

## An event in the history of ‘Sebastian’, ex ‘Daybeam’ - by Nicholas Webster

I thought you may be interested in further details regarding the SS **Sebastian** (initially **Daybeam**). My late father, Dennis Webster was Chief Engineer on this vessel for a time and the following has been gathered from what I can remember him telling me about the ship, his Continuous Certificate of Discharge book and a two page report he wrote regarding an incident in 1944.

He had previously been 1st Engineer on another Euxine vessel, SS **Christine Marie** but had to take leave due to a hand injury. After a couple of months he was fit again and went to Gibraltar to join SS **Sebastian**, which as your notes already state had recently been captured. He signed on 26th November 1943. Details of the vessel are given as Number 143504 Net Tons 2052 and N.H.P. 358. He told me the vessel was in poor order, requiring some work before it could sail. The accommodation was extensively wood lined and severely infested with cockroaches. Thus all the panels were stripped out and burned. This woodwork was said to be ‘in a decorative Spanish style’.

The next piece of information comes from a report dated 28th February 1944, apparently written in London, though whether the ship was actually there I cannot say. It details events beginning 15th February 1944 at an unknown location at sea. In rough weather the ship was under orders to make a certain position. En route the engines were racing and needed careful speed management when the ship pitched and the propeller came out of the water (she was therefore I assume not laden). Once arrived the engines were run variously full ahead and full astern for the next two hours to try and hold station. At 07:20 it became apparent that there was little or no load on the engine and something was seriously wrong. Looking over the stern and with the aid of a torch it was possible to see that all the blades were off the propeller, leaving just stumps. There was now some danger that the ship would be washed onto the lee shore. Anchors were dropped and the engine started again in the hope that the propeller stumps might do something. This continued until 14:45 when the engines were shut down. At 18:00 it was decided to abandon ship. In the intervening hours the engine room had been put into what could be describes as a standby condition - fired banked, water levels topped up, dampers shut etc. The last boat left at 18:50. Apparently my father had the misfortune to slip between the hull and the lifeboat, landing in the water. Fortunately, on a previous voyage to America, he had purchased an enormous bearskin coat of the type made popular by the entertainer Bud Flanagan. It turned out to not only be warm but buoyant too. I guess I am proof that they managed to fish him out again.

For whatever the reason, SS **Sebastian** was lucky and did not end up a wreck. She was later taken in tow by a Royal Naval boarding party. When Dennis Webster returned to the ship at 22:00 on Wednesday 16th he found an attempt had been made to use the engine room. Either through inexperience or haste - or both - this had ended up causing even more problems for the ship. The boilers had been lit, but allowed to go out and the engine room was now deserted. His report details equipment damage – including cross connections allowing sea water into the boiler feed system and other equipment either run hot due to lack of water or hydraulically damaged due to water in steam systems. The report concludes with a recommendation that before ‘moving the vessel under her own power’ the boilers be opened up to inspect for low water level damage and similarly the engine cylinders and valves be inspected for damage due to the over speed racing. I suspect he may have stayed with **Sebastian** to oversee some or all of the remedial work - the discharge date being given as 17th April 1944 at North Shields. I suppose it is possible that after repairs she became SS **Empire Tees**, although my father did not sail with her again.

I hope you have found this of interest. It is quite a lot of detail for a relatively small and humble vessel.

Nick Webster

January 28, 2014