

Our thanks to Cachalot, Major Bill Wynn-Werninck, whose memories were sufficiently jogged by a couple of articles in the last edition to inspire the following contribution. (More of something similar will always be appreciated.)

ANOTHER STEAM CRANE

Seeing the photograph of EMMA LOUISE with the old steam crane alongside, immediately reminded me of a similar steam crane in Douglas Harbour, IOM

In 1947 I was in command of a LCT IV (star) which was my pride and joy. She was a good ship, her hull strengthened for service in the Far East with slightly better accommodation. She was manned by a fine crew of RASC soldier seamen and marine engineers. She was stationed at Abedovey, N. Wales in support of the RASC Amphibian Training Wing at Towyn. One task we were given was to go to Douglas, pick up a load of airfield maintenance machinery and take it to Birkenhead. We arrived in Douglas on the previous evening and berthed under an elderly steam crane to be used for loading us. Next morning I had to go ashore and came back a couple of hours later to find the crane was getting up steam and the old crane driver, sucking his pipe, standing on the quay edge looking down at my ship.

"Good morning" I said. "Is this yours?" he asked. "Yes" I said with pride. "Well" he said, "If my old uncle who went to sea in sail could see this ship and them that man it he would drop down dead on the spot" "Oh" I said "What did your uncle do?" He men told me an astonishing story. Apparently his uncle and a friend got a top-sail schooner built in Peel, north of Douglas. On completion, he loaded her to the gunwales with wheelbarrows, picks and shovels and sailed for Australia to take part in the Gold Rush. She was christened VIXEN. They got to Australia, sold everything and had a go at getting gold. They got a fair amount and then decided to go ranching in western America. They sailed there and bought a lot of cattle. Hearing the money was better in eastern America, he drove the cattle across America, presumably to the New York area where he sold the animals. In the meantime, his friend sailed the VIXEN round Cape Horn and fetched up presumably in New York.

They then decided to sail back to Douglas, IOM which they did. Unfortunately, due to heavy fog, VIXEN was wrecked on the Calf of Man. They rescued their money and got back to Douglas and settled there again.

The old crane driver ended by saying his uncle was a fine looking man. When he walked along Douglas promenade in his white suit, 10 gallon hat and walking stick, all the girls were after him. If I wanted to read about the VIXEN, to go to the Douglas Museum. I thanked him for a most interesting half an hour and after the ship was loaded I walked up to the Museum. Sure enough the story of the VIXEN was there.



(And at www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/famhist/v04n3.htm .. Ed)

I was very interested to read Rear Admiral Sir Morgan-Giles story about Yugoslavia and Bari. I was stationed in Andria a short distance inshore from Barletta as workshops officer of a RASC motor Transport Company and had to go to Bari on several occasions for raw materials. There was a military hospital in Andria and I became friendly with an attractive QA. One day we organized a run to Bari for a day out. I had to go to the Area Headquarter-a very nice hotel building on the north side of Bari harbour. Everybody seemed to have a comfortable office with a view across the harbour. After that visit we had a pleasant lunch at the newly formed Officers' Club in the town and after a walk round, returned to Andria. Two days later I met my MT Sergeant, who told me about the air raid. He had been talking to the driver of one of two tank transporters parked near the Area Headquarters. The air raid suddenly took place followed by a colossal explosion. He and his friend dived under the nearest transporter just as a large tidal wave crashed over them. Just after that they saw the Area HQ in which every window was broken. So much for the comfortable offices!

I was also very interested in the Admiral's arrival in Luka when he and Firzroy Maclean were greeted by a rifle shot which apparently cleared their entry. The RASC had a number of requisitioned Italian schooners which, amongst other duties, supplied the Partisans with ammunition and stores, being unloaded at Split. The RASC crews got fed up with the Partisans who gave firework displays with the ammunition they had brought over from Italy. Barletta was used by these RASC schooners, I remember seeing one efficiently preparing for sea and setting off for Yugoslavia.

(There is a memorial in a church in Venice to the RASC Water Transport crews)

Bill Wynn-Werninck