were situated in the ship's lowest point of habitation. For sleeping purposes, we were given hammocks that we could hang from the floor of the deck just above us. Most just opted to sleep on the metal deck because being cramped in the hammocks was most uncomfortable. We received just two meals each day on this British owned and operated ship. The food was about as palatable as our sleeping quarters were comfy and cozy. Despite the many negatives, the Empress was the largest vessel in our convoy and it took us

safely with the splendid assistance of our navy's destroyers and destroyer escorts to our ultimate destination.

While it would be foolhardy to speak for others, I do know that my return trip to the United States on the M.I.T. Victory afforded me three very adequate meals each day, better than average three-high bunks with mattresses, and a crew that very much appreciated us and our accomplishments.

Yes, it definitely is good to be an American and it's great to be a Hellcat!