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SS Conte Biancamano

Conte Biancamano was an Italian ocean liner launched in 1925. The name was chosen in honor of Humbert I Biancamano, founder of the Savoy dynasty. She was built in the Scottish shipyard William Beardmore & Co. in Dalmuir, near Glasgow. She was built for the Genovese shipping company Lloyd Sabaudo, operator of the *Conte Rosso* and *Conte Verde*. The engine, equipped with two steam turbines double reduction unit and two propellers, allowed her to reach a speed of 20 knots, and vented in two funnels. She housed 180 passengers in first class, 220 in second class, 390 in economic class and 2,660 in third class.

Conte Biancamano was the first of two sister ships, her sister *Conte Grande* not seeing completion until 1927.

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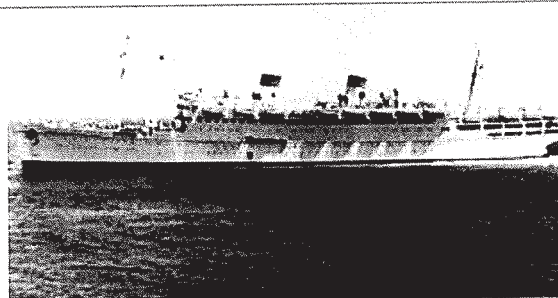
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First years of service

Conte Biancamano was launched 23 April 1925, and made her maiden voyage on 20 November 1925 from Genoa to New York, sailing, as expected, on a direct



CONTE BIANCAMANO

SS Conte Biancamano in 1950s

History

Italy

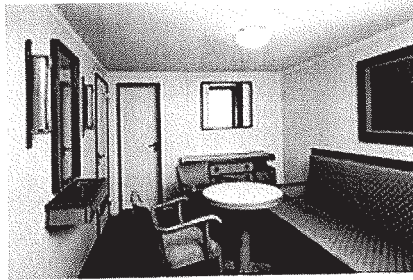
| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Name: | SS <i>Conte Biancamano</i> |
| Namesake: | Humbert I, Count of Savoy |
| Operator: | 1925–1932: Lloyd Sabaudo 1932–1936: Italian Line 1936–1940: Lloyd Triestino 1940–1941: Italian Line |
| Port of registry: | Genoa, Italy |
| Builder: | William Beardmore & Co. of Glasgow, Scotland |
| Launched: | 23 April 1925 |
| Maiden voyage: | 20 November 1925 |
| Fate: | Seized by the United States in December 1941 |

United States

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name: | USS <i>Hermitage</i> (AP-54) |
| Christened: | 1942 |
| Completed: | 1942 |
| Commissioned: | 14 August 1942 |
| Decommissioned: | 20 August 1946 |
| Fate: | Returned to the Italian Line in 1947 |

Italy

| | |
|-------|----------------------------|
| Name: | SS <i>Conte Biancamano</i> |
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First-class cabin of the *Conte Biancamano*, reconstruction at Museo nazionale della scienza e della tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci, Milan.

route to North America. The ship, provided with all the most innovative amenities of its time, was intended primarily as a luxury liner.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Operator: | 1947–1960: Italian Line |
| Port of registry: | ■ ■ Genoa, Italy |
| Builder: | Shipyards of Monfalcone |
| Completed: | 1948 |
| Out of service: | 26 March 1960 |
| Fate: | Completed as National Museum of Science and Technology named <i>Leonardo da Vinci</i> |
| Status: | Partially saved as a museum |

General characteristics

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Type: | 1925–1941: Ocean liner 1941–1947: Troop transport 1947–present: Ocean liner |
| Tonnage: | 1925–1947: 23,562 gross 1947–1960: 24,416 gross |
| Length: | 203.56 m (667.8 feet) |
| Beam: | 23.24 m (76.25 feet) |
| Height: | 8.36 m (27.4 feet) |
| Propulsion: | steam turbines double reduction unit and two propellers |
| Speed: | 20 knots |
| Capacity: | 180 1st class, 220 2nd class, 390 2nd class (economy), 2660 3rd class |

The last trip for the Lloyd Sabaudo departed from Genoa to New York on 25 November 1932.

In 1932, Lloyd Sabaudo, together with other Italian shipping companies, merged to form the famous Italian Line. The *Conte Biancamano* was then used for direct routes to South America. This was continued for six trips, the last of which began on 1 July 1932.

In 1934, she was used for military purposes. She carried troops and military equipment on behalf of the Ministry of the Navy in preparation for the war in Ethiopia.

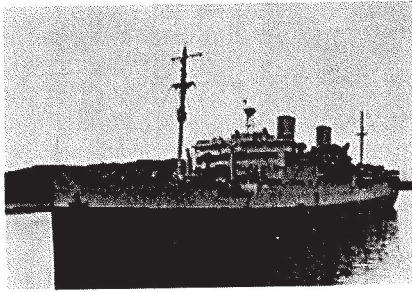
In 1936, she was transferred to Lloyd Triestino, one of the companies in the group, which took a direct route to the Middle East.

In March 1939, the ship carried the first team of climbers (led by the mountaineer Fritz Wiessner) on the 1939 American Karakoram expedition to K2. Scenes of the team on board feature in a BBC documentary titled 'Mountain Men: The Ghosts of K2'.

In 1939 on at least one passage many German Jewish refugees were able to book passage on her, from Genoa to Shanghai, via the Suez Canal and with stops at many ports, as a means of escaping the Nazi terror and genocide. In 1940, she returned to Italian Line and was used for a trip from Genoa – Naples – Panama – Valparaiso – Panama.

USS Hermitage (AP-54)

At the start of the Second World War, she was seized and interned in the Panamanian port of Cristóbal, where she was moored. In December 1941, with the entry of the United States into the war, she was seized by the United States. She was converted to a transport by Cramp Shipbuilding



SS Conte Biancamano as USS *Hermitage* (AP-54)

of Philadelphia; and commissioned 14 August 1942, Captain Donald F. Patterson in command.^[1] The ship could accommodate up to seven thousand men following its conversion. The ship was armed with one 127/38mm gun^[2] and six 76/50mm guns.^[3]

Operation Torch

Embarking 5,600 army troops and sailors, on 2 November 1942 *Hermitage* departed New York with her skipper acting as convoy commodore. Six days later the North African invasion began, and *Hermitage* on 10–25 November debarked her passengers at Casablanca to participate in the momentous campaign. Returning to Norfolk, Virginia 11 December, *Hermitage* next headed for the Pacific with nearly 6,000 passengers embarked. After embarking and debarking passengers at Balboa, Noumea, Brisbane, Sydney, Pago Pago, and Honolulu, the former luxury liner put in at San Francisco 2 March 1943.

Pacific operations

Hermitage's next swing westward, begun 27 March took her to Wellington, New Zealand; Melbourne; and Bombay. At Bombay she embarked some 707 Polish refugees, including nearly a hundred children, for a voyage back to California which ended 25 June. In the next year *Hermitage* made three similar cruises through the South Pacific, with battle-bound marines, soldiers and sailors, civilians, and Chinese and Indian refugees among her diversified passengers. *Hermitage* reached New York 28 May from the South Pacific via Noumea, Goodenough Island, and the Panama Canal.

Operation Overlord

Departing New York 16 June 1944 with over 6,000 passengers, most of them bound for the invasion of Europe just begun at Normandy, *Hermitage* sailed to Liverpool and Belfast to debark the troops before returning to New York 12 July. From then until the end of the war she made 10 more such voyages, principally to Le Havre, to bring replacements to the European theater and transport wounded Allied soldiers and prisoners of war back to the States. V-E Day, 8 May 1945, found *Hermitage* part of the celebration in Le Havre harbor as Allied ships greeted the end of 6 years of war with a cacophony of bells, whistles and sirens screaming through air illuminated by hundreds of signal flares and rockets.

Late- and post-war

Following the Normandy Landings, she made several trips between Europe and the U.S. to transport troops and return wounded prisoners, the first of which was on 16 June 1944. She was at Le Havre on 8 May 1945, the day of Germany's surrender.

On Thursday, 22 November 1945 the *Hermitage* sailed from Marseilles Harbor with 5,799 aboard with units from the 12th Armored Division and the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The ship arrived in New York City on Saturday, 1 December 1945 at Pier 88 North River, at 48th Street at approximately noon.

Departing New York 12 December, the well-traveled transport sailed to Nagoya, Japan to embark some 6,000 homeward bound veterans and return to Seattle 4 February 1946. Assigned to the San Francisco-Marianas run for Operation Magic Carpet, the return of thousands of Pacific troops, she made three further voyages before decommissioning at San Francisco 20 August 1946. While serving with the Navy, the former luxury liner had sailed approximately 230,000 miles and transported 129,695 passengers, including American, British, Australian, French, and Netherlands fighting men as well as Chinese, American, Polish, and British civilians and German and Italian prisoners.