

# She Led Three Lives: *Queens-Excambion-Texas Clipper*

## USS *Queens* (1944 - 1946)



At least 230 attack transports (APA) — the backbone of an amphibious war — sailed during the Second World War. By 2007, only five were in existence. One of the five, the only one in the Windsor class, was *USS Queens* (APA 103).

On September 12, 1944, *Queens* (named after a borough/county in New York) was launched; on December 16, commissioned — both at Sparrows Point shipyards near Baltimore. *Queens* cruised at 16.5 knots and carried two 5-inch cannons, 2 twin 40mm. guns; 2 twin 20mm. guns; and 18 single-mount 20 mm. guns. The ship was never to fire her guns in battle.

Under the command of USNR Captain John J. Mockrish, *Queens* carried 47 officers and 512 enlisted men on its maiden voyage through the Panama Canal to Pearl Harbor. In March 1945, the ship landed supplies and reinforcements at Iwo Jima and carried wounded marines to hospital facilities in Guam. One marine died on board.

*Queens* trained for an invasion of Japan that would never occur. On September 22, 1945, *Queens* took occupation troops into Sasebo, Japan, about 30 miles north of Nagasaki, site of an atomic-bomb explosion 44 days earlier.

As part of Operation Magic Carpet, *Queens* returned more than 3400 homebound troops and passengers stateside. On June 10, 1946, the ship, under USNR Commander Cyril B. Hamblett, was decommissioned in Norfolk, Virginia, and laid up in the nearby James River for a year. *Queens* was awarded the American Campaign, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign, the Navy Occupation Service, and the World War II Victory ribbons.

## SS Excambion (1948 - 1959)



The first fully air-conditioned ships in the world were the postwar Four Aces, the jewels of the fleet operated by American Export Lines. The Four Aces included *Excalibur*, *Exeter*, *Exochorda* — and *Excambion*.

In December 1947, *Queens* arrived at Bethlehem Steel's shipyard in Hoboken, New Jersey, for conversion to a combiliner that would carry both cargo and passengers. On June 22, 1948, *Queens* was renamed *Excambion*. The ship had 3 masts, 2 pairs of kingposts, 16 cargo booms (cargo would prove more lucrative than passengers). It could carry 4,400 tons of freight (362,000 cu. ft.) in five holds, and 30,000 cu. ft. of goods needing refrigeration.

On December 3, *Excambion* left on its maiden voyage as a cruise ship under command of Captain W.W. Kuhne. Fares started at \$850. On routine 6-week roundtrips, the ship carried a crew of 125 and up to 125 passengers from New York City to Mediterranean ports like Barcelona, Marseille, Naples, Beirut, Alexandria, Iskenderun, Latakia, Piraeus, Livorno, and Genoa.

By 1956, due to Mid-East violence, outbound voyages attracted only about a third of the normal number of passengers, but return voyages were packed with refugee families of American soldiers and diplomats. On December 9, 1957, *Excambion*, substituting for the Moore-McCormack ship *Brazil*, took its only non-Mediterranean voyage to South American ports.

On March 12, 1959, *Excambion* completed its last cruise as a liner. American merchant marine passenger service was being phased out because of competition from the new jet passenger service. For the next seven years, *Excambion* was laid up in the Hudson River Ready Reserve Fleet anchorage at Jones Point, New York.

## USTS *Texas Clipper* (1965 - 1996)



By the time it was placed in the reserve fleet in 1996, the oldest active ship in the entire American merchant marine fleet was *Texas Clipper*.

In 1965, the federal government lent *Excambion* to the 3-year-old Texas Maritime Academy (forerunner of Texas A&M University of Galveston) to train cadets as officers for the American merchant marine. Towed from the Hudson River to Galveston, where it arrived on May 16 — the ship was renamed *Texas Clipper*.

On June 15, 1965, under the command of Captain Bennett M. Dodson (USN-retired), *Texas Clipper* departed on its maiden voyage to Northern Europe with about 120 cadets. The ship's itinerary changed each year to ports in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic, and Mediterranean. It carried a complement of up to 250 officers, faculty members, crew and cadets. One of its more popular programs was the onboard prep-cadet summer school at sea: freshmen enrolled in two college courses, stood watches, and helped maintain the ship.

Finally, after 30 consecutive summer training cruises, the sailing days of the 50-year-old ship were over. On August 4, 1994, under the command of Captain Peter Jaime Bourgeois, *Texas Clipper* completed its final training cruise. For the next two years, it was used as a dockside dormitory for Seaborne Conservation Corps, an educational and job-training program for at risk high school students.

In May 1996, the ship added a roman numeral to its name when its successor *Texas Clipper II* arrived on campus. *Texas Clipper I* was towed to reserve moorings in Beaumont, Texas, where it stayed for ten years. In 2007 it was sunk 17 miles off the southern coast of Texas as an artificial reef.