

Submarine Warfare during WWI: Survivors of the *SS Magellan* December 1916

by
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Introduction

SS Magellan (Fig. 1) a French passenger steamer of 6,027 tons, was built by Messageries Maritimes in La Ciotat, France in 1897 and brought into service the next year as paquebot and named *SS Indus*. She served as paquebot with some three sister ships between Marseille and the Far East. In 1904 she was diverted to

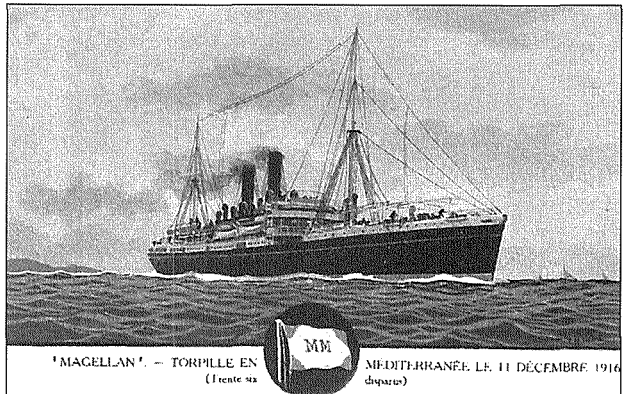


Figure 1. Viewcard commemorating the loss of *SS Magellan*

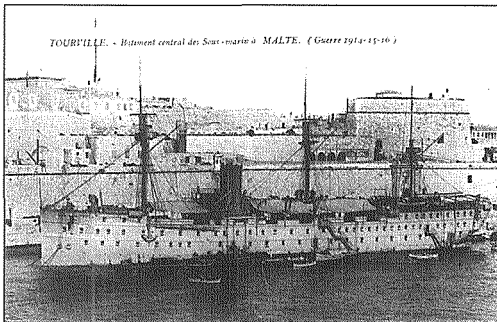


Figure 2. Viewcard of the French base depot ship the *Tourville* in Malta

serve as paquebot between Bordeaux and Buenos Aires and renamed *SS Magellan*. In 1912 she is diverted once more to the postal route of the Far East and at the outbreak of the war requisitioned to assure the postal service on the same line. Next during March and April 1915 she participates at the Dardanelles expedition.

Submarine attack and the landing at Malta.

December 1916, *SS Magellan* with 736 persons on board formed part of a convoy travelling from Shanghai to Marseille. The voyage across the Mediterranean last several days and is dangerous due to the omnipresence of mines and submarines. The *SS Magellan* was accompanied by the French troopship *Amiral Mogan* while escorted across the Mediterranean by *HMS Cyclamen* and the French destroyer *Sabre* when it was torpedoed around 7.30 am 10 miles south of the island of Pantellaria by the German submarine *U-63*. The ship was hit by two torpedoes and sank within two hours with 36 victims of which 26 passengers. When the French destroyer *Sagaie* and the paquebot *SS Sinai*, also owned

by Messageries Maritimes, came to the rescue of the survivors of *SS Magellan*, the *SS Sinai* was also torpedoed by *U-63* and stayed afloat for another six hours before she sank too.

The survivors were landed in Malta and to stay on board the French base depot ship the *Tourville* (Fig. 2). The two viewcards depicting survivors of the *SS Magellan* were taken immediately after their rescue and sent at the end of December 1916 to one of the girlfriends of a survivor mentioning that in a few days a ship would arrive from Salonika to transport them to Marseille (Fig. 3 & 4). The writer of the viewcards can be identified wearing a black beret and standing left on the viewcard taken in a room and written on 27 December, while the one taken outside and written on 28 December he can be seen standing at the top row in the middle (with a cross over his head).

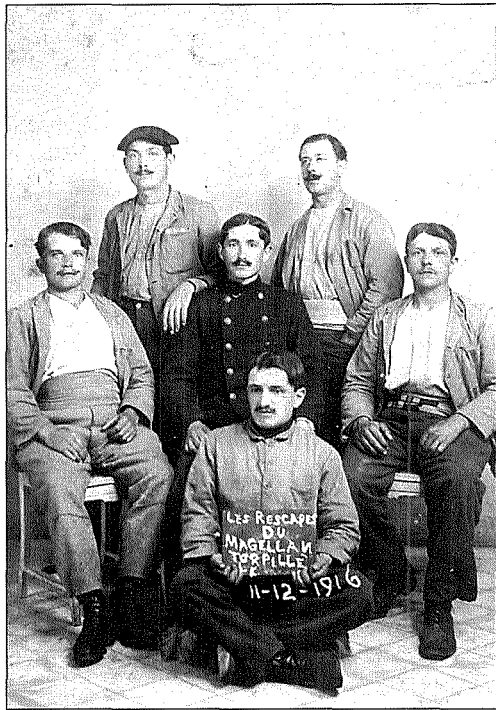
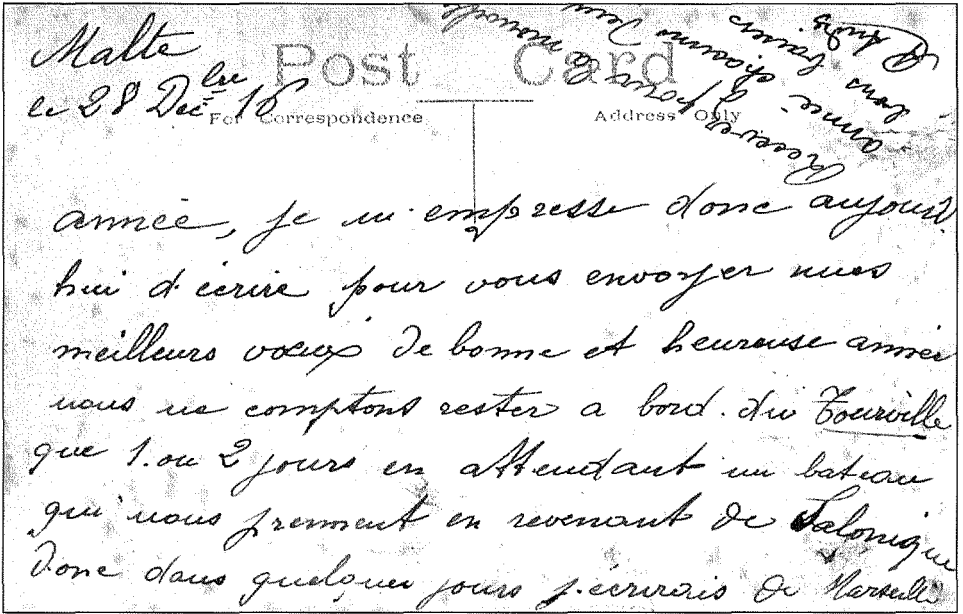


Figure 3. Viewcard depicting survivors in a room dated 27 December 1916



Figure 4. Viewcard depicting survivors dated 28 December 1916



Epilogue

One of the landed persons was the so-called '*contrôleur des postes*' or postal orderly named Jules Hardy of the SS *Magellan* and might have saved some of the mail on board. Three military were not as fortunate as they succumbed to their injuries while at Malta and were buried at the Bighi cemetery. Two soldiers formed part of the *1er Régiment de marche d'Afrique*, battalion of the Foreign Legion (1) the Belgian Alexandre Verdels who died on 11 December, and (2) the Frenchman Alexandre Emile Guegan who died the next day. While of the *115e Régiment d'infanterie territoriale* it concerned the Frenchman Victor Carbonnel. Also the French troopship *Amiral Mogan* was not all that fortunate as it sank the next month forming part of a convoy on its way from Marseille to Salonika after being torpedoed by a submarine.

*Every member
 should try
 to enrol another member*