

SS *Pennsylvania* (1896)

SS *Pennsylvania* was a transatlantic liner that was launched in Ireland in 1896 and spent most of her career with Hamburg America Line (HAPAG). She was the first of a class of four HAPAG sister ships that were built in the United Kingdom and Germany between 1896 and 1899.

In 1917 the US Government seized *Pennsylvania* and renamed her ***Nansemond***. She was a troop ship with the Army Transport Service until the end of the First World War. In 1919 the US Navy operated her as the troop ship **USS *Nansemond* (ID-1395)**.

In August 1919 the Navy returned *Nansemond* to the United States Shipping Board, who had her converted to a cargo-only ship. She was scrapped in 1924.

Building

Harland and Wolff built *Pennsylvania* in Belfast, launching her on 10 September 1896 and completing her on 30 January 1897.^[1] Her registered length was 559.4 ft (170.5 m), her beam was 62.2 ft (19.0 m) and her depth was 30.0 ft (9.1 m). Her tonnages were 13,265 GRT, 8,527 NRT^[2] and 25,000 long tons (25,401 t) displacement.

Harland and Wolff built *Pennsylvania* as a three-class ship. She originally had berths for 162 passengers in first class, 197 in second class and 2,382 in third class.^[3]

Pennsylvania had twin propellers, each driven by a four-cylinder quadruple-expansion steam engine. Between them her twin engines were rated at 695 NHP^[2] and gave her a speed of 14 knots (26 km/h).^[4]

HAPAG registered *Arcadia* in Hamburg. Her code letters were RKPB.^[2]

Sister ships followed *Pennsylvania* from German shipyards. Blohm & Voss built *Pretoria* in 1897^[3] and *Graf Waldersee* in 1898.^[5] AG Vulcan Stettin built



Pennsylvania about 1897–1900

History	
Name	1896: <i>Pennsylvania</i> 1917: <i>Nansemond</i>
Namesake	1896: <u>Pennsylvania</u> 1917: <u>Nansemond</u>
Owner	1897: <u>Hamburg America Line</u> 1917: <u>US Shipping Board</u>
Operator	1917: <u>Army Transport Service</u> 1919: <u>United States Navy</u>
Port of registry	1897: <u>Hamburg</u> 1919: <u>New York</u>
Route	Hamburg – New York
Builder	<u>Harland and Wolff</u> , <u>Belfast</u>
Yard number	302
Launched	10 September 1896
Completed	30 January 1897
Acquired	seized by USA, April 1917
Commissioned	into US Navy, 20 January 1919
Decommissioned	from US Navy, 25 August 1919
Maiden voyage	30 January 1897

Patricia in 1899.^[3]

Pennsylvania

On 30 January 1897 *Pennsylvania* began her maiden voyage from Belfast to New York.^[4] Her regular route was between New York and Hamburg.

On 24 September 1902 *Pennsylvania* rescued all 13 crew from the Norwegian barque *Bothnia*, who had been struggling against rising water for 17 days. On 8 March 1910 *Pennsylvania* accidentally rammed the Hamburg-registered schooner *Gertrud* in the mouth of the Elbe, killing five of the schooner's six crew.^[3]

After the collision, *Pennsylvania* was refitted as a two-class ship, with berths for 404 second class and 2,200 third class passengers. The refit increased her tonnage to 13,333 GRT.^[3]

In the same 1910 refit a flight deck was installed on her after deckhouse for an aeroplane to take off and fly up to 43 nautical miles (80 km). After a number of test flights the flight deck was removed.^[6]

By 1913 *Pennsylvania* was equipped for wireless telegraphy. Her call sign was DDN.^[7]

On 18 July 1914, amid the July Crisis in Europe, *Pennsylvania* left Hamburg for New York. In the first week of August the First World War began, so *Pennsylvania* remained in the neutral US.^[3]

Nansemond

On 6 April 1917 The US declared war on Germany. The US Shipping Board seized *Pennsylvania* and renamed her *Nansemond*. She was given two 6-inch/40-caliber guns and two 3-inch/50-caliber guns as defensive armament. For the remainder of the war the Army Transport Service used *Nansemond* as a troop ship.^[8] The cargoes she carried from the US to Europe included railroad locomotives.^[9]

Late in November 1918 *Nansemond* left Saint-Nazaire in France carrying 16 Medical Corps personnel and 148 patients suffering from shell shock. She was caught in a succession of westerly and northwesterly gales, and on

Reclassified	<u>troop ship</u> , 1917
Refit	1910, 1919
Identification	<u>code letters</u> : 1897–1917: RKPB  1917 (US Shipping Board): LHMJ  1919 (US Navy): GJBN  1919 (US Shipping Board): NITL  1913: <u>wireless call sign</u> DDN 1919: <u>pennant number</u> ID-1395
Fate	Scrapped 1924
General characteristics	
Class and type	P-class <u>ocean liner</u>
Tonnage	13,265 <u>GRT</u> , 8,527 <u>NRT</u>
Displacement	25,000 long tons (25,401 t)
Length	559.4 ft (170.5 m)
Beam	62.2 ft (19.0 m)
Draft	28 ft 5 in (8.66 m)
Depth	30.0 ft (9.1 m)
Decks	4
Installed power	695 <u>NHP</u>
Propulsion	2 × <u>quadruple-expansion engines</u> 2 × <u>propellers</u>
Speed	14 knots (26 km/h)
Capacity	<u>passengers</u> : 1897: 162 1st class, 197 2nd class, 2,382 3rd class 1910: 404 2nd class, 2,200 3rd class

30 November and 1 December she weathered waves up to 40 feet (12 m) high. She reached a US port on 7 December, five days late.^[10]

At Hoboken, New Jersey on 20 January 1919 *Nansemond* was commissioned into the US Navy with the pennant number ID-1395 and code letters GJBN. Lt Cdr W McLeod, USNRF, was appointed to command her, and she was assigned to the Naval Overseas Transportation Service.^[11] For Navy service she was repainted with a black hull and funnel, white superstructure and yellow masts.^[9]

On 4 February *Nansemond* left New York carrying Army supplies, and on 16 February she reached St-Nazaire. On 26 February she left St-Nazaire carrying members of the American Expeditionary Forces, and on 11 March she reached Newport News, Virginia. She spent the next five months crossing and re-crossing the North Atlantic, making a round trip every 32 days.^[11]

On 28 June *Nansemond* left Brest, France carrying members of the 802nd Pioneer Infantry, which was an African-American unit. Also aboard was Frank Monroe Upton, a US Navy ensign who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.^[12]

On 23 August 1919 *Nansemond* reached New York from Brest carrying 2,327 troops.^[13] On 25 August the Navy decommissioned her and returned her to the US Shipping Board the same day.^[11]

Troops	at least 2,327
Complement	as troop ship: 399
Crew	in civilian service: 250
Sensors and processing systems	<u>submarine signalling</u>
Armament	1917–18: 2 × <u>6-inch/40-caliber guns</u> 2 × <u>3-inch/50-caliber guns</u>
Notes	sister ships: <i>Pretoria</i> , <i>Graf Waldersee</i> , <i>Patricia</i>



USS *Nansemond* in 1919, with homeward-bound US troops lining her rails

Fate

The USSB sent *Nansemond* to the National Dry Dock and Repair Company to be converted into a cargo-only ship. A strike or strikes delayed the work, which was not completed until 19 December. The USSB retained Cox & Stevens to prepare plans for new cabin and steerage accommodation, but did not commission the refit to be undertaken.^[14]

The USSB at first allocated *Nansemond* to American Line. The Board then bareboat chartered her to the Army Transport Service, which operated her between Antwerp and New York.^[14]

Nansemond was then laid up with other USSB ships in the lower Hudson River. She was scrapped in 1924^[15] in Baltimore by the Boston Iron and Metals Company.^[1]

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