

ONE OF THE HAPPY REFUGEES
ABOARD THE U.S.S. BENEVOLENT
DEC. 25, 1922. AT
CONSTANTINOPLE, TURKEY.



N. NAV. 43
SEP. 1922

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UNITED STATES SHIP "LILACINLE" #286 Friday 22nd, September, 1922
(DAY) (DATE) (MONTH)

ZONE DESCRIPTION MIGRE-2 REMARKS.

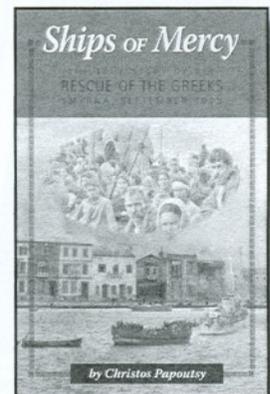
From 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Steaming as before. 4:02 C.C. to 105° (PSC). 4:20 standing into Mytilene Harbor on various courses and speeds. 4:30 anchored in 9 fathoms of water with 30 fathoms of chain on starboard anchor. 4:52 Captain left ship. 4:40 Commanding Officer Greek Auxiliary Destroyer paid official visit. 4:45 left ship. 5:30 boarding Officer Italian Destroyer Solferino paid official visit. 7:00 made preparations for getting underway. 7:05 Captain returned with Mr. Jennings of Near East Relief as passenger to Smyrna, Turkey. 7:31 hove in and underway, on boilers #1&2. Stood out of harbor on various courses and speeds. 7:32 C.C. to 145° (PSC) and went ahead at speed 20 knots. 8:00 passed Greek dreadnaught Milka bound North. C.C. to 180° (PSC). Average Steam 250 Average Revolutions 176.

Asa Jennings
Ensign, U.S. Navy

Ships of Mercy: The True Story of the Rescue of the Greeks, Smyrna, September 1922

Reviewed By Sophia Nibi



Because life, and history for that matter, is personal, I have always thought that the burning of the Mediterranean Metropolis of Smyrna in 1922 is my mother's story. Today, 86 years later, thanks to a newly published book, *Ships of Mercy: The true Story of the Rescue of the Greeks, Smyrna, September 1922* by Christos Papoutsy, I know that the rescue of the hundreds of thousands of refugees of that great catastrophe is Asa Jennings' story.

Jennings was a quiet, humble American Y.M.C.A. worker who moved heaven and earth to secure the evacuation of thousands of people, including, perhaps, my mother and her family. Well documented in the book, Christos Papoutsy shows how driven by the force of his moral convictions, Asa Jennings engineered one of the largest rescue efforts in history.

Today's Turkish city of Izmir has nothing in common with the cosmopolitan city known as Smyrna in which my mother was born in 1916 and where at the age of six she witnessed unspeakable atrocities which haunted her till the day she died in

Wellesley, MA at the age of 81.

In my lifelong search to find more about my mother's childhood about which she would not talk because it was too painful, I have read just about every book about the Great Fire of 1922 during which 55,000 homes and 5,000 shops were burned and thousands of men, women and children were gasping for life on the quay of that historic city whose magnificent civilization spanned centuries. And I have learned a lot about the heroic generation of the Greeks of Asia Minor. But until now, I never knew how they were rescued or what a significant role an American, not just a forgotten hero, but until now also an unknown hero contributed to saving so many lives. *Ships of Mercy* convincingly clarifies the role of the United States Navy, showing how American naval officers horrified by the plight of the refugees, worked with Asa Jennings and organized the ships in the area into a large-scale rescue operation. Vessels from the United States, Great Britain, Italy and France evacuated thousands from the Turkish shores. The American vessels also provid-

Ashore in ruined Smyrna.



Postcards and images from the personal collection of Gregory C. Pappas. Telegram image from "Ships of Mercy." All handwritten notations and captions on postcards are original.

ed food and medical care, and delivered supplies to the refugee camps.

Ships of Mercy does not tell the entire story of Smyrna and the Great Fire that destroyed it. But it tells a lot and offers undisputed evidence of its

presentation. The book's pages contain exactly what the Christos Papoutsy said it would when he chose the 15-word title. Through an extensive ten-year long research by the author and his wife, Mary, which took them to many parts of the world interviewing descendants and records, the book offers a compelling backed by facts account of the resulting conditions from the Great Fire of September 14, 1922 and of the determined role Asa Jennings played in the rescue from the massacre. The photographs are haunting. The reproduced original news accounts and correspondence so telling that the reader finds herself in the middle of the massacre and feels the agony, the pain, the despair, and also the hope as the ships arrive.

What Christos Papoutsy has given us and history through *Ships of Mercy: The True Story of the Rescue of the Greeks, Smyrna, September 1922* is a magnificent missing piece of an epic event which the world has not always treated fairly. I, a proud descendant of the heroic generation of the Greeks of Asia Minor, am grateful to Christos Papoutsy for presenting a documented and

undisputed account which I view not just as a historical fact but also as a respectful tribute to my mother and to the Greeks of that historic area who lost the country they loved overnight through a catastrophe that not only should not have happened, and which should have at the very least been a lesson not to be repeated. Sadly, as evidenced by the holocausts that followed it in other parts of the world, man's inhumanity to man remains a condition not easy to eradicate.

Ships of Mercy: The True Story of the Rescue of the Greeks, Smyrna, September 1922 should be on the history shelves of every library. It is a book to have and read, a book to give as a gift, a book for lovers of history to study again and again. Personally, I plan to visit its pages at least once a year, on September 14, the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, the day in 1922 when the Great Fire destroyed a civilization, killed thousands, and altered the lives of hundreds of thousands who left the land of their birth and became refugees in other lands.

And on September 14, I will not only think and reflect on my mother's life but, thanks to Christos Papoutsy I will also offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the soul of one man, Asa Jennings, who showed us how "one person can make a difference, even in the most extreme circumstances. Asa Jennings didn't just believe this; he lived it. We can aspire to do the same." (*Ships of Mercy*, page 219)

Sophia Nibi, the administrative assistant in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston, is a former journalist and a freelance writer.