

# THE NORTH ATLANTIC

day 1

**T**he name of the troop transport which carried Melvin to Gourock, Scotland, is unknown. Port records don't exist from those years in any known fashion that I've been able to uncover.

Two of the more historic transports, the USS West Point and the HMT Queen Mary were already out to sea that day. The West Point had left Gourock for Boston on February 20, and the Queen Mary arrived in Gourock the very day Melvin departed New York. Those records do exist.

Melvin was placed on one of the many medium-sized cruise ships pressed into transport service by the United States government during the war era. His ship would have normally carried 900 pleasure cruise passengers during peace time. This day it carried no fewer than 2700 soldiers.

It was the largest ship Melvin had ever been on. Actually, it was the only ship he had ever been on, up to that point. Pier 88 was long and narrow and located at the western terminus of

48th Street in Manhattan, New York, where it intersected with 12th Avenue, only a stone's throw from Central Park.

He would have boarded the troop transport over a small gang way and reported to his bunk, immediately stowing his personal gear carried onto the ship in the one and only duffel bag allowed. All soldiers on board would then muster on the top deck for final roll call and instruction for the long North Atlantic crossing. This would not be a pleasurable leisure cruise.

On the afternoon of Saturday, February 24, 1945, the ship pulled away from Pier 88 with the help of a small harbor tug and turned into the Hudson River. Slowly at first, but with increasing intent, it powered down the Hudson. The Manhattan skyline was on the left-hand side of the ship, the buildings reaching high into the sky. Only eight or nine blocks to the east, the Empire State Building was fully lit now by the now western sun. This building was only months away from a tragedy eerily similar to the 2001, September 11, attacks on the World Trade Center. However, it would be completely accidental.

Down the Hudson they traveled, passing Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty on their right hand side. Many of the soldiers aboard had never seen these two sites. Even though less than

a century before, some of their relatives had come to know Ellis Island quite personally. It had been ninety-nine years since Melvin's great-great-grandparents, Matthias and Angeline Engle, and their seven children had made the journey from Prussia (Alsace Lorraine) to the United States of America. Perhaps they followed a reverse route to the one that Melvin was currently traveling.

The seas were heavy on the voyage to Scotland. On her return trip, the USS West Point reported hurricane force gales. Mountainous waves sheered off stanchions and bent ladders on deck as the waves crashed into the ship. It would be this storm that Melvin and his ship would run through days later, but on the opposite side of the Atlantic, as the storm swept from East to West.

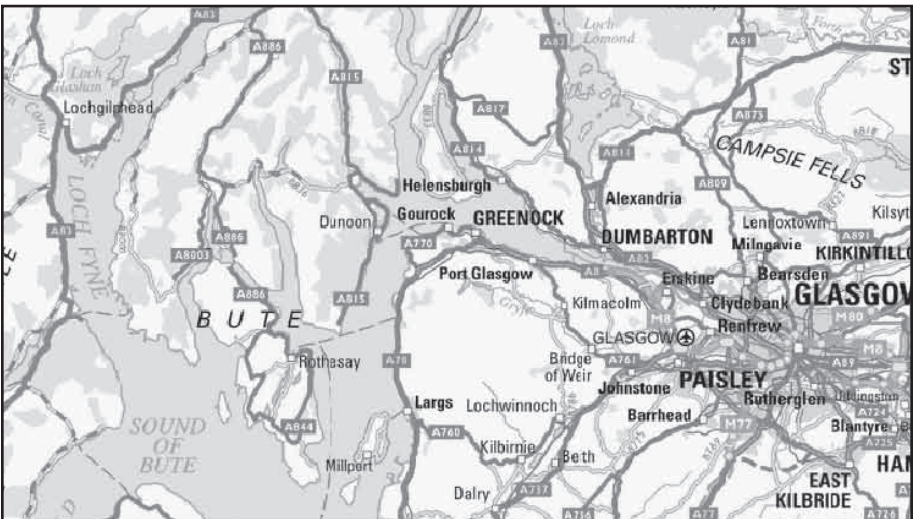
The voyage across the Atlantic took eight long days. Eight days of zig-zagging back and forth to avoid a well launched torpedo from a German U-Boat. Eight days of high seas and seasick land lubbers. Eight days of being packed into a 20' x 15' modified cabin with 27 other seasick men in bunks stacked four high to a row. In spite of the storms, it was usually preferable to be top deck rather than below deck with the stench of the hundreds of seasick men.

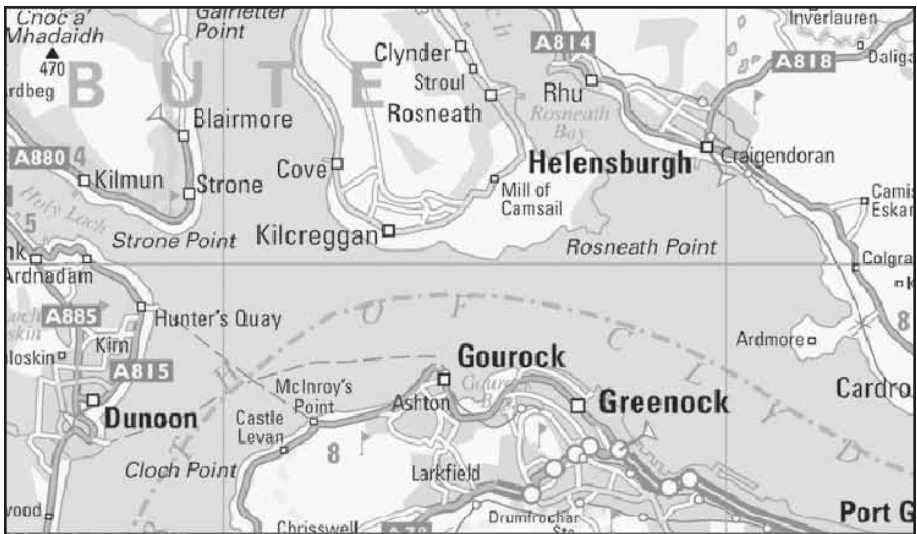
One week later, on Saturday, March 3, 1945,

after completing a successful North Atlantic crossing, land finally appeared. Scotland.

The troop ship navigated down the North Channel, up the much calmer waters of the Firth of Clyde, and found its dock at Gourock about twenty miles northwest of Glasgow. Gourock was a small port town, and still is to this day.

Upon docking in Gourock, their journey was still not complete. Departing muster was initiated on deck of the unidentified troop transport. The soldiers were marched off the ship, finally on dry land once again. Staying in formation was difficult after they departed the ship. They realized they had become accustomed to the sway of the sea. Not having their land legs yet, it was an ordeal to maintain the order of a straight line.





*Modern view of Gourock, Scotland*

Shown the way to the mess hall, they were surprised at how a small cramped gymnasium-sized building now seemed large and roomy as compared to the highly confined quarters of the ship. With a full hot meal to satisfy their stomachs and plenty of hot coffee to chase away the chill of the harsh winter Atlantic winds, they were led to a steam engine train with a seemingly endless number of box cars trailing far behind. After the line of newly arrived soldiers had all climbed aboard their respective box cars, the old steam engine pulled forward with a jerk and gained moderate speed for the 350-mile rail ride south into England and on to Southampton situated on the southern coast of England facing the English Channel. This would be their departure port for Le Harve, France, in the coming days. And from there it was anyone's guess as to where they would be sent next.