

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE M.V. STAR OF MALTA

**By John Buchanan**

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to quite a few readers who replied to my earlier request for information relating to the grounding of the MV Star of Malta in July 1955. All their contributions were much appreciated.

Having completed my research, I feel that these contributors should be able to read the interesting history of this vessel which I have summarised as follows:



The M.V. Star of Malta was launched in 1925 as the luxury yacht Camargo. She was built for a wealthy American - Julius Fleischmann of Cincinnati who was an expert yachtsman. While cruising on board Camargo in the South Pacific with his wife and two children he secretly created maps that were later used by the U.S government when attacking the many Japanese held islands during World War II.

In 1938 she was sold to the Dominican Republic President Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo and renamed Ramfis.

In 1942 she was acquired by the U.S. Navy and converted for Naval service and commissioned USS Marcasite (PY-28) on the 12th May, 1942 with Lt. Cdr. Leander Jeffrey in command. She saw service at Pearl Harbor escorting merchant ships operating in the Hawaiian Islands. Having left Pearl Harbor she was next stationed at Seattle where she served as a patrol and weather station ship. She was decommissioned on the 5th October, 1944 and sold in October that year when she was converted for commercial use and renamed Comando.

In 1947 she was acquired by the Minster SS Co. Ltd (Mitchell Cotts & Co. Malta) and was renamed Westminster. In 1952 she was sold to a Maltese - Mr. Paul M. Laferla who operated her thrice weekly as the passenger ferry Star of Malta between Malta and Syracuse.

On 29th July, 1955 at about 8 a.m. whilst returning from Syracuse the Star of Malta ran aground in thick early mist on the Mercanti Reef some 200 feet off Dragonara Point and capsized. The ship which under the command of Commodore S.G. Kent, O.B.E. was carrying 57 passengers, some were on deck at the time whilst others preparing to go to breakfast. Some passengers and crew swam ashore or were picked up by a fleet of small boats which came to their assistance. The Second Cook, Mr. A. Grech was drowned and a passenger, Miss Mary Borg was unaccounted for. Malta had now lost its only sea link with Sicily. The Royal Navy sent the destroyer HMS Scorpion to pick up stranded passengers in Sicily.

In August that year the Star of Malta was re-floated and towed to the Rodriques shipyard in Messina where she was repaired. The vessel carried mail and a hand stamp "DAMAGED BY SEAWATER"/"EX STAR OF MALTA 29.7.55" was applied to all letters, cards etc. salvaged from the wreck.

Two months later she returned to Malta in much the same foggy conditions as when she went aground. She was under the command of Captain Velkjo Hajjia, a Yugoslav.

On September 19th assessors from the maritime inquiry into the circumstances which led to the grounding of the Star of Malta found that the responsibility for the accident rested squarely on the master of the vessel, Commodore S.G. Kent.

However, Commodore Kent's blameless record as master was taken into full consideration by the assessors who felt they could do no less than recommend that his master's ticket be suspended for 12 months from the date of the grounding.

She was sold in March 1966 to Cantieri Navali della Grazie, La Spezia, Italy where she was broken up thus ending 41 years in a variety of interesting roles.

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