



Ship Fact Sheet



STRATHNAVER (1931)

Base data at 2 September 1931. Last amended June 2009

* indicates entries changed during P&O Group service.

Type	Passenger liner
P&O Group service	1931-1962
P&O Group status	Owned by parent company
Former name(s)	
Registered owners, managers* and operators*	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
Builders	Vickers-Armstrongs Ltd
Yard	Barrow-in-Furness
Country	UK
Yard number	663
Registry	London, UK
Official number	162619
Call sign	GRPZ
Signal letters	
Classification society	Lloyd's Register
Gross tonnage*	22,547 grt
Net tonnage*	13,620 nrt
Deadweight*	6,283 tons
Length	194.61m (638.7ft)
Breadth	24.44m (80.2ft)
Depth	14.20m (46.6ft)
Draught	8.671m (28ft 5½in)
Engines	Steam turbines
Engine builders	Vickers-Armstrongs Ltd
Works	Barrow-in-Furness
Country	UK
Power	28,000 shp
Propulsion	Twin screw
Speed	21 knots
Passenger capacity*	498 first class, 670 tourist class
Cargo capacity	12,500 cubic metres (441,000 cubic feet)
Crew*	487 (14 officers, 82 seaman, 21 engineers, 45 firemen and 325 saloon crew)
Employment	UK/Australia service, and cruising as required

Career

- 01.1930: Ordered.
- 05.02.1931: Launched by Lady Janet Bailey, second daughter of P&O Chairman Lord Inchcape.
- 26.08.1931: Ran trials.
- 02.09.1931: Delivered as *Strathnaver* for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company Ltd. The first of five 'white sisters' designed for the UK/Suez/Bombay/Australia service, her name comes from the full title of Lord Inchcape ('of Strathnaver'), and is taken from a valley to the north of Loch Naver, Sutherland. Her first and third funnels were dummies. She and her sister *Strathaird* brought real improvements in passenger comfort including forced ventilation, running water in all cabins (both hot and cold in first class) and the white hulls were reckoned to reduce summer temperatures by 4°F.
- 01.10.1931: Maiden voyage to Brisbane via Marseilles, Suez, Bombay and Colombo carrying 1,416 passengers, the largest P&O load up to that time.
- 1932: First programme of cruises, repeated each year.
- 13.05.1932: A dinner was given on board in Tilbury to mark the end of her maiden voyage, with the speeches being broadcast by the BBC.
- 11.09.1937: Delayed on Australian line voyage at Tilbury after colliding with the quay.
- 1938: Fitted to carry chilled beef with the same equipment as had been installed new in *Stratheden* and *Strathallan*.
- 07.01.1940: Requisitioned by the Ministry of Shipping (later the Ministry of War Transport) for service as a troop transport. Sailed from Sydney in the first Australia and New Zealand/Near East convoy.
- 11.11.1942: Landed troops at Algiers.
- 12.11.1942: Ferried survivors of P&O's *Cathay* and British India's *Karanja* from Bougie to Algiers while under fire.
- 05.1943/
06.1943: Used in training in the Red Sea for the Italian landings and later followed the Allied forces up Italy as they advanced. During the War steamed 563,000km (350,000 miles) and carried 128,792 personnel.
- 10.10.1946: Collided with small cargo vessel *Fluor* which sank in about 40 foot of water at Berth 103, Southampton.
- 04.11.1948: Arrived at Belfast to be refitted and reconditioned by Harland & Wolff Ltd.
- 06.12.1948: Redelivered to her owners.
- 05.01.1950: Re-entered commercial service on the Australian route carrying 573 first and 496 tourist class passengers. She now had only one funnel.
- 16.06.1953: Chartered to take Government guests to the Coronation Review at Spithead.
- 06.1954: Refitted as a one-class ship (1,252 tourist class passengers). Now usually omitted calls at Bombay.
- 19.12.1959: Collided with the tanker *Light* at Port Said owing to temporary engine failure. Repairs were carried out at Aden.
- 05.1960: Now managed by P&O-Orient Management Ltd., operated by P&O-Orient Lines.

- 25.10.1960: Rescued the Second Officer (and sole survivor) of the Egyptian steamer *El Gamil* which had sunk in the southern Red Sea.
- 11.12.1961: Withdrawal announced after the Australian Government cancelled forward bookings for supported-passage British emigrants for the first five months of 1962.
- 12.02.1962: Sold for £325,500 to Shun Fung Ironworks Co, Hong Kong for breaking up.
- 01.03.1962: Left London on delivery voyage.
- 03.04.1962: Arrived at breakers in Hong Kong.

COMMANDER'S REPORT

ss STRATHNAVER, At Sea, 19 November 1942

The Managing Directors,
P&OSNCo,
122 Leadenhall St.
London EC3

Gentlemen,

I beg to forward my report on the experiences of this ship, during Combined Operations in North Africa.

The voyage out, in convoy, was uneventful until the early morning of 7 November when, at about 0530, a submarine torpedoed the USS *Thomas G Stone*, obtaining a hit which carried away her propeller and steering gear. The ship fell out of convoy but was taken in tow and arrived in Algiers on November 11th.

Reconnaissance planes were seen over the convoy at times during the day but no attack was made.

The landing went off without much opposition at any of the beaches and *Strathnaver* entered Algiers Bay in the forenoon of November 9th.

The ship was ordered alongside but no definite berth was allotted and it was decided, in conference with the Pilot, that the best wharf available was the East side of Mole Louis Billiard.

There were no tugs available and a fresh NE wind was blowing on the wharf and a small French ship was moored head and stern about 150 feet off the wharf and parallel to it.

While approaching the breakwater the first enemy planes came over and, although this was a comparatively mild raid, a very heavy bomb fell a few hundred yards off our port quarter.

At 1600 a heavy attack developed and one of HM Ships received a direct hit which caused a fire aft. This was got under [*sic*] although a quantity of ready use ammunition caught fire.

Our fighters made their first appearance in this raid and 11 enemy planes were brought down, some in view of the ship.

Many houses in the town were hit by AA fire during this time but no great damage seems to have been done. No bombs were dropped on the town.

At dusk minelaying and torpedo bombing planes were active in the Bay and out to sea

but no ships in the anchorage received any damage.

At dawn next day low flying planes again came the bay [*sic*] and there was much activity over the sea. During the day there was bombing inland, apparently over the aerodromes. The usual mine-laying and torpedo attack took place at dusk.

A small raid took place about 0200 on 11 November and a heavy bomb fell about 200 yards from us.

The ship sailed for Bougie at 2000. Flares were burning over the land at several places as we left.

Approaching Bougie at 0645 on 12 November we ran right into a torpedo bombing and minelaying attack and it was reported that a torpedo had passed close astern of the ship. The planes were seen to be flying about 6 feet above the water, one of them seemed to be no more than a ship's length away.

At the same time a heavy bombing raid developed on the ships in the anchorage and we saw HMS *Karanja* hit and set on fire. *Cathay* was, by this time, burning fiercely and listing. She had caught fire during the night, having been abandoned earlier. Another of HM Ships [HMS *Tynwald*] was slowly sinking and a monitor [HMS *Roberts*] had received a direct hit from a heavy bomb. She was, however, able to steam into the harbour.

I received a signal from this ship to say that magnetic mines had been laid in the approaches to the harbour and anchored well clear. A corvette came alongside and took off the majority of our troops, the remainder being disembarked in our landing craft.

At about 0830 some 4 aircraft attacked without effect.

One military officer and 4 Oerlikon gun crews remained on board to assist in the AA defence of the ship.

At about 0930 disembarkation was complete, except for the above gunners, and I signalled the Senior Officer of Minesweepers asking to be swept into the harbour and two sweepers carried out this sweep ahead of us.

As we approached the harbour an attack by 6 aircraft was made, a stick of bombs just missed the blazing wreck of *Cathay* and a salvo of 4 fell just short of the ss *Marnix van Sint Aldegonde* as she was weighing and another 4 very close to the craft which had just landed our troops. One oil bomb, with incendiaries, fell close to our starboard bow. Planes were around for a long time and firing was fairly continuous while we were manoeuvring and making fast in the harbour.

At 1330 there was an attack by about 7 aircraft.

At approximately 1500 a formation of 10 planes were spotted coming in over the hill close on our starboard side and it was apparent that this attack was directed at this

ship. Heavy bombs fell on shore near us and two fell some 20 yards on our starboard quarter. These brought down some insulation in the engine room.

Our fighters came into operation in this raid and one enemy plane was seen to crash but we heard later that they had much more success than this. Bombing attacks were made at 1700 and 1800. During the latter the expected torpedo and minelaying attack took place,

At 2200 *Strathnaver* cleared the harbour and sailed for Algiers and, except for one flare dropped at sea and rather too close for our liking and one reconnaissance plane over Algiers Bay the next day, we saw no more air activity.

Bombing attacks were of two kinds, dive bombing and level, the latter from about 6,000 to 7,000 feet. Shallow dive bombing from about 3,000 to 4,000 feet. Both types were uncomfortably accurate.

It would appear that in most of these raids a definite target had been selected beforehand, as we had been left alone until inside the harbour.

Once inside there is no doubt that we got protection from the high, steep hill close to, this obviously interfered with the planes' run in.

During the raids at Algiers our AA gunners were over eager and had to be checked when firing at planes clearly out of range and retreating. At Bougie, however, there was very little waste of ammunition although no opportunity of opening fire on any plane in range was missed. Some very good shooting was seen and hits were observed although we cannot claim to have brought anything down.

The 1500 raid was definitely broken up by our prompt and accurate fire. The Bofors gun put up a very good performance, as did the two 12 pounders although the latter, being mounted forward, seldom had a clear range owing to the derricks being hoisted for discharging, and the planes usually coming in from the quarter.

This explains [their] limited expenditure of ammunition.

Control of the Oerlikons was done by means of the "Ardente" loud hailer with great success. As soon as enemy planes were spotted the bearing and elevation was passed to the guns with the addition of such information as "out of range", "coming in" etc. and also the order to open or check fire. I think that it is certain that no plane came within range without being fired on.

Apart from the protection from the hill everything was in the enemy's favour; cloud cover at the right height and no wind.

As it was essential that the work of the ship should go on, even during raids, the Air Alarm was not sounded, but, as orders were always broadcast for guns crews to close up throughout the ship, warning was passed to all that a raid was imminent. The breaks between raids were few and short.

Throughout the practically continuous raids, at Bougie the behaviour of the crew, in all Departments, was excellent. As an example, while entering harbour, current was cut off the winches in order to minimise the risk of fire and, although a raid was in progress, the Lascars carried on hoisting the 3 ton derricks by hand.

The appointment of a DEMS Officer, Lieut. Evans RNVR, proved to be of great value, not only in the care of the greatly increased armament and assistance in organising action stations, ammunition supply parties etc. but also in looking after the DEMS personnel. It is hoped that Lieut. Evans may be re-appointed.

Most of the bombers were thought to be Ju88s. but He111s were also reported. The torpedo bombers and minelayers appeared to be Italian S79s.

The following ammunition was expended during the Operation:
Oerlikon 3,704 rounds; Bofors 216 rounds; 12 pdr 25 rounds; 3" QF 78 rounds; .303 & .300 750 rounds; 2" UP rockets 82.

The Ship's Company suffered no casualties. Slight damage was done to the concrete on the wharf at Algiers and the ship's side was set in, a frame buckled and a port in the firemen's forecastle strained. This was due to the ship surging alongside unprotected until two baulks of timber were "acquired" for use as fenders.

I am glad to be able to report that there was complete cooperation between the ship and the Naval officers appointed for duty for the voyage and that amicable relations were maintained throughout.

I have the honour to be,
Gentlemen,
Your obedient Servant,
E M Coates
Commander

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