

MAYFLOWER TO MALA

It was the ship Exodus that was immortalized in literature and on film. But at the very moment she was being rammed and captured by the British as she attempted to slip into Palestinian waters, an ex-Presidential yacht was being readied to carry 2500 more displaced Jews to their promised land

BY RICHARD WINER

It was cold and blustery that winter day in 1948 when I walked from the BMT Line Station down to the docks at Gravesend in Brooklyn. It was a raw, damp cold — very dissimilar to the dry Minnesota cold that I had finally adopted myself to after four-years of Navy duty in the South Pacific.

Ahead, I could see the jungle of masts that identified Liberty ships, tugs, patrol craft, landing ships, and other vessels laid-up as war surplus. It was a relief to reach the pier and get in the lee of these ships out of the full force of the howling North Atlantic gale.

As I shifted my seabag from one sore shoulder to one not quite as sore, I kept wondering why sailors wore bell-bottoms in the winter. My legs from the knees down had never been so cold. I partially consoled myself with the thought that things could be worse — I could be at sea that day standing a bow watch.

I looked down at the debris-strewn docks in search of some line or something to wrap around by pants cuffs to keep out the cold.

There, lying in a rotting cargo net, was a ball of marlin. As I was about to bend over and try to pick it up without removing my sea bag, I glanced to see if anyone was watching and discovered that I was already at the ship on which I was to report — the SS *Mala*, formerly the USS *Mayflower*.

The *Mayflower* was built by J. and G. Thompson, Clyde Bank, Scotland, in 1896 for an American industrialist. With the Spanish-American War she was purchased by the United States Navy as a patrol vessel for plying Cuban waters. The vessel was commissioned USS *Mayflower* on 24 March 1898 at the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn.

The ship went through a couple decommissionings and commissionings, with the last one being on 1 November 1904, at which time she would take on a new mission. When Theodore Roosevelt became president, he selected her as his presidential yacht, being recommissioned as such on 25 July 1905.

With the exception of a period of patrol and convoy service during World War I,



USS *Mayflower* (PY-1) being converted to a presidential yacht for Theodore Roosevelt in the Brooklyn Navy Yard during 1904.

she served as yacht to all presidents up to 22 March 1929, when she was once again decommissioned.

On 19 October 1931, she was sold to Frank P. Parish of Chicago. With the coming of the Second World War, she was purchased by the War Shipping Administration from the Broadfoot Iron Works in North Carolina and renamed *Butte*. The US Coast Guard operated her as a gunboat and radar training ship beginning on 6 September 1943 as USCGC *Mayflower* (WPB-183). The *Mayflower* was sold as surplus to a sealing company as a factory and base ship in 1946.

Next to being converted to a barge, a sealing factory ship is about the worst fate that can befall a ex-presidential yacht, and I think that the *Mayflower* knew this, for on her first hunt she reached the northern extremity of Hudson Bay and blew one of her main boilers, killing the second engineer and a fireman. She was towed back to New York and sold to one of the many “single vessel”-shipping companies that

Magnificent view of the *Mayflower* flying all her flags. With a displacement of 2690-tons, *Mayflower* had a length of 273-ft, a beam of 36-ft, draft of 17-ft 2.5-in, and a top speed of 17-kts.