

## A TANKER TALE.

Having obtained my Second Class Steam Certificate of Competency, and having accumulated sufficient further steam watchkeeping time to sit the exam for a First Class certificate I desired to obtain Motor (diesel) watchkeeping time with a view to sitting the Combined Steamship and Motorship examination; to this end I requested the Caltex head office in London to agree to a transfer. So, on 15 February 1956 I signed off the steam turbine powered SS Caltex Manchester in Sydney, Australia and signed on the Doxford built and engined MV Caltex Calcutta the next day. (The actual signing off/on was at the Caltex refinery at Kurnell, Botany Bay.)

Caltex Calcutta was at that time, based at Kurnell and for the next six months we operated on the Australian coast delivering refined products, mainly petroleum fuel, to Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and Townsville with the occasional trip over to New Zealand with lubricating oil.

Within sight of the loading/discharging jetty at Kurnell is an engraved stone built obelisk marking the point where Captain Cook first landed, thus discovering Australia and claiming it for the British throne.

Each year, on the anniversary of the landing, it is customary for the Governor of New South Wales to enter Botany Bay aboard a RAN vessel from which he is carried by a launch to the beach beside the obelisk where a small ceremony takes place.

In 1956 on the anniversary date, Caltex Calcutta was on the berth loading petrol in No.7 cargo tanks, port centre and starboard. In those days there was no cargo loading control room and the tanks were observed to be full via observation or taking an ullage through the 6" diameter ullage hatches built into the cargo tank hatches themselves.

With the main engine shut down the engineer officers were all on daywork and had been carrying out routine overhauls on various pieces of machinery and had come out of the engineroom for morning coffee and to watch the Governor's landing. The 3rd officer was the loading officer this morning.

Our Captain had asked that our ship be dressed overall at the time the navy launch reached the beach and to this end our Indian crew sailors were manning the halliards at the foremast, the mainmast and the bridge and at the appropriate moment the Chief Officer blew his whistle and the flags were hauled up most efficiently. We knew how to do things on that ship!

Unfortunately at virtually the same moment all three cargo tanks overflowed and 6" diameter petrol spouts shot up from the ullage hatches and all hell was let loose. All the refinery and jetty hooters sounded, everything was shut down as the petrol flowed over the gunwales and into the bay shimmering across the water towards Caltex Manchester which was at anchor awaiting us clearing the berth. Being a steamship she was immediately ordered to up anchor and go out of the Bay.

We engineers rushed into the after house closing the WT doors, down into the engineroom where we shut down our auxiliary boiler and started up the fire pump for "water on deck".

Later, when everything had calmed down and presumably the spilled petrol had evaporated things returned to normal; the 3rd Officer left the ship never to return (which was a pity as he was a good chap). We blamed Captain Cook.

David Aris.



### **Caltex Calcutta in 1952**

*Picture from a gallery displaying tankers of a bygone era provided by Jörgen Lönn from Stockholm and courtesy of the*

*Merchant Navy Nostalgia website.*

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