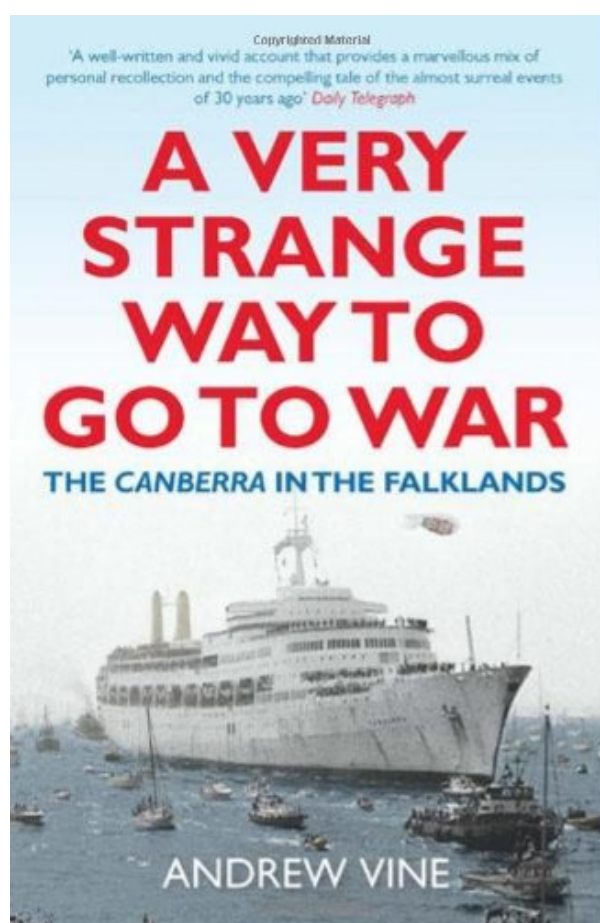


A VERY STRANGE WAY TO GO TO WAR: THE CANBERRA IN THE FALKLANDS BY ANDREW VINE



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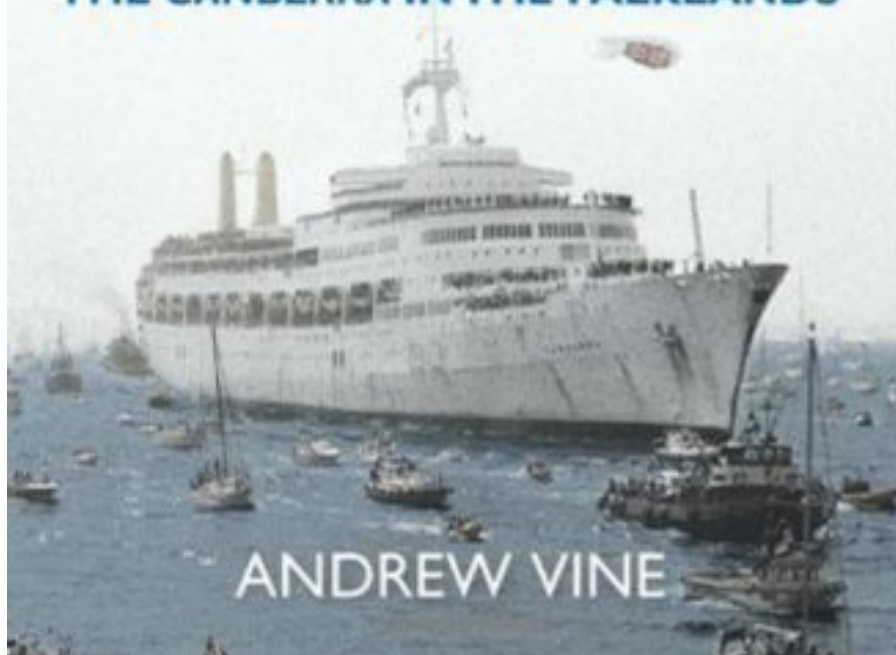


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'A well-written and vivid account that provides a marvellous mix of personal recollection and the compelling tale of the almost surreal events of 30 years ago' *Daily Telegraph*

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Review

A well-written and vivid account that provides a marvellous mix of personal recollection and the compelling tale of the almost surreal events of 30 years ago *The Telegraph*

About the Author

Andrew Vine is an award-winning journalist and assistant editor of the *Yorkshire Post*. He is author of *Last of the Summer Wine: The Story of the World's Longest Running Comedy Series*. He lives in Leeds.

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She was the last icon of an age of leisurely travel fading into memory even as she embarked on her maiden voyage: a luxurious ocean liner vast and brilliant white, a beacon of elegance and opulence. For a decade P&O's flagship SS Canberra was the standard passage for any Britons travelling to Australia, and subsequently the voyage of a lifetime for well-heeled cruise passengers. But then in March 1982 Britain stirred itself to go to war for the first time in generations in defence of a lonely and little-known outpost of empire, the Falkland Islands, and the Canberra, its round-the-world cruise suddenly interrupted at Gibraltar for the first of the military to board, found itself, surreally, requisitioned as a troopship to carry the Marines and the Paratroops into battle.

This is the astonishing story of how a luxury liner and her civilian crew – as close as family – went from pampering affluent retirees in the Mediterranean to taking thousands of soldiers, who pounded circuits of her creaking decks incessantly to keep fit, and took them down into the bitter winter waters of the South Atlantic. On the day troops landed to recapture the Falklands Canberra found herself in the thick of action with Argentine bombs raining down around her. Against the odds she survived, performing a crucial role as a hospital ship, then taking a vanquished and bewildered conscript army home to Buenos Aires before returning to Southampton, grubby and rust-streaked, forever to be fondly known as the Great White Whale, to a tumultuous hero's welcome.

This is the extraordinary story untold until now, of how unlikely combatants like waiters, cooks, nurses and cleaners who never in their dreams imagined they could be caught up in a war, found themselves on the front line at the very end of the world. Drawing on dozens of new interviews with those who were there, from the Canberra's crew to the soldiers and war correspondents who sailed with her, as well as previously unpublished archives, *A Very Strange Way To Go To War* is a candid, revealing and compelling story of bravery, by turns surprising, tender and deeply moving. Above all, it is the story of a quintessentially British finest hour, brought about by ordinary men and women, who, when their country called, went all the way.

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Review

A well-written and vivid account that provides a marvellous mix of personal recollection and the compelling tale of the almost surreal events of 30 years ago *The Telegraph*

About the Author

Andrew Vine is an award-winning journalist and assistant editor of the Yorkshire Post. He is author of Last of the Summer Wine: The Story of the World's Longest Running Comedy Series. He lives in Leeds.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

More fodder for the addicts

By Amazon Customer

My favorite ship of all time is the extremely atmospheric SS Canberra, aboard which I took a world cruise in the 1980s. Every utterance about this ultimate ocean liner stops me in my tracks. This is one of those books that really takes you there with information, insight and English humor.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A worthwhile alternative viewpoint for Falklands conflict readers

By FallsChurchReader

This is a worthwhile counterpoint to the many accounts of the Falklands conflict written by or about its military participants. Vine succeeds in detailing the life of the Canberra's crew and its passengers to create a narrative unlike others available for the war. Those conducting deep reading into the conflict should not miss this one.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

The Canberra's role in the Falklands war

By Peter Durward Harris

The author has managed to largely avoid politics in this book, which is quite extraordinary given the nature of the book, although politics creeps in here and there. The war itself is given very limited coverage beyond Canberra's role, although the main events are mentioned briefly.

The author discusses the life of the Canberra from its beginnings in the fifties to its scrapping in the late nineties, but mostly focuses on its 1982 role as a troopship. It also carried supplies, served as a hospital ship when required, and also carried prisoners of war back to Argentina - well away from Buenos Aires, where by that time the junta was in trouble so it was wise to land those prisoners near the southern tip.

The book discusses the conversion of the cruise liner to a warship, explaining that it was far from ideal in that there was plenty of glass, wood and other material that would be avoided as far as possible in a warship, but that it had the capacity needed. Other advantages became apparent along the journey including excellent training space, but the ship was still vulnerable - and if the Argentine commanders had realized that the Canberra was carrying troops, they would have attacked her as soon as they spotted her at anchor. Britain must be grateful that initially, Argentina focused in attacking the warships.

Plenty of coverage is given to the way the facilities on board were adapted, the relations between crew and troops and how that developed as the days and weeks rolled by. There was also a dispute between the Canberra, which was in danger, and the QE2, which stayed well away from the main action, but brought extra troops to South Georgia along with much needed extra food, but refused to let the Canberra have any of that food.

It is a shame that the Canberra ended up being scrapped, but the scrap merchant paid a good price that was presumably better than anybody else was prepared to pay for it.

This is an incredible story. I followed the war avidly at the time, being one of the few people who knew much about the Falkland Islands (in those days, I was a stamp collector and the Falkland Islands was one of

my favorite countries) but I mostly followed the news stories and background info such as you'll find in this book wasn't available then for obvious reasons.

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