

Captain Carey, the Queen and World War I shipping in the Channel

————— Lorraine Sencicle —————

Newsflash, the Times special correspondent in Folkestone 28th October 1914:

'The French Steamer 'Amiral Ganteaume' carrying about 2,500 French refugees from Calais to Havre, struck a floating mine this afternoon about 12 miles off Cape Gris Nez. It is believed that the passengers were saved, with the exception of between 30 and 40, by the South Eastern and Chatham Company's steamer 'Queen'. Fifteen of the passengers were drowned, and about the same number were crushed to death when the two vessels came together.'

Although World War I (1914-1918) technically began on 28 July 1914, on 3 August Germany declared war on France and massed her troops on the Belgium border. In accordance with the written obligation of 1839 to uphold the neutrality of Belgium, the UK demanded Germany to respect it. They refused and the next day, 4 August, Britain declared war on Germany, the latter's troops having swept through Belgium, routing the Belgian army. Then on 14 August, they defeated the French at Charleroi and on the 31 August, the British Expeditionary Force at Mons. The subsequent fighting consisted mainly of trench warfare with the German capture of the Belgium coast having put Allied shipping under constant threat.

The defences of Dover were placed on a war footing, both on land and sea. The entrance and exit to, the now Fortress Dover, was strictly by the railways and the main roads to Folkestone, Deal and Canterbury. Special passes, limited in number, were necessary for those who required to enter or leave the town. The Military Authorities had the power to arrest and search. All local newspapers were



MBE - Member of the British Empire - awarded to Capt Carey yet Dover has forgotten him - Lest we Forget

subject to censorship by the military and anyone approaching any defensive works would be stopped. Cross-Channel ferries were transferred to Folkestone from where they took troops to the Continent and brought back civilians desperate to get back to England.

One such ship was the Queen a steel triple screw turbine steamer, built in 1903, by Denny's of Dumbarton for the South Eastern and Chatham Railway Company (SECR). Her tonnage was 1,676 gross, 345 net and she had three compound direct drive steam



*Queen - c 1905-10 besides Admiralty Pier.
Courtesy of Dover Museum*



The Queen Cross Channel Turbine Steamer Built by Dennies of Dumbarton 1903 Torpedoed 26th October 1916

turbines, one of high pressure driving the central screw and two of low pressure, driving the outer screws. She was the first cross Channel turbine steamer to come to the port and was put on the Dover/Calais route in June 1903. The Queen quickly became a favourite both for speed and for comfort and was seen by the Company as one of the main reasons for the dramatic increase in passengers in that and subsequent years.

Robert Edward Carey (1864-1942), was born on 30 October 1864 at 2 Townwall Street, Dover, and went to sea with his father when he was 14. They mainly worked on colliers, brigs and schooners sailing out of Dover. In 1892, Robert joined SECR and was married to Eliza Pont the following year. On 20 October 1914 he was appointed the Master of the Queen and six days later, on 26 October, he had taken the Queen across the Channel to Boulogne. On the return journey, at 16.30hrs, off the Varne bank, he saw distress signals. They came from the Amiral Ganteaume a 4,560 ton steamer built by Napier and Miller Ltd, Glasgow, in 1902. She was carrying some 2,500 French refugees from Calais to Havre and according to a Times special correspondent in Folkestone she had, 'struck a floating mine about 12 miles off Cape Gris Nez.'

Donald Waylen, a Daily Mail reporter was on board the Queen, writing that screams could be heard some way off. As they came closer, they could see that most of the passengers on the Amiral Ganteaume were tightly packed on the main deck with some climbing the mast. To his horror, passengers could be seen jumping or being pushed overboard.

Waylen went on to write that the sea was running high and with great skill, Captain Carey manoeuvred the Queen to the leeward side of the Amiral Ganteaume. Then, according to Wentworth Huyshe (1847-1934), who was on the Queen, 'Before this seaman like manoeuvre was complete ... we saw that the whole mass of the refugees were frantic with terror, shouting, crying, gesticulating frantically, waving caps and handkerchiefs. A long loud, wailing cry of terror and despair arose, but mingled with it, and soon, thank God, drowning it, the sound of cheering and clapping of hands and a joyous shout of 'Vive l'Angleterre!' Huyshe wrote that although rescue was at hand, some passengers jumped over the side and swam away from the Queen.

Once alongside and gangway made, the passengers of the Amiral Ganteaume

swarmed onboard the Queen, pushing others to the ground and trampling on them. About 15 passengers were pushed overboard between the two ships and were crushed to death or drowned. One woman, carrying a small child, jumped at the wrong moment, fell between the two ships and they were both crushed. A number of the crew and passengers of the Queen, who were helping, were also knocked down in the rush. Nonetheless, as the Daily Mail reporter observed, 'The crew and passengers of the Queen worked splendidly to rescue the refugees, and eventually their coolness had a pacifying effect, and something like order was restored.'

Eventually, with 1,964 passengers on board from the stricken vessel, the Queen sailed for Folkestone. The captain and crew of the Amiral Ganteaume, remained with the ship and as they parted the two captains saluted each other. Arriving at about 19.00hrs the injured - seventeen - were first taken to the Pavilion Hotel and then to Folkestone Hospital. The remainder were put on a train for London and on arrival, they were taken to Alexandra Palace. Of the injured one died, one lost a leg and two others had an arm amputated. Several children were badly scalded or burnt about the head.

The Amiral Ganteaume eventually made it to Boulogne, where her crew stated that she had not hit a mine but that the ship's boiler had exploded. Most of the passengers who had been thrown into the sea were rescued by fishing boats out of Boulogne. With watertight bulkheads closed, the Amiral Ganteaume was towed to Bordeaux where she arrived on 27 October and was examined.

The official inquiry took place in Paris where the captain of the Amiral Ganteaume said that Napier & Miller in Glasgow had built the ship in 1902 and that the operator

was Chargeurs Réunis of Havre. He went on to say that the vessel had been torpedoed on the starboard side between the engine and the stokehold. The helmsman had seen the periscope of a submarine. A formidable explosion had occurred raising a column of water about 50 yards high.

The examination of the Amiral Ganteaume found that one of the damaged lifeboats led to the discovery of fragments of a German torpedo. This, French and British experts stated, proved that the vessel was torpedoed by a German submarine. They provided photographs that included ones showing the torpedo fragment.

The conclusion was that the ship had been subject to a torpedo attack without military excuse. With the help of the Channel steamer Queen and the trawler Sagaie nearly all the passengers were rescued. Four engine-room hands were killed by the explosion and 20 passengers, consisting of old men, women and children. Finally, the attack was the first recorded attempt made to sink a passenger vessel.

The first German submarines, or U-boats as they were hence forth referred to, had appeared in the Channel around the middle of September 1914, sinking the Aboukir, Hogue and Cressy, off Zeebrugge. All three had men on board from Dover. Immediately after, the Admiralty gave notice that a minefield was to be laid in the eastern entrance to the English Channel, between the East Goodwin Lightship and Ostend. The Scout, Attentive, was attacked by a U-boat on 27 September. This was the first appearance of the U-boats in the Channel and led to the withdrawal of the Scouts from patrol duties. They were replaced by the Dover Patrol, from March 1915, under the command of Rear Admiral Horace Hood (1870-1916)*. The Patrol had bases in both Dover and Dunkerque and consisted of

naval destroyers, small submarines, drifters and requisitioned fishing vessels.

With regards to what had happened to the Amiral Ganteaume, the view of the Admiralty, was that the devastation caused by the submarine's torpedo was catastrophic. However, submarines were a 'novel craft' and not a great concern. To that date, the official statement issued on 1 December 1914, said, 'During the first four months of the War the raids of German submarines have resulted in the destruction of seven of our men-of-war and four or five merchant ships. By gunfire, however, the Germans have succeeded in destroying three men-of-war and some 50 merchantmen.' Therefore, it was concluded, that it was only a matter of time before the naval establishment will have worked how to deal with the 'novel craft.'

*NB: In the Battle of Jutland (31 May-1 June 1916) Rear Admiral Hood commanded the Third Battleship Squadron but was killed when his flagship battle-cruiser Invincible was sunk on 31 May.

The Admiralty did, initially commend Captain Carey on the successful rescue of most of the passengers from the Amiral Ganteaume, then nothing more was said. The Captain quietly carried on with the transporting of troops across the Channel. This, many in Dover found offensive, something that the Dover Express took up followed by the national newspapers. The result was that the French awarded the Captain Carey with the *Medaille de Sauvetage en Or* (2i^{em} classe) and the *Medaille d'Or Societe Centrale de Sauvetage de Naufrages*. King Albert I (1909-1934) of Belgium created him *Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold*. Sir Francis Dent (1866-1955), General Manager of SECR, gave Captain Carey a gold watch. Then, in November 1917, when George V (1910-1936) was

returning from Boulogne on the hospital ship Anglia, of which Captain Carey was Master that day, the King personally expressed his appreciation.

That year King George, recognised that there was a gap in the honours system. There was no official acknowledgement of the many thousands of people who had served in numerous non-combatant capacities during the war. In order to make amends, on 4 June that year he introduced the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire and Captain Carey was honoured in the New Year's Honours list of 1919.

Throughout the War, Captain Carey was involved in the transporting of troops to and from Calais and Boulogne and also between Southampton and Havre. Following the War he was appointed Master of the 2,384 ton Maid of Orleans a steel twin-screw passenger and cargo steamer launched 4 March 1918. Along with other cross Channel ships, she was commandeered for active service in World War II (1939-1945) and was part of the May-June 1940 Dunkirk rescue.

It was reported that the Maid of Orleans was so packed with troops that they were standing shoulder to shoulder when the ship was attacked by five planes. When she arrived in Dover, it was reported that 'blood was running down her sides! The ship was also involved in the Normandy D-Day landings of June 1944 and after making several trips to the beaches hit a mine on 28 June, sank off St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight and five crew members were lost.

Then in 1925, Captain Carey was appointed the Commander of Southern Railways Channel fleet and his flagship was the newly launched Isle of Thanet, a post he held until he retired in 1929. The 2,664 ton Isle of Thanet was a steel twin-screw

turbine steamer built by Denny's of Dumbarton and launched on 23 April 1925. She was provided with Babcock & Wilcox water-tube boilers, oil rather than coal-fired and made her inaugural voyage to Calais on 24 July. In November that year she was transferred to Folkestone for the Boulogne passage.

The Isle of Thanet was the first hospital ship to go into Dunkirk and made several trips. She also saw activity in the D-Day Landings as the deputy HQ ship of Force J commanded by Admiral Philip Vian (1894-1968). Following the War in July 1947, she reopened the Dover-Boulogne service and in May 1948 was transferred to Folkestone until September 1963. She was then brought to Dover until towed away on 10 June 1964 to be broken up.

After he retired, Captain Carey occasionally took charge of other vessels. In 1934, he was the Master of the 12,568 ton US Dollar Steamship Line President Cleveland, when at 04.50hours on Saturday 13 September, he was informed by the First Officer that the land station had reported a ship on fire. His ship was 5 miles south of the Barnegat Light, New Jersey, and Captain Carey ordered the lifeboats to be prepared and informed the engine room that he would go to the rescue. The President Cleveland made for the 11,520 ton US Ward Line Morro Castle, the ship in distress and was alongside about 06.30hours. By that time the 22,424 ton luxury liner, Monarch of Bermuda, the passenger-cargo vessel City of Savannah and the 6,565ton cargo ship Andrea F Luckenbach as well as a number of small craft were at the scene of the disaster. Captain Carey ordered the launch of a motorboat to assess the situation and the officer in charge reported back that there was no one in the water.

The Inquiry was held in New York where it

was stated that the fire was discovered at 03.10hours and that 137 passengers and crew were killed. The cause of the fire was never determined but it was noted that fire precautions left a lot to be desired and that on board were stocks of highly inflammable fluids such as kerosene and turpentine. Captain Carey came in for a great deal of criticism from his four senior officers for not giving the order to launch lifeboats, saying that they had lost confidence in him. However, the Dollar Line inquiry exonerated Captain Carey and two of the officers were relieved of their duties at their own request. Afterwards, it was said that throughout his career Captain Carey had the reputation for being precise and not tolerating the 'rule of thumb'. That he had always refused to carry out any plan, whether it was put forward by management or men, which had not been thought through to his satisfaction. In 1940, Captain Carey was awarded the MBE, along with other members of his crew, for the lives they saved in the Amiral Ganteaume disaster.

The Queen, the ship involved in the Amiral Ganteaume rescue, was the first turbine steamer commissioned by SECR and initially worked the Dover-Calais run. In 1907, she was transferred to the Folkestone-Boulogne service from where she was commandeered in World War I as a troop carrier. In August 1916 she was involved in another heroic rescue when she helped to take off the packed but disabled troop transport ship Empress Queen to safety. The 2,140 ton steel paddle steamer belonging to the Isle of Man Steam Company, had been commandeered by the Admiralty on 6 February 1915 as a troop carrier.

On returning from Le Havre to Southampton on 1 February 1916, with 1,300 men on board, she ran aground on

rocks off the Isle of Wight during foul weather with poor visibility. Destroyers and other ships, including the *Queen*, took off the troops but the crew stayed on board in order to try and save the beleaguered ship. However, the weather deteriorated further and the Bembridge lifeboat managed to rescue the 110 people still on board. The *Queen* was still in the vicinity and she rescued a further nine.

However, towards the end of 1916, about 300,000 tons of shipping was being destroyed every month in the Channel and North Atlantic. Secret German documents showed that U-boats were travelling on the surface at night, passing over the Channel Barrage, a huge net, with minefields on either side, that was strung across the Channel suspended from fishing boats and buoys. On 26 October 1916, while making the return journey after disembarking troops, German destroyers surrounded the *Queen*.

The German commander allowed the crew to take to their boats and then they blew up the brave little ship *Queen*. According to the Admiralty report, she drifted for over three hours before finally coming to rest on the South Goodwins. The ship's crew were picked up and returned to Dover. Lewis Dilnot (21), the ship's cook, later died from injuries sustained while launching the vessel's lifeboat.

In the twenty-four hours that the *Queen* was sunk, ten destroyers were sunk in the Channel by U-boats, including the torpedo-boat destroyer *Flirt*, commanded by Richard P Kellett, but nine of her crew were saved. The Tribal or F Class torpedo-boat destroyer *Nubian*, commanded by Montague Bernard, was disabled, and grounded in the succeeding gale. Six patrol boats were also sunk. The carnage at the Somme when in the course of three months



WWI Troop Ship at Admiralty Pier © Dover Museum

in 1916, 420,000 British service men, 200,000 French and 450,000 Germans were killed or injured and a total of 400,000 from both sides were killed together with the incessant U-boats attacks led to the resignation of Herbert Asquith (1852-1928) as Prime Minister (1908-1916) on 7 December.

In charge of the Dover Patrol at the time the *Queen* was sunk, was Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon (1863-1947) and regardless of the attempts to stop the U-boats attacks they continued. In April 1917, about 875,000 tons of British and Allied shipping were destroyed and subsequent shortages led to the introduction of partial rationing in June 1917 and general rationing on 1 January 1918. Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes (1872-1945) replaced Admiral Bacon on 31 December 1917. Shortly after, the British First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe (1859-1935), was dismissed but before going he had proposed a raid on the Zeebrugge/Ostend U-boat base and Keyes' objective was to formulate a plan – the annually celebrated Zeebrugge Raid!

*This story along with many other
local articles of interest can be found on
Lorraine's website at;*

<http://doverhistorian.wordpress.com>