

## Shark-fishing in East Africa

M.V. "LLANGIBBY CASTLE" in the early 1950s was an intermediate liner employed on Union-Castle Line's Round Africa Service. Her deck storekeeper was a petty officer by the name of Charlie Basden. He was a shark-fishing enthusiast with many years experience, and was known to all as "Sharkey" Basden. He was particularly successful in catching sharks in Kilindini Harbour, Mombasa. Kilindini is a deep-water harbour and in those days it was often said that every vessel entering harbour was followed by a shark.



Sharkey's fishing tackle consisted of two old plaited loglines on to which a wire trace and large hook was attached. The line was kept on a drum with inboard end securely attached. The drum, on an axle, was suspended from the forecastle head awning wire. The hook was baited with waste meat acquired from the ship's butcher. Alongside the quay at Mombasa the baited line was kept permanently in the water on the outboard side, the hook a fathom or two below the surface. The line was kept away from the ship's side using a piece of 1" x 1" fruit dunnage. The fruit dunnage was readily visible from the fore deck and bridge, everybody keeping an eye out hoping to see a shark strike. Disturbance of the fruit dunnage soon brought Sharkey out of his cabin or storeroom, close by. The writer understood, it may or may not have been true, that lying in his bunk at night (no air-conditioning in those days!) Sharkey had a piece of thread attached to his big toe, leading out through his porthole up to the fruit dunnage.



*Dangerous Goods being hoisted ashore at No.1 hatch.*

A shark, on taking the baited hook, would head out across Kilindini, the line zigzagging through the water. Unlike ordinary fishing line, the zigzagging logline couldn't be broken, even by the largest of sharks. Sharkey was never in a hurry to pull in his catch, preferring to let it thrash up and down the harbour until it was tired out. He could then pull it to the ship's side quite easily by hand. Once alongside he placed a noose (wire spliced at both ends) around the logline at deck level, which he attached to a heaving line. This was lowered to the water and waggled about until the noose was safely positioned over the shark's head. He would then manoeuvre the shark round the bow to the quayside, endeavouring to keep the shark alive in the water. A phone call to a local



*Sharkey Basden, this time with a large grouper caught at Beira.*

trader soon brought a lorry to the quayside. After negotiating a price, cargo work at No.1 Hatch would be cease while the shore crane or ship's derricks hoisted the still-live shark on to the lorry. During the few days spent in Mombasa Sharkey's profit from shark-fishing could sometimes equal or better his seaman's wages.

The writer recalls an enterprising galley boy, inspired by Sharkey's successes, managing to catch a large shark at Kilindini. He caught it in the dark after dinner through a porthole in the main galley. The porthole was about 6 feet above the galley deck, so he had difficulty seeing what was happening in the water. The writer cannot remember the outcome, but feels sure the shark must have got away, but the incident certainly entertained many passengers and crew watching from the decks above.

Richard Olden

Visit [www.red-duster.co.uk/UNION17.htm](http://www.red-duster.co.uk/UNION17.htm) for a very interesting history of this ship.