

Beat: Local

## **THE SAGA OF THE BRIDGE CELEBRATING 1917 - THE EVENT OF CENTURY - 2017!**

### **QUEEN MARY II RETURNED ITS NATIVE PLACE**

SAINT-NAZAIRE / LOIRE-ATLANTIQUE 44 / FRANCE, 08.07.2017, 00:48 Time

**USPA NEWS** - Part Two : A travel back on history full of witnesses and various stories !

Real inspiration to travel with its so specific old style the Queen Mary II is used to cross the Oceans. Getting on board and enjoy going on one of its cruise remains a dream for many people. But sometimes it becomes something magic and unusual that makes your spirit travel through your eyes only. Transatlantic of the century between Saint-Nazaire and New York has so offered many memorable moments to the crowd coming to admire the Queen Mary II but not only, commemorating first the arrival of the Sammies while first World War in France. Festivities of this exceptional event named The Bridge (Watch the article in the section news to know some more) have ended in New York City this beginning of July. But almost 3200 miles away, no one could ever forget the enormous impact lived at departure harbour in Saint-Nazaire. Travel was not only on board. Let's remember and discover some of these moments witnesses and their stories !

It was almost five in the afternoon this Saturday June the 24th when the tension rises one more level with the sound of the funnel of the Queen Mary II echoes along the harbour and the main village of the Bridge... The weather stays really warm. Estimated at about 300 000, people are joining all along the coast from both rivers of the Loire's Estuary contemplating a shadow on the sea becoming closer minutes after minutes. All along the beaches and the fairway of La Loire from both parts of the rivers, the emotion is growing.... The famous cruise liner has never reached again the coast of Saint-Nazaire since it has been delivered at the end of 2003 to the Cunard line. But thanks to the Bridge, the dream of most of the local people is becoming true. They have been expecting it since years. And before leaving again to New York City for a unique historical cruise, they will come numerous responding to the appeal of joining the festivities. Some Americans and French flags are twirling above the heads as on some apartments through the initiative of the local. Saint-Nazaire's harbour is having a field day.

### **An intense emotion along both rivers of the Estuary of Loire**

Among all these people awaiting the Queen Mary II, Jean-Claude Boulay has been coming with his wife Annette. They are from Saint-Michel Chef-Chef a few kilometers on the other side of the Loire, home of the famous and delicious "Galette". Even if they have to organize the local tennis tournaments of the Tennis Club they are directing, they wished to be here on that so special afternoon. The Queen Mary II is like a child around. Watching it returning inside "La Forme Joubert" is full of emotion. Many would have tears coming at the moment of attempting the return. And nobody has forgotten the drama in November 2003 that has provoked 16 deaths and 29 injured. So this commemoration of the Sammies is also a good way to turn its back to the past. It is much more a like of gratitude but really a new vision on future as the symbolism of the transatlantic departure between here and New York City.

Besides this sensational emotion is not only the one of locals. Not too far from the Sammies's statue another witness of this historical event of 1917, were standing Deborah and Ruth Miller (63 and 89 years old) They are from Boston and traveling for the first time in France. They are daughter and mother. But in 1917 a young boy named Evan Miller has set foot on the ground of Saint-Nazaire. He was only 19 years old and has experienced 19 months aid at hospital and was the Deborah's grandfather. They are three generations here and admiring full of emotion this beautiful Cruise Liner from the Cunard on its way to park inside the harbour. Three generations of the family have been coming so at Saint-Nazaire. They have been guest by the town as they were discovering Nantes and the "Pays de Loire".

### **Three generations of a family following the trail of their Sammie**

Later while the QM2 is making the joy of the visitors taking many pictures and impressed by the boat the official commemorating ceremony inside the village is on. The official's speeches underline this growing emotion and the impact of the history for the town as

mentioned by the mayor David Samzun. Even the dove release contributes to the symbol of the alliance. Nathalie Nicaud dressed sublimely with the official colours of the two countries sings notably with class both national anthems in front of officials, veterans and some representing the armies. In a few hours she will herself get on board as she was not expected that privilege and will travel to New York City.

A little further on the way back to "La Forme Joubert" and as a small boat leaves the basin to reach the sea some of the crew members are visiting the village. Christopher is from Philippines. He is 20 years old and he explains how it is so unique experience to be part of such human adventure. His job is tedious in charge of make rooms but he speaks frankly and with passion. He has always wished to work on the QM2 where he shares many international moments with his colleagues. Each day is a discovery. He is conscious of the romantic atmosphere of such a cruise liner and does not despair about buying tickets for himself someday.

Unfortunately some have not this chance to watch the return. Julien, 20 years old is one member of the security organise for the event. From 9 am he is staying in the middle of the shipyard roads where he checks the vehicles and directs people to the parking entrance. He was really enthousaist about being there today. But will see the boat from far away distinguishing only the back. 17 hours later at 2 in the morning he would still be here expecting to finish his guard so he can at least have a look at the boat by night. From Vendée he had the opportunity at 7 years old to follow the building of the QM2, thanks to his grand parents who made him discover the "Escalaes de Saint-Nazaire, Museums, and also the Submarine Espadon. And he already knows he won't be able to watch the departure. So while night would he admire the boat in the silence after the spectacular firework created by Jacques Couturier Organisation.

### **The workers remember and recount construction of the ship**

A fabulous moment that has delighted the crowd especially after a spectacular air show by the "Grattes Ciel Company" Some as François (51 years old) had preferred to watch this through the reflects on Queen Mary's windows so he could feel more intense emotion. As so many others workers he has never forgotten all the days and nights building this giant of the seas. Before the Harmony of the Seas delivered in 2016, the Queen Mary II was becoming the longest cruise boat in the world with its length of 345, 03 meters and its 18 bridges. That night later after most of people already left the place he would still be staying in front explaining with passion to others curious what he was working at and what he became as a restaurant or simply a room...The level of impressive is so high that even police cars have a stop to admire Queen Mary II as passengers already asleep inside before celebrating departure of the Bridge's race.

The fervor is still growing on the day after with even more families to join From the deck visitors may admire future passengers of the Transatlantic expecting departure. Some are taking advantage of the pool at the back. Other already on the roof with flags saluting. Martine and Edith (49 years old) are also admiring the boat in traditional clothes from the second war. Belonging to the association "Atlantic-Mémoire" who has reconstruct a vintage space from World War Two with some Jeeps, Dodge, GMC or motorcycles. One question remains on the lips from many visitors : how much would it have cost to make a reservation on the Bridge Transatlantic. A little girl Julie, only 12 years old does not matter. She is saluting her grandmother on board with some tears to leave her under the comfort of her mother. She is explaining to her how wonderful and what a chance it is to count among the passengers. The last one go back on board before being too late. In the distance we hear the cannon shots of the french frigate Primauguet announcing the repairs for the great race.

But that would be the last part of our Saga of the Bridge to follow on sports section. But here were some of the beautiful human stories of men and women encountered here and there around that unique, historical and specific Transatlantic Race that will remain in our memories. Thanks to all of them for their warm welcome, personal testimonials and pleasure to exchange. Later in the night after the QM2 has left the harbour, we could feel the impression of a great emptiness.

From Christophe ANDREEFF <http://www.frenchnews.uspa24.com/>

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CHRISTOPHE ANDREEFF

**Editorial program service of General News Agency:**

United Press Association, Inc.  
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168  
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA  
(702) 943.0321 Local  
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile  
[info@unitedpressassociation.org](mailto:info@unitedpressassociation.org)  
[info@gna24.com](mailto:info@gna24.com)  
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