

HISTORY OF THE MAUNGANUI.

The Maunganui was built in 1911 at Glasgow on the order of the Union Steamship Coy of New Zealand. She was designed for the Inter Colonial service. She arrived in Wellington towards the end of 1911 and was immediately put into service on the "Horseshoe run," her ports of call being Hobart, Sydney, Melbourne via Wellington, Lyttelton, Dunedin or Bluff. The high promise expected of her was soon fulfilled and she quickly established a reputation for comfort, speed and sea worthiness. She continued running between New Zealand and Australia until a few months after the beginning of the last war when, along with the Tahiti, she was gutted and transformed into a troopship. She remained a troopship for the rest of the war. She was Commodore's ship in the convoy that took the Main Body to Egypt and was later seen at Mudros. Most of her voyages in this period were between New Zealand and Egypt though she made a few trips between England and New York with American troops. On one such voyage she carried 2,500 soldiers. Towards the end of her career as a troopship she called at Bombay and Karachi where she embarked British troops for England. This was an uneventful trip. The Egyptian insurrection broke out just before the ship arrived at Egypt and all her troops were disembarked at Port Said. After waiting there for three weeks the Maunganui proceeded to Alexandria and embarked women and children and other civilian evacuees for England. These were transported to Southampton and from there the ship went to Liverpool. The last New Zealand troops to leave England were passengers on the next trip and on the 19th July, 1919 the Maunganui arrived back at Port Chalmers having completed four years of honourable service in the First World War.

There followed a period of twelve months at anchor in Port Chalmers where the ship was converted into an oil burner. Previous to this the section that is now occupied by the Q Store, the Convalescent Patient's Mess, the Chapel, Ward M, and some neighbouring areas was one large coal bunker. Of the Chapel it may truly be said that it has seen other days. During the war period the Officers' Mess was as it is now. The present theatre block was used for Officers' accommodation and for reasons that seemed as obscure then as they are now it was always known as "Canaries Cottage."

After being refitted as a passenger liner the ship left Wellington in September 1920 for San Francisco. Thereafter for nearly ten years she carried thousands of passengers in the Tasman and the Pacific. The Inter-Colonial service between Australia and New Zealand was the most constant route but she frequently went to San Francisco and Vancouver. The last voyage to San Francisco was 1936. For several years after this she had a variety of missions which frequently embraced the Inter-Colonial service in summer and Island cruises in the Pacific during the winter. One memorable trip was in April, 1936 when she carried a large contingent of Anzacs to the Anzac celebrations in Sydney.

With the advent of the Second World War the Maunganui put on her white gown and went on active service again as a Hospital Ship, being commissioned on 22 April 1941. This period which has comprised 17 voyages from her home port has been uninterrupted. As a Hospital Ship she has steamed over 320,000 miles, has carried over 9,000 patients which include Pakehas, Maoris, Australians, South Africans, East Africans, Malaysians, Greeks, Danes, English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Americans, French, Indians, Cingalese, Germans, Italians, Norwegians and Yugoslavs, and she has been seen in Wellington, Lyttelton, Melbourne, Sydney, Fremantle, Colombo, Bombay, Aden, Tewfik, Port Said, Durban, Algiers, Port Sudan, Mombassa, Massawa, Tripoli, Gibraltar, Bizerta, Bari, Taranto, Glasgow, Manus, Leyte, Hong Kong, Kiirun, Subic Bay, and Manila.

One of the broad classifications of ships that seamen often make is into lucky and unlucky. The Maunganui is certainly lucky. After 35 years of all seas and weathers and full service in two wars she has escaped all major accidents. In the last war there was a fire in number 5 lower hold. Despite the fact that the ammunition for the six inch gun was stored in the same compartment the fire was successfully dealt with. At the end of 1943 another fire broke out in number two hold and resulted in damage to some equipment and also to the Chief Officer's leg. In both instances the fire was due to a careless smoker. Just previous to the fire the ship broke a crankshaft necessitating repairs in Glasgow. The above incidents represent the worst that the ship has suffered.

(The majority of the information on which the above history is based has been supplied by the present Master, Capt. A.H. Prosser, whose career has been closely associated with the ship. The present voyage marks the fourth occasion on which he has been appointed Master of the ship and he was Chief Officer of the Maunganui during part of the last war. Though some of the information is necessarily documentary, much of it is based on personal knowledge. This magazine acknowledges its indebtedness to Capt. Prosser for his help.)