



+ FLOATING FORTRESSES OF HEALTH + HOSPITAL SHIPS, 1898-1920

- The period between **1898 and 1920** was pivotal in the development and recognition of U.S. Navy hospital ships as vital components of **naval power projection** and **humanitarian aid**.
- Although still mainly used for patient transportation, hospital ships provided a well-equipped environment for immediate medical attention, surgery, and recovery close to the theater of operations. This drastically improved the chances of survival and the quality of care for injured personnel during **Spanish-American War** and **World War I**.

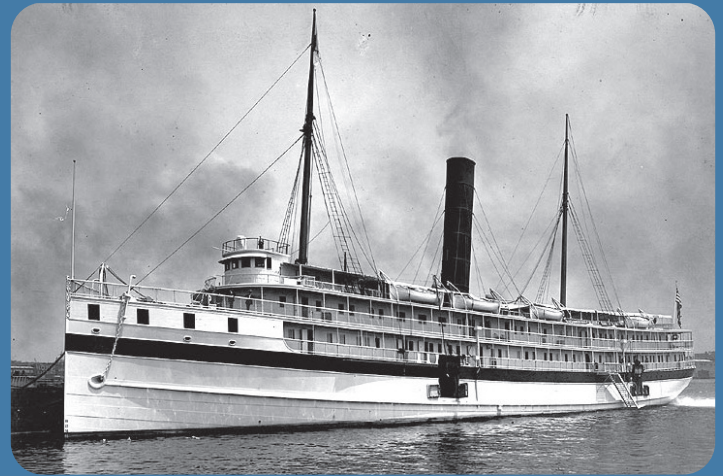
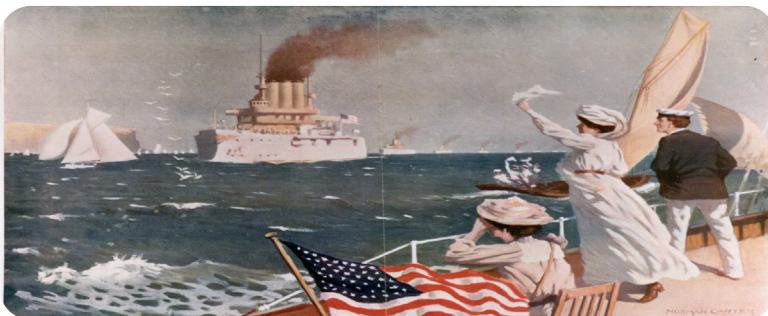


⚓ **USS SOLACE — THE FIRST OF A CLASS** ⚓

- On April 7, 1898, President William McKinley authorized Secretary of the Navy John D. Long to purchase an “ambulance ship” for the service of the Navy. The Navy purchased the Creole, a former ocean liner, and **converted it into a hospital ship in 16 days**.
- Its new name—**USS Solace**—was chosen by Margaret Long, the daughter of Secretary Long. Since 1898 every Navy hospital ship has followed the Solace’s lead and been given a name denoting **healing, peace, and refuge**.

⚓ **HOSPITAL SHIP OF THE GREAT WHITE FLEET** ⚓

- In 1908, the 195-bed hospital ship USS Relief sailed with the **Great White Fleet's** on its historic voyage around the globe, and provided care and medical consultations to **14,000+** Sailors.
- In November 1908, Relief **sustained severe damage during a typhoon** off of the Philippines and was deemed unseaworthy.
- Relief’s final years in the Navy were spent as a **station hospital** in Olongapo, Philippines. Although decommissioned in 1910, Relief remained in service as a station hospital until 1918.



⚓ **NAVY HOSPITAL SHIPS, PRE-WWII** ⚓

USS RELIEF—Active: 1907-1918 (as Navy ship)

USS RELIEF (AH-1)—Active: 1920-1945

USS SOLACE (AH-2)—Active: 1898; 1909-1921

USS COMFORT (AH-3)—Active: 1918-1921

USS MERCY (AH-4)—Active: 1918-1934



NAVY MEDICINE *FAST FACTS*



Did you know?



In World War I, medical personnel assigned to Navy hospital ships **Comfort**, **Solace** and **Mercy** cared for and oversaw the transfer of **8,800+** casualties.

HOSPITAL SHIP COMMAND

- In 1907, while citing the *Army Manual of the Medical Department* (1906), which provided that all “hospital boats” be exclusively under control of medical departments, Rear Adm. Presley Rixey, the Navy Surgeon General, requested that **medical officers be given command of naval hospital ships**. President Theodore Roosevelt agreed with Rixey's assessment and ordered Secretary of the Navy Victor Metcalf, to “**give them what they have in the Army.**”
- On Dec. 23, 1907, Rixey ordered **Surgeon Charles Francis Stokes to take command** of the hospital ship USS Relief.
- Over the course of the next 13 years, **5** Navy hospital ships would sail under the helm of a Navy medical officer.
- In total, **18** physicians commanded hospital ships before the Navy overturned Roosevelt's decision in 1921.



USS RELIEF (AH-1) —IN A CLASS BY ITSELF

- USS Relief (AH-1) is the **ONLY** naval vessel ever constructed from the keel up as a hospital ship and was the first hospital ship bestowed with a hull number.
- Measuring **483 feet in length**, a normal displacement of 10,112 tons and a mean draft of 19 feet, Relief was the **largest hospital ship in use until the launching of USS Refuge (AH-11) in 1944.**
- When commissioned on Dec. 28, 1920, Relief could boast of the same amenities as the **most modern hospitals at the time**—large corridors and elevators for transporting patients, and fully-equipped surgical operating rooms, wards, galleys, pantries, wash rooms, laboratories, dispensaries, as well as a sterilizing / disinfecting room all with “sanitary” tiled flooring.
- Aside from a 500-bed hospital onboard, the Relief also carried a **field hospital unit complete with tentage, a fully stocked pharmacy, and an ambulance.**

