



Today, anything to do with SS *Normandie* is wildly collectible among ocean liner buffs, including items such as this first day cover.

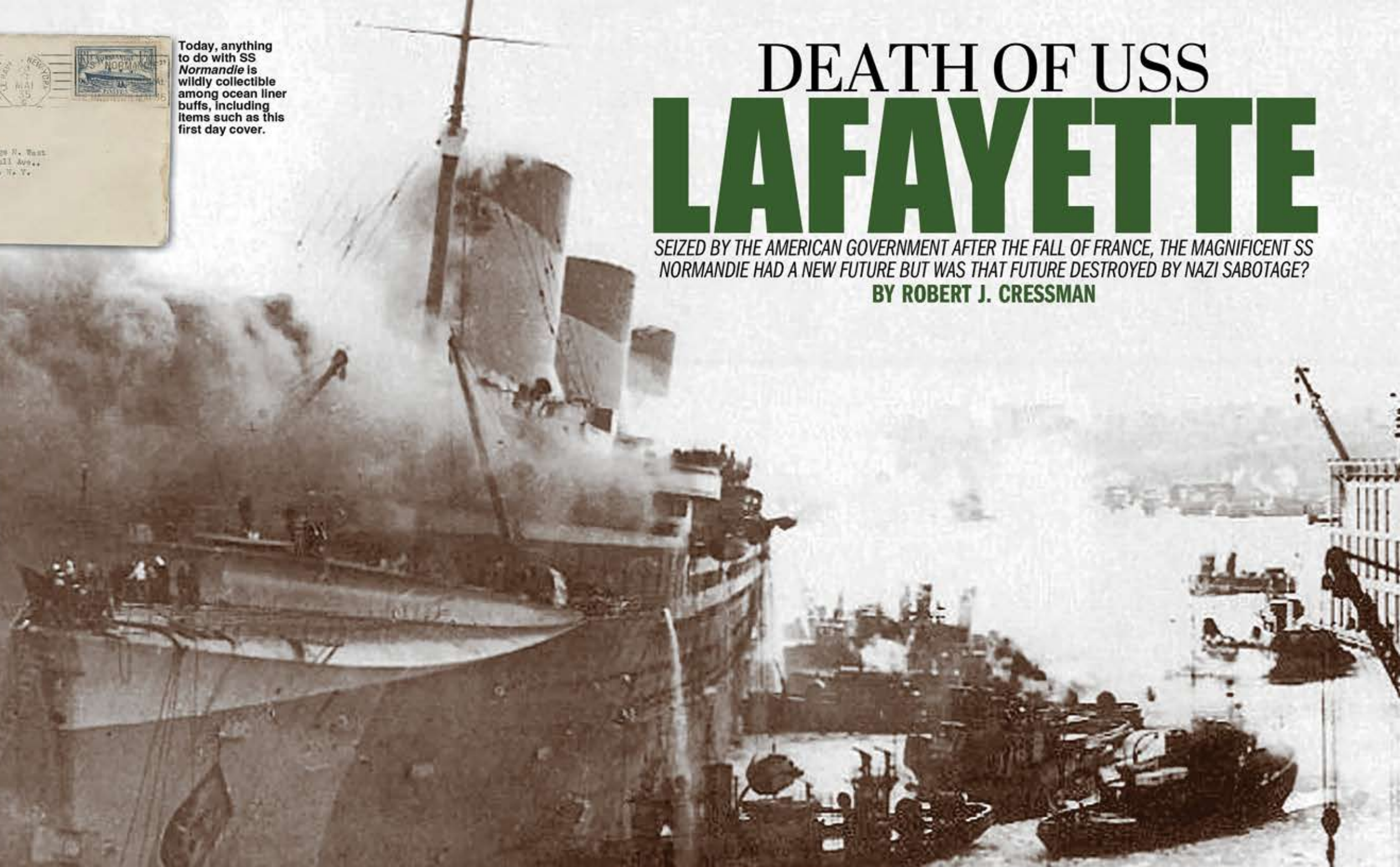


Normandie was an Art Deco masterpiece whose interior featured the work of some of France's greatest artists. The ship also inspired many magnificent posters including this one by famed artist Adolphe Cassandre. Today, original copies of the poster command large sums of money.

DEATH OF USS LAFAYETTE

SEIZED BY THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AFTER THE FALL OF FRANCE, THE MAGNIFICENT SS *NORMANDIE* HAD A NEW FUTURE BUT WAS THAT FUTURE DESTROYED BY NAZI SABOTAGE?

BY ROBERT J. CRESSMAN



The horrible sight that greeted New Yorkers on the cold and gray morning of 9 February 1942 — the *Normandie/Lafayette* engulfed in smoke and flames.



“It would be a swell propaganda stunt now that we have taken over **NORMANDIE** to rename her the **LAFAYETTE**”

James P. Warburg in memo to Col. William “Wild Bill” Donovan

On the bridge of the speeding SS *Normandie*, worry lines etched the weathered face of Captain Herve Lehuède as he stared at the horizon. He had good reason to be worried on that August day in 1939 as the deluxe liner's sharp bow cleaved through the gray waves of the Atlantic. The entire day seemed to be gray — the gray sky merging into a gray ocean without

a solid line of demarcation and this seemed to fit the captain's mood.

Back in France, the situation had gone from bad to really bad. France's numerous political factions were battling with each other over what certainly had to be a coming war with Germany. All branches of the French military were in disarray. The French army, one of the largest in the world,

was poorly equipped and even more poorly trained. France's *Armée de l'Air* had thousands of aircraft but the majority were obsolete while many of the more modern fighting machines were lacking essential items — like guns! The situation was so bad that France was attempting to buy hundreds of new warplanes from America and Britain. At sea, *La Marine Française*