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WWII Veteran
Ile de France
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I sailed the last week of June 1945 from Pier 21, bound for the Army of Occupation in NW Europe, and expecting to be away for at least two years. It was a wonderful voyage, the weather being beautiful. We were accompanied on board with a number of young RAF men returning from the Commonwealth Air Training Plan, and several Concert Parties going to entertain the troops who were awaiting repatriation. The war with the Japanese had not yet ended, so we zigzagged in the accepted manner, arriving in Greenock Scotland on the morning of July 1st. One of the "Queens" was anchored nearby in the Clyde River.

Taken by train to Aldershot in Southern England, we arrived just as the famous riots were beginning - by Canadian soldiers who felt they'd been waiting too long for transport home. Due to unforeseen circumstances, reportedly connected to the riots, we found ourselves on the way home again in early 1946. I made the return voyage on the wonderful old Aquitania during the first week of February in a storm that the ship's captain told us was the worst he'd experienced in his 45 years at sea. We were allowed out for exercise only on the boarded-in Promenade Deck where numbers of our 7,000 other returning troops who were seasick would stagger up to hang forlornly on the folded-up metal bunks attached to the bulkheads, presumably for transport of additional passengers (troops) during warm weather.

It was dark when we docked at 21, to my intense disappointment, as we'd also left in the dark. But there was a band on the pier to greet us, and great jubilation all 'round.

I have vivid memories of the countless feet marching down South Street in the pre-dawn of just after dark during 1943/44 and the frequent appearance of the distinctive funnels of the super-liners above 21's roof. The 'Embarkation' pier loomed large in my early adulthood and I'm anxious that the Pier 21 society, in its exhibit, give equal billing with the immigrants and child evacuees to our young men and women who sailed off from here in their thousands to rescue the countries from which the children and the post-war immigrants came.