

## THE HABANA

The 10,800 ton transatlantic steamer, the *Habana*, was built in Sestao in the 1920s by the Compañía Transatlántica. From its launching until the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, it made several journeys to America, its normal itinerary being Bilbao–Cuba–Mexico–New-York. The steamer was originally named *Alfonso XIII*, after the King, but when the Republic came to power, the name was changed to the *Habana*. In January 1937 it was requisitioned by the Basque Government so that they could convert it into a hospital ship, but this in fact never happened, as the *Habana* was used in May to take Basque children to France and then to Britain. It was supposed to carry 800 passengers, but greatly exceeded this number during the evacuations. Some 3,890 children, 80 teachers, 120 helpers, 15 catholic priests and two doctors travelled on the steamer, together with Leah Manning.

## NORTH STONEHAM

The camp at North Stoneham in Eastleigh was set up in a three fields lent by Mr G A Brown of Swaythling Lane Farm. The preparation of the camp in less than two weeks was the result of a remarkable effort by the whole community. Volunteers (boy scouts, girl guides, representatives from the political parties, the Rotary Club, the Co-operative Society, employees of the utilities) worked round the clock and through the Bank Holiday to prepare it for a contingent of 2,000 children and discovered at the last moment that double that number were expected. Drains were installed, water piped in, some 500 bell tents hired from the Ministry of War and several enormous marquees were erected.

There were three main divisions in the camp; the children were placed according to their parents' political affiliations at the time of registration, so there was a republican/left wing section and a nationalist section, the last having also a large tent which was used for a chapel. The third group was made up of older boys, who also acted as guards. These divisions exacerbated tensions in the camp and sometimes created trouble with rival gangs, but they were never terribly accurate. Some parents, at the time of registration, realising that the places of their political affiliation had been taken up, just put their children down for one of the others in order to procure a passage to Britain for their child.

North Stoneham was like a little town, with all sorts of commodities, including electric light, telephone, a cinema, a stage for performing plays and dancing, loudspeakers which were used to announce news and give details of activities that were laid on. At first, local people would come to the camp and stare at the inmates through the barbed wire as if they were animals at the zoo: the children complained that they felt degraded to be ogled in this way. Others threw in sweets and cigarettes for the children – visitors remarked on the high incidence of smoking among the boys. Before a marquee seating 250 was erected, food was served to the children in a queue. Groups who had not yet eaten wore a yellow armband, but some boys refused to wear it and were even prepared to go without food since it was the colour of Franco's Moroccan troops.

The airport was very close to North Stoneham and pilots were asked to give it as wide a berth as possible so as not to remind the children of their recent experiences of bombing.