



# Reviews

Edited by William A. Fox

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## BOAT TRAINS: The English Channel & Ocean Liner Specials

Martyn Pring. *Pen & Sword (casematepublishers.com)*. 2020. 384 pp., illustrated \$70.00. Hardcover.

**T**HE CONCEPT OF THE EUROPEAN BOAT TRAIN HAS ALWAYS fascinated me. The idea of boarding a train in London in 1900 and having it deliver you pier-side at Dover to the ship heading for

France, or taking a train to Southampton to board a ship for Montreal, speaks of a highly sophisticated, interacting, multifaceted, international transportation network.

**THE AUTHOR**, using descriptive text, black-and-white and color photos, colorized postcards, and period advertising posters, brings to life the world of the boat train. We meet not only the trains and the ships but

also those who partook of this service. Those riding the boat train were not only the wealthy but from all walks of life.

**THE BOOK IS DIVIDED** into three sections. The first section explores the development and demise of boat train operations in Europe. The second section discusses boat train operations between England and France. The third section reports on Great Britain's boat train overseas passenger liner service.

**THE OVERALL STORY** of boat train service is divided into three eras. The first era is the years before World War I, the golden age of boat train service; the second era, in the 1920s and 1930s, saw the railroads struggling to maintain the prewar opulence during times of economic crisis; and the third and final era was the decades after World War II, when the boat train suffered a slow death as Europe undertook to rebuild its war-destroyed rail network, and domestic commercial aviation grew in efficiency.

**THE FIRST SECTION** traces the development of the boat train on the continent and its adoption by the railroads and steamboat companies based in Great Britain. European boat train operations tied the Baltic countries to each other and connected the mainland to Mediterranean islands.

**THE SECOND SECTION** is "Great Cross Channel Boat Train Expresses" and examines in detail the Calais-Mediterranean Express, Cote d'Azur Rapid, Rome Express, the Blue Train and the Golden Arrow. The author also provides a nice, detailed look at night ferry service, where one's Pullman car was transported across the English Channel on the well deck of the ferry to allow a one-coach trip from London to Nimes. The slow demise of the boat train during the last half of the 20th century was due to the cross-channel ferries catering more to the transportation of trucks and cars and to the opening of the Channel, which provided direct

train service between Great Britain and the continent.

**THE THIRD SECTION** examines Southern England ocean liner special boat train operations. Ports covered are Liverpool Riverside and Gladstone Docks, Southampton Docks, Plymouth Millbay and Stonehouse Docks, Bristol Avonmouth Dock, and Fishguard Harbor. All of these boat train operations would cease running during the 1960s thanks to the airplane.

**AMONG THE LONG-DISTANCE** boat train routes touched on by the author is the one from London to Tokyo via a train from London to Liverpool, then a ship to Halifax, Nova Scotia, a train to Vancouver, British Columbia, then a ship to Yokohama, and a train to Tokyo. Another seagoing boat train route is travel by ship from Bombay, India, to Port Suez, Egypt, then another ship for Taranto, Italy, a train for Cherbourg, France, a boat to Dover and then a train to London. Both of these routes offered travelers a faster way of reaching their destinations than an all-water route.

**THIS BOOK SHOULD APPEAL** to the rail fan, the ship enthusiast, the connoisseur of color travel posters and those interested in the business of transportation. I know of nowhere else one can find so much information on boat train operations in one book. While pricey, the book is well worth a read by anyone interested in the interconnectivity of different means of public transportation.

Charles H. Bogart

## THE IMMORTALS: The World War II Story of Five Fearless Heroes, The Sinking of the *Dorchester*, and an Awe-inspiring Rescue

Steven T. Collis. *Shadow Mountain (shadowmountain.com)*. 2021. 256 pp., illustrated. \$24.99. Hardcover.

**I**HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED in the story of the Merchants and Miners passenger liner *Dorchester*, built at Newport News in 1928. She was the second of her class, between *Chatham* and *Fairfax*. These were luxurious, 365-ft, 314-passenger, 5,549-ton vessels built for the booming trade between Miami and northern ports. All three were called for war service as Army troop transports in 1941 and 1942. *Chatham* was torpedoed and sank in Canadian waters in August 1942, and of 569 men aboard only 26 were lost. *Fairfax* survived the war, but *Dorchester* was torpedoed near Greenland on February 3, 1943, and 678 men of the 904 aboard were lost. Four Army chaplains prayed with those on board and gave them their own lifejackets in one of the most heroic and famous episodes of the war.

**IN THE IMMORTALS**, Steven T. Collis tells the story of the sinking

