

M.V. "Allobrogia" at Royal Albert Docks

Autor(en): [s.n.]

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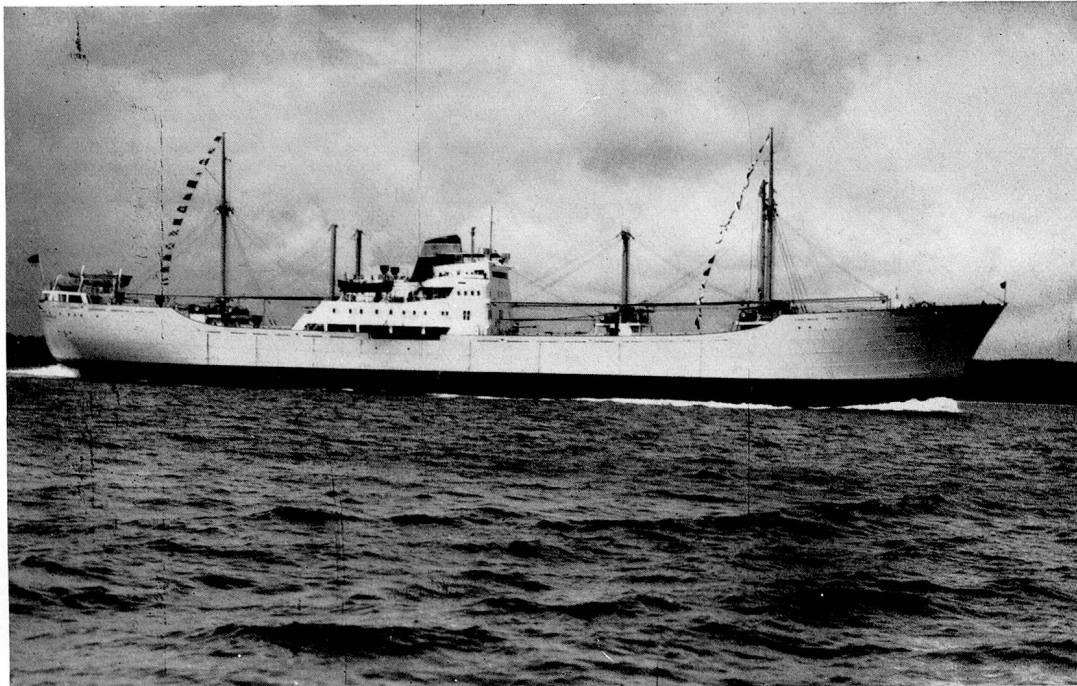
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M.V. "ALLOBROGIA" AT ROYAL ALBERT DOCKS



When the Spanish Armada set sail to invade Britain's shores, it was annihilated; but what the Spaniards did not achieve, the Swiss Merchant Navy has accomplished. It is true, Swiss ships do not carry guns, nor do they come here on any warlike mission —

Once again a vessel, proudly carrying the Swiss flag, has arrived in one of the London Docks. This time it was M.V. "Allobrogia", sister ship of the M.V. "Anunciada", which anchored in mid-river off Gravesend in July of this year. (see report in "Swiss Observer", issue No. 1208, July 17th).

Both ships are owned by the "Transports Maritimes Suisse- Outremer, S.A." of Geneva, and are registered in Basle. (The port of registry for all Swiss ships is Basle. They are entered in the Register of Swiss ships kept by the Office for Maritime Navigation in Basle, which superintends the whole of the Swiss shipping.)

It might be an opportune moment to refer briefly to the history of the Swiss Mercantile fleet.

The Swiss Fleet came into being during the war. Up to that time, Switzerland, without a seaboard, was chartering foreign vessels for its imports — an average of a million tons per annum from overseas. This was the case during the war 1914/18. It was hoped that it might still be possible to act likewise during the last war, especially in view of the time charter contract which was concluded sometime before the beginning of hostilities for 15 Greek tramps with an aggregate tonnage of about 120,000 tons which the belligerents agreed to allot to Switzerland with a guarantee of non requisition.

As war operations developed, however, it was found necessary to create a small merchant fleet under the Swiss Flag which would secure more easily from

the belligerents immunity at sea and access to the ports of discharge. Such a fleet was to be entirely in Swiss hands and used exclusively for transport to and from Switzerland. A little later, other ships were added to this fleet for the transportation of food for the Red Cross which brought highly appreciated relief to all those — prisoners-of-war and others — who benefited from this humanitarian work.

Under the Convention of Barcelona of 1921, such countries without seaboard were allowed to carry out shipping business under their own flag. This enabled the Swiss Government to issue a decree on the 9th April, 1941 entitling their ships to carry the Swiss Flag. Its essential provisions are in agreement with the usual maritime law. The Swiss Federal Council decreed that the various international conventions settling and unifying customs at sea, the work of minors, the repatriation of sailors, the contracts for the crews, etc., should be made compulsory for all vessels flying the Swiss flag.

* * *

In a recent article I mentioned the launching of two Swiss ships, which I had the privilege of attending at the yard of Messrs. Wm. Gray & Co. Ltd., at West Hartlepool on the Scottish border, namely the M.V. "General Guisan" (June, 1947), and the M.V. "Carona" (Nov., 1948), the former owned by the "Suisse Atlantique, S.A." of Lausanne, and the latter by the "Schweiz. Reederei, A.G." of Basle.

Since then, on various occasions, I have had an opportunity of visiting vessels flying the Swiss flag, which arrived either at the London Docks, Gravesend or Tilbury. Each time, I was greatly impressed by these ships, which are not only very handsome to look at, but also beautifully fitted up, and equipped with the latest mechanical devices.

My latest visit took me to the Royal Albert Dock, on Tuesday the 13th of this month, where the M.V. "Allobrogia" had put in from Antwerp taking up general cargo for her voyage to New Zealand.

This ship was built in 1952 at the yard of the "Flensburger Schiffbau-Gesellschaft", Flensburg, she has a length of 434' 9", and breadth 60' 6", gross register 6,205 tons, dead weight 9,565 tons, speed in service is 13½ knots; she is fitted up with Sulzer Diesel engines.

The visiting party included the following: Messrs. S. L. Stanley, A. B. McQueen, A. M. Bolling, Directors of Messrs. Phs. Van Ommeren (London), Ltd., agents for the "Transports Maritimes Suisse-Outremer, S.A." of Geneva. Also from the agents company were present Messrs. C. J. Hart, Peter Strutt, P. Camp and K. B. Evans. Other visitors were Mr. Russel (Messrs. Shaw, Saville & Co.), Mr. Cyril Warwick, Mr. Robinson (Messrs. Houlder Bros. & Co. Ltd.), Mr. Vacher (Messrs. Willis Faber & Dumas), and Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer".

On ascending the companion way we were greeted by captain K. R. Heeres, who is of Dutch nationality. He is one of the oldest captains in the service of the Swiss Mercantile Marine, having been in command of the M.V. "Maloya", as far back as 1940, when she sailed under the Panamanian flag. He is the proud owner of a fine gold wrist watch, presented to him by the Swiss Government for services well rendered.

The captain then took the party on an inspection tour over the ship. We saw the Passengers accommodation which is arranged on the promenade deck, and consists of 6 cabins with two beds each and bathroom attached, all beautifully fitted up, the captain's officers and crew quarters, the bridge, where various instruments were explained, the chart room, wireless cabin and machine room.

It might interest my readers to learn, that of a crew of 36 carried by the "Allobrogia", no less than 22 are of Swiss nationality, mostly coming from the German speaking part of our country. On interviewing some of them, I was delighted to hear, that they are happy and content in their job, although at times feeling somewhat homesick.

The Captain, 1st Officer and Chief Engineer told me that they give every satisfaction, and I hope to see the time arriving when a Swiss ship sailing the high seas will be under the command of a Swiss.

On terminating the inspection, cocktails were served at the cocktail bar, followed by a luncheon in the spacious and luxurious dining room.

The party was seated at various tables, each one presided over by one of the ship's officers. At the principal table were placed the captain, and his wife, and the Directors of the Agents company.

The excellent Menu consisted of Consommé Belle Gabrielle, Croûte aux Champignons, Filet Mignon Béarnaise, Bouquet de Cresson, Pommes Allumettes, Fraises Chantilly, Moka, Vin, Liqueurs.

Having, on several occasions, either dined or lunched on board of a Swiss ship, I can testify to the excellence of the food both as to quality and quantity, which should be an additional incentive to join the "Swiss Navy". The chef, a countryman of ours, had certainly excelled himself, and thus greatly added to the enjoyment of this visit.

During luncheon, the Chief Engineer, Carl Pedersen, a Dane, at whose table I had the pleasure to be seated, told me of his many interesting experiences during his seafaring life.

Mr. Warwick then, on behalf of the visitors thanked Captain Heeres for the generous hospitality extended, congratulating him very warmly on having such a fine vessel under his command, and wishing him and his crew "Bon Voyage". Mr. S. L. Stanley, associated himself with the speaker. After a reply by the captain this interesting and enjoyable visit was concluded.

By the time this report appears in print the M.V. "Allobrogia" will be on its way to a far distant land, may it be a happy and successful voyage.

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