

Basic Detail Report



SS Devanha Lifeboat

Vessel number

HV000652

Date

c1905

Primary Maker

Harland & Wolff

Description

The lifeboat is built with clinker construction and has twenty planks on each side. It is framed and has a heavy keelson over the frames. Within the hull there is a narrow deck 200mm below the sheer. This is boxed in with tongue and groove boards which run down to the internal frames in the bilge, and inside this structure are a series

of copper sheet flotation tanks, lining the interior space. There are four cross thwarts at the deck level. The boat can be propelled using either oars or rowlocks mounted on the gunwale, or by mast and sail. During the Gallipoli landing the boats each carried over 30 soldiers with their equipment and were rowed to shore. SS DEVANHA was built in 1905-6 by Caird and Co, Greenock, for the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). Registered on 31 January 1906, the ship was placed on the UK to India and Far East run for nine years. After the outbreak of war in 1914 it was pressed into military service in 1915. As with other requisitioned vessels it continued to be manned by the normal peacetime P&O officers and crews. SS DEVANHA was then known as Troopship A3, and sailed to the Mediterranean to take part in the landings at Gallipoli to open up a new front in the European theatre. It served as both a troop transport ship (HMT) and later hospital ship (HMHS). It was used by 12 Battalion AIF, 3 Field Ambulance and 3 Infantry Brigade Head Quarters during the landings at Gallipoli in 1915. On 25 April at 2pm the ship sailed from Mudros Harbour and proceeded to the Island of Imbros, anchoring off Kephalos Harbour. SS DEVANHA was A5 in the convoy, Berth 4 of the Echelon landing force. At 11pm the order was given for the troops to move into six destroyers, which had moved up on either side of their respective transports. As SS DEVANHA carried only one company of the 12th, some medical officers, stretcher-bearers and others of the 3rd Field Ambulance and the 3rd Infantry Brigade Head Quarters only one destroyer, the HMS RIBBLE, came alongside the ship. The historian Charles Bean noted that: 'The night was so still that the Devanha's captain ordered 'Lower the Gangway.' Down this the troops ('A' Coy, 3rd Fld Amb and H.Q) filed on to the destroyer's deck in half the time that had been required with the rope ladders on which they had practiced for nearly two months. Five minutes before midnight, HMS RIBBLE, with its decks crowded, left the transport towing behind it SS DEVANHA's empty lifeboats. They headed toward the landing beaches with the six other destroyers, all similarly loaded. The life boats from HMS RIBBLE landed on the beach around

the point from Anzac Cove. This landing was part of the initial wave and was timed to arrive at the beach at about 4.30 am. The landing position was almost at the extreme north (or left) of the Divisional front, at the foot of the well-known landmark on Russell's Top known as 'The Sphinx'. This portion of the beach was under direct machine-gun fire, apparently coming from the lower slopes of Walker's Ridge or perhaps further north from the vicinity of Fisherman's Hut. After the first wave of troops landed SS DEVANHA steamed up the coast as a feint to draw enemy fire. That evening the vessel evacuated its first load of casualties and began service as a hospital ship. As a hospital ship HMHS DEVANHA transported sick and wounded troops from the battle field to hospital bases. Originally hospital ships were ordered to take serious cases while transports were to take the lightly wounded, but the confusion which resulted after the initial landing and the large numbers of casualties meant this system soon fell into disarray. HMHS DEVANHA and other hospital ships provided emergency treatment while evacuating the troops directly to Egypt, from where some would be sent to Malta and England. HMHS DEVANHA continued with these duties until the end of the campaign, and it was the last hospital ship to leave the Dardanelles. The lifeboat managed to remain with SS DEVANHA and was used until 1919 when a passenger who knew it had been used at Gallipoli alerted the Australian War Memorial to the existence of the boat. After negotiations with P & O the craft was donated to the AWM in late December 1919 along with documentation provided by P&O that confirmed that Lifeboat No. 5 was used in the Gallipoli landings. The Lifeboat has been restored and is now on display in Victoria at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 8.74 m × 8.33 m × 2.71 m (28.66 ft × 27.33 ft × 8.9 ft)