

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No.26

December 2007

CAPTAIN'S LOG

As I write my log for this December edition of *The Cachalot*, though of course it is still November at the moment, and I look out of the window for inspiration, it is raining outside. The weather seems to be performing in its traditional British fashion of changing day by day, today being destined for a cold wet miserable one while yesterday was a lovely bright autumnal day. I do wonder what the next few months have in store for us. But the Captain's Log is neither the time nor place for discussing the weather – its purpose is to let you what I have been up to since the last edition.

September was a busy and varied month. On 2nd September myself and the Boatsteerer represented the Club at Holy Rood Church in Southampton for the service to mark Merchant Navy Day. Then the following weekend I was invited to attend a birthday celebration which was held in our Club rooms. The occasion was to mark the 90th birthday of Iris Brooke, whose late husband, Captain Stuart Brooke, had been an active member of the Club in the 1970s. Iris is still a member of the Watch Ashore and the Missions to Seamen and is a remarkable lady.

At the curry lunch on 15th September I was delighted to inform Edwina Smart, the daughter of John and Marjorie Smart, that she was to be made an Honorary Member in recognition of her support for the Club over the years. In presenting Edwina with her Honorary Member parchment things were not quite straight forward, as those who were present at the lunch will recall!

During the Southampton Boat Show the following week the Boatsteerer and I attended a business breakfast as part of the Club's role as a City Champion. The August edition of *The Cachalot* gave you details of this initiative.

September finished with the wonderful coach trip to the Loire Valley with other Cachalots and wives. This is the first such trip Janet and I have been on and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. We now look forward to future trips.

Ten days after our return from France Janet and I were off on our holiday to Dubai. The last time I was there was 27 years previously and at that time I would never have thought that I would some day return for a holiday. How things have changed and what an amazing place it is! While we were away the Annual Shipping Service at St Pauls Cathedral was held so unfortunately we could not attend but the Club was represented by George and Sarah Angas.

A few days after our return it was time for the Annual Dinner Dance at Brook House on 20th October. Our special guest that evening was our past Honorary

Chaplain, the Reverend Bill McCrea and his wife Rosaleen. I had the greatest of pleasure in presenting Bill with a cheque made up from the donations received from Cachalots to mark Bill's recent retirement.

On 2nd November at the Annual Harpooners' Dinner, held at the Tudor Merchants Hall, I was able to thank the Club Officers, Harpooners and Past Captains for their support during my term as Captain. I also had the greatest of pleasure in surprising Captain Reg Kelso with the news that the Club was bestowing upon him Honorary Life Membership in recognition of the exceptional and distinguished service he has given to the Club over many years. This may seem hard to believe but Reg was almost, though not quite, lost for words!



Capt. Marriott prepares to present Capt. Kelso with his special Honorary Life Member insignia.

I represented the Club at the Cenotaph in Southampton at the Annual Remembrance Day wreath-laying service on 11th November. It was a very moving experience to see both young and old remembering those who have died in war. Gratefully the weather stayed dry until just before the end of the ceremonies.

As you all know next year we celebrate our 80th Anniversary. To mark this occasion there is to be an Anniversary Ball on Saturday 17th May 2008 and details about this are enclosed with this edition of *The Cachalot*. Let us make this a very special event I would ask as many of you as possible to attend.

By the time you receive this edition of *The Cachalot* it will only be a few short weeks before Christmas is upon us. Whether you are at home or away, Janet and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all truly happy Christmas and may the coming New Year be a peaceful one.



GLOBAL INTEGRATION OR CULTURE CLASH?

Yes, it is Christmas once more so I thought I would provide another story from Persia.

You may recall that last year I related our family Christmas of 1978 when I, together with a multicultural team of specialists from the Warsash Maritime Centre (as it was then), the British Council and the University of Baluchistan, Iran, together with our families were setting up a maritime faculty for the University of Baluchistan in a beautiful but remote spot on the Indian Ocean coast of Iran called Chah Bahar.

Being so remote – the nearest real shopping centre was a five hour trek in a landrover through mountainous terrain to the nearest city of Zahedan, about the size of Fareham, – one had relatively restricted amenities. This created a tremendous team spirit and interdependence that fostered a trust, respect and friendship that we were so used to at sea but today somehow seems to be sadly lacking.

It was early December and we had started earlier that year with our first full complement of 75 cadets from all over Iran. English, Seamanship, Navigation and Ship Construction were all on the curriculum, as were the more vocational activities of laying moorings for our fleet of boats (an old wooden lifeboat and two GRP wayfarer dinghies!), learning to swim and of course the inevitable games of football (1966 did not seem so far away then and Bobby Moore and his team were still icons of the football world).

As part of our attempts to integrate with the local community of Chah Bahar we held morning welcome sessions for the town elders and dignitaries. Over cups of tea and cakes we tried, with limited success, to communicate and establish our good intentions by offering free English classes, movies etc. This success was somewhat tempered by two things, the first of these was obvious; the second was less so and is the basis of this story. The first issue involved my three-year old son and the village Elder. The natural colouring of Baluch peoples is very dark with usually thick black hair. William had an unruly shock of blonde hair a pale skin and an impish grin. Most of our guests could not resist reaching out and touching Williams' hair, which after a while started to irritate him. Unfortunately, after some time, his irritation boiled over just as the Elder of the town wanted to touch his hair as well. Kicking said Elder in the shins and slapping his hand away did not go too far in fostering good relationships with the community!

The second reason, and I like to think the more important one, was explained in a most charming way by the young, western educated, manager of the Bank Meli in town. He asked me if I would like to go on a picnic with him one day. He took me to a remote headland nearby the village of Tiss. Upon this headland, in the shelter of which we picnicked, was the ruin of a fort the origin of which I was about to learn.

My host asked me if I knew what the fort had been built for. My obvious ignorance was remedied by his explanation that it had been built by the Portuguese as a staging post to keep their lines of communication and supply open when they colonised Goa. He then pointed out a cylindrical metal post of riveted construction some fifteen feet high with a few very small patches of a worn eggshell blue paint sticking to it. This he explained was all that was left in the area of the British telegraph system that had been established in order to colonise India.

"The point of all this George", he said "is to, hopefully without causing you any offence, explain why our two cultures will take a long, long time to even start to understand each other. When Alexander the Great came through here, as historical record shows that he did, on the first of the many colonising expeditions that this part of the world has seen, Chah Bahar was already here and was still here when he and his armies left. When the Portuguese eventually left, Chah Bahar was still here. When the British left, Chah Bahar was still here. The Elder knows his history and he **knows** that you will go also, that they will still be here and that the remoteness, beauty and tranquillity of this place will once again be theirs. It is this that they are too polite to tell you."

Six weeks later the Shah had left Iran. Three months later the Universities had closed and we eventually also left. Our Campus was approximately a square mile with only a six-foot high wire fence to mark the boundary, we had ten Swiss chalet type prefabricated single story buildings with a lot of equipment. This we locked up and gave the keys to the Iranian Director of Administration. We chartered a Dhow to take all the staff's personal belongings to Oman. Several years later when the Iraq/ Iran war finished some of our lecturers, by now spread to the corners of the earth, made the long and arduous journey back to Chah Bahar. After being welcomed with great happiness from the locals they found not only their Landrovers that they had had to leave in the customs compound (Chah Bahar was an import port within the middle eastern world) but also the batteries for it had been maintained and they started them with little trouble. The campus roads had been swept and all the buildings, equipment and perimeter fence was intact almost as though they were waiting for somebody to come back. However we, like the rest of the world's transient interlopers through history, had gone and Chah Bahar is still there.

Footnote – If you go to google earth and look for Chah Bahar you will see a sprawling city about the size of Southampton. It is, like Southampton, a major container port. It is not even recognisable as the beautiful place we knew. I only hope that the Elder and local people that we knew never lived to see how the 'march of progress' wrought such havoc and that the new generation of locals were able to adapt to and benefit from the changes. I attach one of our Christmas cards for 1978 to give you some idea of what has been lost.

A Happy Christmas to you all and best wishes for the New Year.

George Angas. Boatsteerer.



Chah Behar

THE BOATSTEERER'S LOCKER

Clubrooms

The foyer lighting refurbishments are now complete. The toilets are in the middle of a comprehensive refurbishment and the painting of the shared passageways will be undertaken after the Sea Pie Supper, so I will be calling for a working party soon after the 1st February to undertake the foyer and the passageway adjacent to our clubrooms! New carpets will follow. Thank you Southampton Seafarers Centre.

Club Profile

At an open meeting arranged by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the Sir James Matthews building (Southampton Solent University) on Wednesday 31st October. Mr Robin Middleton, the Secretary of State's Maritime Representative (SoSRep) gave a most interesting and informative talk that summarised this summer's salvage operation of the MS Napoli. Lloyds Maritime Academy is soon to hold a seminar on the same subject. Accordingly it was agreed by all concerned that, even though our proposal to hold a half day seminar to consider the effect on the 'stage two' emergency requirements (see the Sep 07 BSL) of the grounding of a much larger container ship might provide some positive input into future emergency planning, another seminar on the subject at this point in time would not be well attended.

We have attended two City Champions events and made new contacts. At a meeting with Mrs Angela Wright the Chief Executive of Solent Skill Quest, we have agreed to develop a programme of events that Cachalots can attend/contribute to in order to raise the profile of the shipping and maritime industry as a worthwhile career. We are also considering 'adopting' a school to enable us to focus upon the needs of some of today's children in the context of careers within the maritime industry. This activity will commence with a visit from Angela Wright to the SMMC to explain the objective of Skill Quest and outline possible areas of collaboration.

We are attending a Sea Vision forum in London on the 27th November to catch up with what the Chamber of Shipping is doing to raise the visibility of the maritime industry. This forum will consider:

- Regional Engagement – Will provide an overview of the current distribution and activities of regional and local clusters across the UK. To share best practice across regional groupings and to discuss specific problems which relate to the promotion of the maritime sector regionally.
- EU Green Paper on a future maritime policy – To hear the responses of partners to the GP and exchange views.
- Learning and Careers – A session on materials and resources for the promotion of learning and careers in the maritime sector.

Discussions are taking place between Business Southampton, the Southampton Shipowners Association and the SMMC to identify how best to raise the shipping profile within Southampton.

80th Anniversary Celebrations

We make no apology for raising this issue over and over again. The Southampton Master Mariners' Club has not only been a part of Southampton's maritime scene for the last 80 years, but it has also been making continuous and positive contributions to the community for that time as well. We have made annual donations to our chosen charities to provide impartial and expert opinion and advice on matters maritime that lie within our members competence and have always provided a facility within which our members can meet in a friendly atmosphere to share friendship and professional advice, be it in the Clubrooms, the Guildhall at the Sea Pie Supper, Winchester Cathedral or any of the many venues that we use to meet. Of this heritage we are rightly proud.

In today's global maritime environs in which increasing competent manpower shortages not only to operate ships, but also to manage the attendant shore based infrastructure businesses, is inevitably leading towards a diminishing national maritime profile. Organisations such as ours, although not at the industry's cutting edge, are needed more than ever before. Our wider fraternity gives us the opportunity to match our limited resource to the changing needs of both the local industry and our members.

In addition to trying to develop our professional activities, we also have a full, varied and interesting social calendar to celebrate our 80th Anniversary. I would ask you all to, wherever possible, come and join us. Not only for the Sea Pie Supper but also the Shipping Festival Service in Winchester Cathedral. How many people have the opportunity to pass through these magnificent portals and to sit within it for a few minutes to hear its wonderful organ and peoples voices raised in celebration of our industry. A visit to Buckingham Palace, curry lunches and quiz nights are also included on the events calendar enclosed with this edition of the Cachalot.

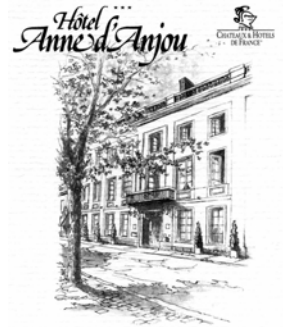
You will also notice the extra event of an Anniversary Dinner Dance at the Warsash Maritime Academy on Saturday 17th May 2008. For those of you that have not been to the UK's premier Maritime Academy, now a faculty of the Southampton Solent University, here is an opportunity to enjoy a memorable evening with your friends sitting in the elegant surroundings of this campus that has lovely views over Southampton Water and the Solent. Good food, wine and music in this most maritime of environments will ensure an enjoyable and memorable evening will be had by all. Please bring your friends and family and join us.

Before all this of course comes Christmas so, as your Boatsteerer, I will finish by thanking all of you for your support during this year, especially Peter Marriott and Les Morris who have, in their Captain's and Staff Captain's year respectively, had to put up with a new boy as Boatsteerer trying to support them! Also, Barry Peck, Gerry Cartwright, Douglas Gates, Terry Clark, Simon Harwood, Richard James and Elizabeth Robson This unsung group have managed the administration and operation of your Club most diligently and effectively.

George Angas.
Boatsteerer,
November 16th 2007

 **Merry
Christmas**

Frogs, Trogs and Old Sea-Dogs **a personal account of** **The Loire Valley Excursion**



This year's continental excursion started on Sunday 23rd September when a group of 36 members and spouses set off from Southampton to catch the Brittany Ferries 20:30 sailing from Portsmouth to St. Malo. Our driver, Neil, a Welshman with a sometimes impenetrable accent, got us there with plenty of time to spare for a drink at the bar before boarding. And time to reflect on the niceties of British travel as we picked our way between bar and "drinking stations" over a floor made sticky with the sloppings of previous customers' pints of Euro-fizz. And cheap, or even reasonable, it weren't. (I've been complaining about the price of beer since I was sixteen so don't expect me to stop now!) Indignities were not quite over for, as we made our way by coach to the ferry, we were pulled over for a "random baggage check". Several of our number were called off the coach by name to take their cases, through the lightly falling rain, for X-ray examination. (Note to Capt. Bin Laden: Don't put your name on your suitcase!) I was mentally composing a headline: "Old Sea-Dogs in Terror Alert!" when we were allowed to proceed to the ferry. OK, I know I shouldn't disparage their security measures, and since we were the only coach boarding that night they had to be seen to be doing something, but it didn't do much for our ilk-levels.

Once on board the *Bretagne* things returned to a more civilised level and some of us enjoyed, or even overindulged in, a nice meal which included a buffet starter, an excellent main course and then a buffet cheese board as well as a buffet pudding course. Twice around the buoys, I'm afraid.

A pleasant crossing and, even though someone who couldn't sleep reported that we had been punching into a force 7/8, I never felt a thing.

It was an early call in the morning for an 07:15 arrival, and with the promise of a breakfast stop about an hour down the road, we decided to forego breakfast on board. Bad mistake! Although we followed all the signs to the intended restaurant, when we arrived at the village we couldn't find it and had to press on towards Angers where we were due to have lunch.

On the way Neil spotted a supermarket so we pulled in there for a comfort stop. French supermarkets normally have a small bistro incorporated and this was no exception. There was just the one toilet which was kept locked for the use of bona-fide (paying) customers only. So a 36 long queue, "pass the key for a pee". I don't think Monsieur, or his toilet, had seen that level of trade in 30 minutes for a long time.

On to Angers and a tour around the narrow streets of the town before finally finding the coach stop which we had previously passed. We had two hours here, time for lunch in the square, opposite the *Le Kent Pub*, and a visit to the Chateau and the Cathedral before making our way back to the coach. All very pleasant and civilised.

The Hotel Anne d'Anjou at Saumur was our destination and we arrived in time for late afternoon tea in the courtyard. Alongside and overlooking the River Loire, this 16th century building has been restored and restructured to accommodate the three star hotel. The

architecture is original, with historic mouldings carefully conserved. Some of its rooms still have their original luxurious décor and antique furniture, from the Louis XVI, Restoration and Empire periods, while others have had modern facilities added. Some of our party were allocated suites which spread over two floors.

That evening a Cachalots' Dinner was held in the adjoining restaurant which was set in the gardens and reached through a vaulted cellar. Refined and elegant, and serving a gourmet set dinner which was included in our tariff, it was the perfect setting for our occasion. That it was also the birthday of Past Captain Simon Harwood just added to the enjoyment and jollity.

Afterwards, in the courtyard, the jollity continued long into the evening, giving the lie to the old adage that you are only young once.

The following morning, after an ample buffet breakfast, it was an 09:30 start and off to visit Rochemenier, a troglodyte village some 30 minutes away. There were originally around 250 underground rooms, comprising about 40 farms, on the site and now some 20 rooms, 2 farms which were finally abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century, are open to view. It is tempting to tease the French by saying that some of them have only come out of their caves about one hundred years ago, but these are not caves. They are excavated dwellings, the minings, a soft limy sandstone, being used to lime the neighbouring acid fields.



Modern troglodytes hold an impromptu meeting in the village hall

Our English guide attempted, to no avail, to keep our gang together so as not to have to repeat herself. Cachalots were off, hither and yon, ferreting for the most interesting bits and generally doing their own thing. It was a wonder that we all made it back to the coach in time for our departure. Personally, I found it all quite fascinating and could have enjoyed a bit more time there. Not a universal feeling apparently, but *different ships, different long splices*, as our hon. archivist likes to remind us.

Next stop was at the château of Azay le Rideau but lunch and a beer became the priority when we arrived



Château Azay-le-Rideau

at the village around 13:00. Afterwards we just had time for a quick dash around the beautifully photogenic château, seeking the best aspect for that special picture, before it was time to set off back to Saumur.

On the approach to the town we stopped at the imposing premises of Gratien & Meyer, a wine producer specialising in the *Méthode Champenoise* to produce sparkling wines. A comprehensive tour of their voluminous and extensive caves, proper caves this time, set into the hill-side, (and no stragglers, so easy to get lost in the dark) was followed by the inevitable, and no less comprehensive, wine tasting. By the time we had tasted x sparkling and y still wines, most of us had forgotten where we started. But we did come away with a few cases of wine, for their trouble, and no doubt these will grace our Christmas dining tables, if we can keep them that long.

We arrived back at the hotel at 17:45, none too the worse for wear but wondering if we could have benefited from fitting less into the day and having more time at each stop. Always a dilemma on these sort of trips.

That evening we were free to chose our own entertainment and most split into small groups to explore the many restaurants, bars and eateries in Saumur. Our own small group found a cosy little place; husband cooking, wife serving, about half a dozen other customers in a room with seating for around 18 - 20, the menu explained to us ignorant *rosbifs* without a hint of disdain, a bottle or two of the local wine and the music of Reinhardt and Brubeck playing at *just* the right volume. And the very attractive waitress even showed us the

secret of her superb *crème brûlées*. We were well satisfied.

Our last day started with another ample breakfast before we made our 09:30 farewell to Anne d'Anjou and set off towards Le Mans. No racing there though, just the reverse, as we crawled through streets congested with lunch time traffic. A quick stop at the Carrefours super-market for vital supplies before parking up on the square in front of the cathedral for lunch.

Onwards then towards Caen – Ouistreham in fact – where we were booked on the 17:00 sailing and were required to check in by 15:30 at the latest. Stuck behind a caravan, British no less, we didn't arrive until 16:00 but that was no problem and we were allowed to board the ferry, the *Mont St. Michel* this time, with no bother. We had two and a half hours before dinner so some relaxed at the bar while others spent the last of their euros in the duty free.

Our group had been booked for dinner and a section of the restaurant reserved especially for us. Once we were settled down to study the menu the assistant purser asked Lionel for *Le voucher*, proof of payment, what-have-you. Lionel insisted that no such voucher had been issued to him and that the bill had been pre-paid by the tour operator. They were having none of it, showing just how far they were willing to trust a bunch of Master Mariners, and British ones at that. I felt that if we hadn't been bobbin on the oggin they would have locked the doors and called for the *gendarmarie*. Amid a few mutterings and raised eye-brows, Lionel, in a state of some confusion and embarrassment, explained the situation to the company who all agreed to foot their part of the bill. Then the assistant purser returned to say that inspection of the computer revealed that, yes, the bill had been pre-paid after-all, and *bon appetit*. At least they then had the grace to offer us free wine as a compensation and this went some way to assuage Lionel's ruffled feathers. All was back to sweetness and light and a fine meal enjoyed by all. Twice around the buoys again!

Back in Portsmouth, our berthing having been delayed by *weather conditions* (they mean other traffic) we sat on the coach for ages, amongst other traffic coming from all directions, just trying to get out of the port. Our driver had run out of time and by the time we had driven round and found his relief, who was waiting, and then made our escape again it was a bit later than anticipated when we arrived back in Southampton.

But, thanks mainly to Lionel Hall and all his organising, we had had another memorable and enjoyable trip, made in the company of good ship-mates!



Saumur in the early morning sun

Another bumper issue for you; in fact I've had to withhold some contributions until next time, but don't let that stop you from sending them in.

More from "The Unforgiving Minute" and the 2nd part of the History of The Liberty Ship by David Aris. Another letter from Robert Thomson to his wife, written 10 days after the previous one, and another thought provoking contribution from our latest Hon. Life Member, whose "What are they up to now?" look you will have seen on the front page.

Coverage of the recent tragedy in Bangladesh caused by Cyclone "Sidr" would have us believe that it is yet another result of global warming. The story of the Clan Alpine pre-dates that overworked term by some 40 years.

Included with this mailing is your programme of events for 2008 with your cut off subscription/250 Club slip.

Also a "come on" page detailing the arrangements so far re the 80th Anniversary Ball, something mentioned only 3 times elsewhere in this mag. By now you should be getting the message. Ed.

Tobruk (II)

Small, unconnected little stories crowd back to mind. HMS Aphis, one of the old Yangtse River gunboats, built in 1915, had been sent to Tobruk and was commanded by a retired RN Lieutenant Commander "Jock" Campbell. HMS Aphis went out at night to go along the coast to the westward and bombard any enemy "target of opportunity". This proved quite effective.

One night I went with him with some of the small R-mines which I had brought with me when I first arrived. The idea was to drop these in a little shallow inlet called Bomba which we thought the enemy might use for bringing up stores in small craft. It was not easy to throw these mines over the stern because the "heads" (latrines) in those little ships were wooden benches stuck over the stern with holes in them. The mines would not go through! So we got a plank, put it over the side well aft, stood a fat stoker on the inboard end, while a torpedoman tiptoed out along the plank and splashed them one by one into the sea.

On this same trip we had to look a little bit further along the coast where there were reported to be a party of British troops who had escaped from German captivity and who needed to be rescued. I took in the whaler from HMS Aphis with half a dozen British soldiers - Guardsmen, I cannot remember which regiment. The whaler grounded gently on the nice white sand. A Sergeant was in charge of these Guardsmen. I remember they were wearing khaki wool hats and not helmets. (British helmets and German helmets are a completely different shape so all too easy to recognise in silhouette at close quarters). These soldiers had automatic rifles, Stenguns I suppose. They splashed over the bows of the whaler and disappeared silently into the darkness. I remember being very impressed because they clearly knew exactly and confidently what they were doing. Within half an hour they were back again, but unfortunately empty handed, so we returned to the ship.

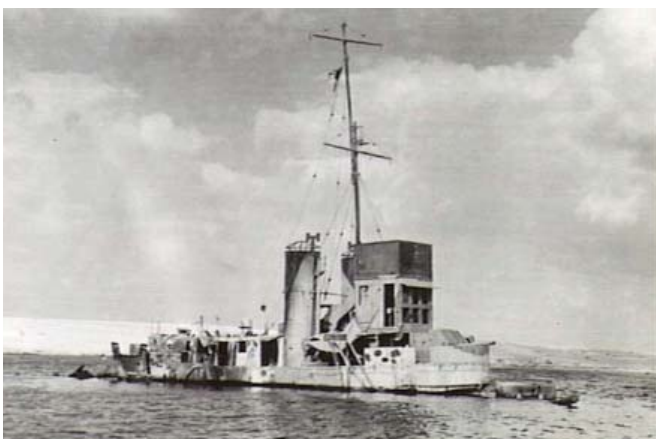
Another small expedition like this came about because Italian submarines were believed to be using the port of Derna further to the west. Captain Poland (Senior Naval Officer Inshore Squadron - SNOIS) whose headquarters were also in Tobruk Navy House, got hold of two very old coastal motor boats, World War I design, which were in Alexandria. These were sent up with large British magnetic mines loaded into stern troughs instead of torpedoes. I was ordered to take charge of these two boats, go up off Derna, get as close inshore as possible and lay the mines in the harbour entrance. We got up there without trouble and we crept in at slow speed on very small silent auxiliary engines. We got well in, and slid the mines overboard. Just as we turned away we were spotted from the shore and a tremendous barrage opened up. "Start main engines"

ordered the young C.O. of the boat. The engine mechanic put his head up the hatch and said "We've run out of starting air, Sir". But very quickly he did somehow start first one engine and then the other and I remember a tremendously thrilling ride in these wonderfully fast boats, now without their loads, making fantastic speed away to safety. We did not have enough fuel to get back to Tobruk so a small "R" lighter had been positioned out at sea to meet us at dawn. The transfer was an anxious interlude because of the risk from enemy aircraft, and it was a slow job because the petrol was in two-gallon tin cans. However, all went well. (Incidentally, the Germans in the desert used much better and stronger 4-gallon cans: Hence the word Jerrycan).

I believe that this was the last operation ever carried out by these splendid old World War I boats.



HMS Aphis



HMS Ladybird

The Army continued to use the antiaircraft gun on board even after she was sunk.

Another of the Yangtse River gunboats, HMS Ladybird, was also used for the same sort of thing as Aphis, but eventually she was sunk by Stukas in shallow water in Tobruk Harbour. Even when on the bottom her bridge, mast and funnel showed above the water, adding to the large number of wrecks which were to be seen everywhere. Another large wreck was the ex-Italian liner "Ligurio" and an old Italian cruiser "San Georgio".

Life in Tobruk was spartan, but exhilarating and there was wonderful fellow-feeling throughout the Garrison. One of my problems as First Lieutenant was how to keep the sailors of the Port Party occupied and interested when off-duty. We got various officers, many of them reservists, to give lectures on any subject not connected with the war. One, which was very popular, was given by Peter Beatty RNVR (son of Admiral Beatty) who was a race-horse trainer in peacetime. His subject was "How to Spot the Winners".

There was a great shortage of water, tightly rationed and very brackish. The weather was usually quite delightful. We all dressed in khaki shorts, no "proper" naval uniform. The bathing was the finest in the world. Occasionally there were dreadful sandstorms called "Hamseen"; sand in one's mouth and nose and ears and everywhere. But at least there was no bombing on hamseen days.

One of the very few good points about a world war is that conscription throws together a truly wonderful collection of all sorts of people from different walks of life. This makes for a varied community and a diversity of unfailing interest.

Whilst I was in Tobruk a Royal Engineers major who had been taken prisoner, escaped from the prisoner-of-war cage and walked about in the desert for a very long time on his own. He was helped a bit by the Senouissi, the local desert Arabs. Water was his great problem and he even resorted to draining the radiators of wrecked German vehicles. He headed towards Tobruk and somehow managed to get through the German troops outside the perimeter, through the wire and mines, and through our own defensive troops and finally down to Navy House. He was totally exhausted, matted beard and hair, covered with desert sores and in a bad way. He wanted to get back to Alexandria. I said "Lie down there, I'll tell you when there's a ship". There was no ship for a few days and gradually I thought he looked familiar. We finally discovered that we had been at school together. He was Peter Moore, who later did wonders in Yugoslavia.

Many strange memories come back. One was a visit by John Lawrence, the Assistant Fleet Signals Officer who was an old friend of mine. We had a few "Tobronx" cocktails, made of captured Italian brandy mixed with Royal Navy limejuice. We all had to sleep on campbeds in dormitories, and when he went up to turn in he wanted to spend a penny. He asked somebody the way to the Heads: "Down two flights of stairs, out of the back door, go on and turn right at the little white hut" etc. This was too much trouble and he thought to himself "It's only desert here: What's the matter with the edge of the balcony". What he did not notice was Able Seaman Bloggs standing immediately beneath on sentry duty. Feeling a gentle rain from a cloudless sky on his tin helmet, AB Bloggs turned round, looked up and saw what had happened. With very commendable restraint he said "Waal, that's a noice thing!" This expression gained wide currency for the next few weeks, especially when anything went wrong.

One of the little ships that ran the gauntlet of the Tobruk run was the small trading schooner "Maria Giovanni" which became well known as she did many runs under the command of a tough Australian called Pedlar Palmer.

The Army said that if taken prisoner, it was important to be taken by the Germans and not by the Italians. The Germans would be very firm and very strict, but would obey the rules of war. The Italians by contrast would steal your wristwatch and probably your rations too.

Another strange story was about a Rifle Brigade Officer called Vivian Street. He was taken prisoner by the Germans who, wanting to send him to Germany for proper interrogation, put him in an Italian submarine running out of Derna. A British destroyer, HMS Pakenham, on patrol made asdic contact with a submarine, but did not know whether it was friend or foe. In this dilemma the Captain decided to attack, dropped a pattern of depth charges: Up came the submarine and all the survivors jumped overboard. It was night-time and Pakenham was horrified to hear "Help, help, help" in English. But in fact this was Vivian Street, who was then picked up and rescued and was back in Alexandria about three days later. We shall also hear a lot more about Vivian Street later on.

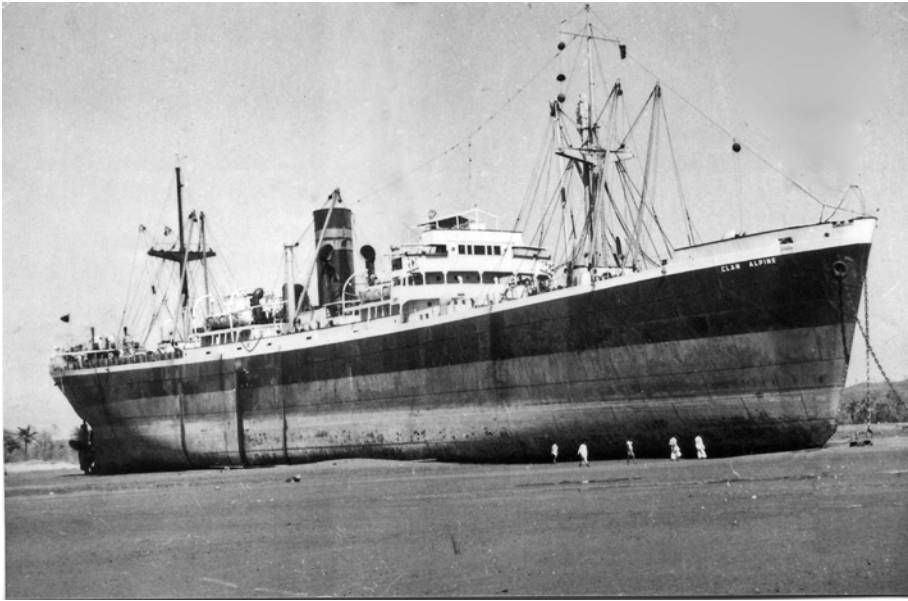
More about Tobruk can be read in Sir Carol Mathers excellent book *WHEN THE GRASS STOPS GROWING*.

Perhaps the last word about Tobruk was uttered by the traitor Lord Haw-Haw on German radio. He referred to the Tobruk garrison as "those voluntarily self-supporting prisoners of war"! But in reality it was the reverse.

In September 1941 I was recalled from Tobruk and returned to Alexandria, taking passage in the Australian destroyer VENDETTA.

These memoirs will be continued in future editions.

Last Voyage of the S. S. "CLAN ALPINE"



On 31st October 1960 while on voyage from Glasgow to Chittagong with general cargo, the vessel was caught in a cyclone while anchored off Chittagong. Driven from her moorings she was left high and dry in paddy fields at Skonai Chori, 11 miles N.N. W. of the entrance to the Kharnapuli River. The vessel was declared a constructive total loss, and the cargo was discharged into lorries. On February 14th 1961 she was sold to East Bengal Trading Corporation Ltd. and broken up as she lay.

John Morris, brother of Staff Captain Les, was 3rd Engineer on the eventful trip and has written this account of it. It will be concluded in the next edition..

S. S. "CLAN ALPINE" (1945-1957) and (1959-1960)

O.N. 169016. 7168 g. 4253 n. 3 Cylinder, Triple expansion Steam engine, 2510 nhp. Built by G. Clark Ltd. Sunderland.

Launched 17th January 1942 and completed April 1942 by J. L. Thompson & Sons Ltd., Sunderland (Yard No. 615) as "EMPIRE BARRIE" for the Ministry of War Transport. Allan, Black & Co., Sunderland, appointed managers.

In 1944 Cayzer Irvine & Co. Ltd. appointed managers.

Purchased in 1945 by Clan Line Steamers and renamed "CLAN ALPINE".

In 1952 underwent strain comparison tests with the welded "OCEAN VULCAN".

1957 registered under Bullard, King & Co. Ltd. and renamed "UMVOTI".

1959 registered under The Clan Line Steamers Ltd. and renamed "CLAN ALPINE" again.

In 1960 sold to Japanese breakers with delivery November 1960.

I had just been promoted to 3rd Engineer Officer, and after the usual stint of relieving duties around the coast, I was appointed to the "Clan Alpine" which was loading at Vittoria Dock in Birkenhead. I was 22 years old and had joined Clan Line in January 1957. My letter of appointment had said that the trip was to be with a full general cargo for India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) then on to be scrapped at a location to be determined later.

The company was often called the "Scottish Navy" due I believe to the fact that the Officers wore naval rather than merchant braid. The vessels were well built and much respected in the maritime world. Each ship flew a unique stem jack of its particular tartan with a lion rampant on a white diamond.

The "Alpine" was a 7,103 gross ton standard "Empire" class vessel. She was 424 ft. in length and had been built as the "Empire Borne" at Sunderland in 1942. She was purchased by Clan Line in 1945 from the Ministry of War Transport and renamed "Clan Alpine". (Coincidentally this was the name of both first and last vessels built by Clan Line). As with most Clan Line vessels she had been well maintained in seaworthy condition. However, as the company had a number of new vessels built and building she was no longer required. The 2,500 horsepower engine was reliable and economical but at a service speed 10.5 knots much too slow for the increasingly competitive cargo liner trade to India, Pakistan, Ceylon, South and East Africa and Australia that Clan Line engaged in.

The Engine Room was small but compact compared to modern vessels. The main propulsion unit was a 3-cylinder triple expansion steam engine, the steam provided by 3 Scotch Boilers. Two Bellis & Morcom steam driven generators provided lighting and heating.

The engine room compliment consisted of 5 Engineer Officers, the Chief and 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Engineers. While the vessel was at sea, the senior watch keepers in charge of their respective watches were the 2nd Engineer (4 to 8); 3rd Engineer (12 to 4); 4th Engineer (8 to 12). My watch (12 to 4) was known as the "Graveyard" watch, due to the fact that one took over his watch at 2400 hrs. until 0400 hrs., and again at 1200 hrs. until 1600 hrs. Although most Officers detested this particular watch, especially the midnight to 4 a.m., I for one enjoyed the so called "Graveyard" watch, as the majority of the ships compliment were asleep and there was little chance of the Chief Engineer arriving down the engine room and poking around.

There was a compatible and friendly group of 14 officers aboard plus the chief engineers wife and 59 lascars (Indian or Pakistani) crew who were returning to their homes in the Chittagong area after 18 months away serving on various Clan boats. The large number of lascars was partly as a result of this smaller vessel repatriating them from larger company vessels back to Pakistan. Clan Line maintained a boarding house in Glasgow, which was used as a pool of lascar crew. Routinely lascars were transferred from vessels arriving from India to vessels going to South Africa or Australia and vice versa.

We set sail from the Mersey on September 16th 1960 for a trip to the Suez Canal, Assab, Djibouti, Aden, Bombay, Cochin, Tuticorin and final discharge port of Chittagong. Arrival at the Chittagong anchorage was at 0130 hrs. on October 31st. While at anchor, anchor watches are maintained and main engines are on standby. The bridge phoned down to say that a delay was expected till a berth inside the harbour would be available.

While in Bombay, orders had been received that on completion of discharge of cargo in Chittagong, the vessel was to proceed to a scrapyard in Onomichi, Japan. All the officers and crew were looking forward to the trip to Japan as this area was not on Clan Line's normal run. While at anchor, last minute orders were received from the London head office to take a cargo from either Vizaghatnam or Rangoon, to Japan, no doubt to cover the cost of the delivery voyage.

Chittagong, situated at the mouth of the Kharnapuli River, was the principal port, for the then, East Pakistan and had been a regular port of call for the company's vessels for many years. Usually general cargo from the U.K. was unloaded and jute for Dundee and elsewhere was loaded for the return trip. The port was quite well equipped and had good docks and cranes. The population of about 365,000 people was for the most part extremely poor and many lived in bamboo shacks with tin roofs. They certainly didn't need the extra misery that was about to descend on them.

I had just taken over my noon watch (12 to 4), completed my engine room inspection, was chatting with my Pakistani fireman to ensure that all the burners had been cleaned and the correct burner tips installed ready for trip up river, when the engine room phone sounded. The call was from the bridge informing me that the Radio Officer had picked up a cyclone warning from Chittagong Radio. The information indicated that a cyclone was approaching from the south but heading closer to Calcutta than our anchored position. The 2nd mate however informed me that the barometer was falling quite quickly, but at that time the wind was not increasing in force very much. I was about to telephone the Chief Engineer and relate the information just received when the 2nd Engineer appeared alongside. He was already aware of the situation and I informed him that a full head of steam was maintained and main engine kept at the ready. He asked me to keep him informed of any further developments, then left the engine room as he would take over his watch at 1600 hrs. At around 1400 hours, down in the bowels of the engine room one could feel the change in the weather.

When I took over the watch at noon the ship was stable, now she was starting to roll a few degrees to port and starboard. I called up the bridge to find out the latest weather conditions, and was informed that the wind was rising, the barometer was falling rapidly, and that the sky was darkening. As I hung up the telephone, I sensed impending doom. I had just completed the engine room log and sat down to enjoy a hot mug of tea brought to me by my greaser, when the telephone rang once again. The bridge informed me that they had received another warning indicating centre of the cyclone would be over Chittagong at midnight. At this time, the wind was gusting to whole gale force 9 with very rough seas and the ship was rolling and pitching considerably. The barometer had also dropped 0.2" since noon.

At 1600 hrs. I handed over the watch to the 2nd Engineer, informing him that I would make myself available should things deteriorate. I bumped into the 2nd Mate who had also just come off watch and he informed me that the wind had veered to south at hurricane force 12 +. At 1835 hrs. the wind shifted very quickly to SSW. This shift of wind towards the land was to have dire consequences. It was later estimated that the wind force had peaked at over 130 knots and was the areas worst storm in 70 years. I had a quick shower, put on a clean pair of overalls and was eating a sandwich in my cabin, when there was a knock on my door. The door opened and a dark terrified face appeared; it was the greaser on watch informing me that the 2nd Engineer needed me down below.

The port and starboard heavy steel engine room doors had been secured in the fully open position for obvious reasons (quick exit if this became necessary). On me reaching the main engine manoeuvring platform, the 2nd Engineer asked me to stand by the controls while he went walk about checking the state of the engine room / boiler room bilge's and the bilge at the stern end of the ship known as the "tunnel well". The engine room telegraph was reading "Full Ahead", boiler pressure was just under the maximum prior to the safety valves lifting and the vessel was going astern up the Sandwip Channel at 35 knots dragging both anchors. No more could be done than was already being done. We were now in the hands of the Gods.

Shortly after this, all lights ashore disappeared. Unknown to us at the time, a huge tidal wave had passed over Kutubia Island lighthouse and had left a tide mark 35ft. above sea level. It then passed over the harbour and coastal area causing appalling loss of life, enormous property damage and a total power blackout.

We were later told that the anemometer at the Chittagong Meteorological Office had blown away while recording winds of 120 knots with the centre of the storm approaching us at 30 knots. The sea conditions were unimaginable at this point, completely white and like a boiling cauldron. The air was filled with foam and spray reducing the visibility on the bridge to near zero. The ferocity of the spray was incredible, almost like solid waves breaking over the vessel. At the height of the storm, the radar stopped functioning and it was later found that the scanner motor had burned out with the force of the wind. Unknown to the engine room personnel at the time, the hatch tarpaulins were starting to loosen and in those sea conditions, it seemed we would soon be shipping green seas down the cargo hatches. In that event, the vessel would quickly founder. The weather seemed to be about to completely overwhelm the vessel. Launching a boat or survival in the water seemed out of the question. The vessel was rolling and pitching to such an extent it was proving very difficult to keep on ones feet, without hanging on to a fixed object in the engine room. Although my life flashed before my eyes, I was fortunately too busy to feel any great fear. At around 1850 hrs., and without warning, the wind died completely and the ship lay perfectly still. The 2nd Engineer asked me to go up on deck and see what was happening. I was completely dumbfounded on reaching the main deck, the wind had died completely, the sea was relatively calm and one could see a well-defined circle in the sky overhead. At this point I realised that we were in the eye of the storm. The calm however only lasted about 30 seconds before it resumed its fury. At 1925 hrs. we felt a slight bump and immediately noticed that the we were losing vacuum on the main engine. The cooling water to the main condenser has two suctions, a low suction on the ships bottom, and a high suction just below the ships waterline. We were on the low suction at the time and assuming that the suction inlet had become blocked with mud and silt, we changed over to the high suction in order to get flow of water back through the condenser as quickly as possible so that vacuum on the main engine would be reinstated. After a few more bumps and scrapes felt, the engine room telegraph rang to main engine "Stop". The 2nd Engineer, 5th Engineer and myself looked at each other in disbelief as the main engine came to a stop. Seconds later, the phone rang and the bridge informed us that the vessel was aground. At this news, a wonderful feeling of tremendous relief prevailed.

It was astounding how quickly the weather improved. The wind died right down to a gentle breeze and a beautiful tropic moon came out as the clouds rolled away. At this stage the ships Master, Captain F. Harris thought that the vessel was aground on a flat bottom somewhere north of the port and plans were made to maintain full steam to pull her off in the morning. Suddenly and without warning, the engine room telegraph rang asking for an engine movement. It appeared that the 2nd Mate on the bridge saw what he thought was rocks off the port quarter and rang the engine room telegraph in an attempt to get clear. But a further study at the "rocks" through binoculars revealed that they were in fact the tops of palm trees becoming visible as the water was receding. "Finished with Engines" was then rung on the engine room telegraph and this was to be the last time her main engines ever moved.

The account of the aftermath to this stranding will be included in the next edition. Ed

HISTORY OF THE LIBERTY SHIP

SS. JEREMIAH O'BRIEN.

This is the second part of an article taken from the lecture notes of Engineer David Aris

LIBERTY BUILDING PROGRAMME.

In 1936 a US government agency, the US Maritime Commission (USMC) was set up to oversee the development of the American Merchant fleet.

In 1941, whilst the Ocean ships were under construction, President Roosevelt wished to expand this fleet which he considered too small and too old. The USMC and American shipowners required a faster and larger ship than the Ocean design but US shipbuilders and the very respected New York naval architects, Gibbs and Cox testified that the British design was well founded and had much to recommend it, pointing out that with the looming possibility of war, time was running out for a fresh design to be developed. (William Gibbs, after WW2, went on to design the Blue Ribband winning passenger ship SS United States.)

Gibbs and Cox were very familiar with the Thompson design having redrawn some of the original drawings to suit US building practices and they were allocated the task of modifying the Ocean design to become the Liberty design; but there were several major modifications –

Two Water tube boilers were fitted in exchange for the three Scotch boilers of the Oceans. It is interesting that the two major boilermakers in the US at that time, Babcock and Wilcox and Foster Wheeler both had suitable designs but the USMC wished for total standardisation and persuaded B & W to allow F.W. to build their boilers under licence for the duration of the war. (The Jeremiah O'Brien then, has B & W design boilers manufactured by F.W.)

There was much more use of welding of shell plating and all superstructures although in most cases rivets were retained in shell/frame connections. Welding was used on 75-95% of all joints. Contrary to popular opinion only 353 fully welded ships were built these from the delta yard in New Orleans and the Jones yards in Georgia and Florida, these three being new yards and allocated the building of some specials such as Liberty tankers and Liberty colliers.

At that time the standard UK built Empire ship would use 480,000 rivets whereas a Portland sourced ship would only use some 23,000 rivets. The well established Bethlehem yard was somewhere in between using 114,000 rivets on frame connections and on plate seams the butts being welded. Post war the Bethlehem ships were the most favoured for purchase by knowing British shipowners.

In the Ocean class, there were two hatches forward of the bridge structure, no. 3 hatch was between the bridge and the engine/boiler casing the latter also including engineer's accommodation, with two hatches aft of the engine/boiler casing. The American design was to move the bridge aft and join it to the engine/boiler casing thus forming one unit accommodation block for all crew members. This was considered more "democratic", safer in bad weather and wartime conditions, and cheaper to build.

Spray painting, as opposed to brush application, was widely used.

So far as organisation was concerned it was common to work 24/24 on three shifts; 3 yards had full scale mock-ups of engine room piping and ten sets of pipe systems were produced at a time.

Gibbs and Cox gave all the yards backup providing drawings and models using a staff of about 2300.

In December 1941, as a result of the attack on Pearl harbour, the US entered the war against Germany and Japan and the Liberty building programme was greatly expanded in both existing shipyards and new shipyards built on "green field" sites. The 18 yards had a total of 210 building berths plus of course associated assembly buildings. There were 20 manufacturers of the main engine, two in particular taking the lion's share, Joshua Hendy of Sunnyvale and Hamilton, Ohio both building 28% each. Hendy were eventually producing one engine per day and their final total was 754 engines in 2 1/2 years at a cost of about \$106,000 per engine. In some cases, engines were exchanged between builders in Canada and the US.

Henry Kaiser operated many of the yards and usually gets the credit for building most Liberty ships but the single yard which built the most ships was Bethlehem Fairfield of Baltimore whose output was 384 Liberty's plus many other types. Kaiser was not a shipbuilder but a very skilful organiser of men and materials who thought big. He started life as a photographer in New York, moved into the concrete business and eventually built large civil projects such as the Boulder and Hoover dams and the Bay Bridge linking San Francisco with Oakland. A sip to him was merely another product to be made; after the war he built motorcars and organised a very large life insurance company.

The Chairman of USMC took a drawing of the Liberty to President who described it as adequate but an “ugly duckling”. Land recognised this name would not be a morale booster to the thousands of people building the ships so coined the name “Liberty” and 27 December 1941 was designated Liberty Day on which 14 identical ships were launched.

The first Liberty ship to be built, SS. Patrick Henry, was completed by the Bethlehem yard in 245 days but by the time the 20th ship was built this time had come down to 120 days and by the 50th ship, only 58 days. The learning curve was working!

The average of ALL yards was about 62 days and this depended upon cranes, weather conditions, skills and availability of the workforce and in some cases, availability of steel from the mills. It has been estimated that a Liberty comprises of some 250,000 components but there were only about 100 crane lifts on the berth as a result of well organised prefabrication. The Kaiser yard at Vancouver (Washington State, not Canada), had a sheer legs crane which could lift an entire 250 ton deckhouse as a unit.

Kaiser organised a record attempt (possibly to demoralise the enemy!) and this took place at the Kaiser yard in Richmond where the SS Robert Peary was completed, keel laying to launch in 4 days, 15 ½ hours with a further 3 days afloat for final fitting out.

The schedule was....

Day 1. 1450 tons of steel laid down and main engine installed on tanktop.

Day 2. Built to upper deck.

Day 3. Deckhouses, masts and deck machinery installed.

Day 4. Wiring and painting mainly completed.

There is a story which persists whereby Kaiser invited a lady sponsor to the launching platform and handed her the champagne bottle; the lady looked down the berth and remarked to Kaiser, “There is no ship there”. Kaiser replied, “lady, don’t worry, just start swinging....”

But there is another side to these wonderful production results and I quote the Editorial from the local newspaper the Baltimore News of 13 November 1942 as follows....

“AND YET, FOR ALL THIS DAZZLING SPEED IN TURNING OUT INDIVIDUAL SHIPS FASTER THAN SHIPS HAVE EVER BEEN BUILT BEFORE, AMERICA MUST FACE THE FACT THAT THE OUTPUT PER WORKER IN OUR SHIPYARDS, IN TONS OF STEEL, IS ONLY ABOUT HALF THE OUTPUT PER MAN IN BRITISH SHIPYARDS. THAT IS A CHASTENING THOUGHT!

CRAMPED AS THEY ARE FOR SPACE, HAMPERED BY A RIGIDLY ENFORCED BLACKOUT, HARASSED AT INTERVALS BY GERMAN BOMBERS, MANNED BY WORKERS WHOSE DIET IS INFERIOR TO THAT OF AMERICAN WORKERS, NEVERTHELESS BRITAIN’S SHIPYARDS ARE OUT-PRODUCING US, MAN FOR MAN, BY ABOUT TWO TO ONE.

IT IS A FINE THING TO STARTLE THE WORLD BY PRODUCING A SHIP IN LESS THAN FIVE DAYS BUT IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT OUR SHIPYARDS WILL HAVE TO STEP UP GENERAL PRODUCTION A LONG WAY. WHILST CHEERING LUSTILY FOR SPEED RECORDS WE MUST ALSO ASK WHY THE BRITISH, MAN FOR MAN ARE OUT-PRODUCING US.”

In shipbuilding it is generally accepted that steelwork output is a good measure of the progress of a ship, other trades, carpenters, fitters, electricians, etc. following up at the same rate.

The building man-hours for steelwork at J.L.Thompson’s in Sunderland ((Empire ship), 336,000.

The building man-hours for steelwork at Bethlehem, Baltimore, (Liberty), 510,000.

Hence, Bethlehem required 52% more hours than Thompson.

At the outbreak of war, there were 12 million unemployed in the US and a mere 20,000 workers in the shipbuilding industry. So there was no shortage of labour and at the wartime peak there were 650,000 in the industry in some cases, 50% being female. The Portland yard for example, employed 30,000 of which 10% were female and 85% were from non traditional shipbuilding backgrounds. With ample labour and the developed concept of prefabrication speed records for ship production were achieved.

There is little evidence of trade demarcation and there were few inhibitions about new practices and economy was a watchword so far as materials were concerned. (Though not apparently where labour figures were concerned.) The Marin shipyard at Sausalito in the early days scoured redundant railway systems to obtain unused railway bridges which were dismantled and recycled into ship components. Very early Liberty ships occasionally went to sea with wooden cargo booms until steel tube supplies caught up and some ships went to sea with only 1 ½ sets of anchor cable lengths in the name of economy.

After the war ended, General Eisenhower, the supreme Allied Commander, made a speech in which he listed items of equipment without which he doubted the war could have been won. He included the Jeep, the Dakota aircraft, the Sherman tank and the Liberty ship. The USA was the arsenal for the supply of essential equipment and much food and if these could not be shipped across the sea they were useless.

Continued on the next page

Prime Minister Winston Churchill had an opinion on merchant shipping -

In his letter to Roosevelt on 8 December 1940 when things were not looking good he stated...

“THE MORTAL DANGER TO OUR COUNTRY IS THE STEADY AND INCREASING DIMINUATION OF OUR SEA TONNAGE. WE CAN ENDURE THE SHATTERING OF OUR DWELLINGS AND THE SLAUGHTER OF OUR CIVILIAN POPULATION BY AIR ATTACKS, BUT THE DECISION FOR 1941 LIES UPON THE SEA. UNLESS WE CAN ESTABLISH OUR ABILITY TO FEED THIS ISLAND, TO IMPORT THE MUNITIONS OF ALL KINDS THAT WE NEED, WE MAY FALL BY THE WAY.

IT IS THEREFOR IN SHIPPING AND THE POWER TO TRANSPORT ACROSS THE OCEANS, PARTICULARLY THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, THAT IN 1941, THE WHOLE CRUNCH OF THE WAR WILL BE FOUND”.

In 1949, Churchill in his book, “The History of the Second World War” states that the above quoted letter was one of the most important he ever wrote.

(This is of course, why I feel that Thompson and Hunter should have received higher honours.)

All Liberty ships were built to American Bureau of Shipping Classification. (ABS) The original deadweight tonnage as designed was 10,428 but ABS were so impressed with the general design and scantlings of the ship that they considered that it could have an increased DW of 10,865 without modification (i.e. deeper loading to load line), hence a gain of 437 tons per ship. Of the 2710 Liberty ships built in 4 years, 2580 were standard basic dry cargo vessels and hence the total gain of this increased tonnage was 1,184,000 tons equivalent in theory to 113 more ships!

Whilst retaining the standard hull form and main machinery some vessels were fitted out for special purposes such as hospital ships, animal transport, repair workshops and distilling ships for the navy, troop ships (which doubled up as POW ships), tank transports which had heavier tanktop plating, boxed aircraft carriers which had enlarged hatch openings, colliers which had the engineroom located aft, and tankers which looked like cargo vessels complete with hatch coamings and cargo gear, but had oil-tight bulkheads and tank divisions built in.

PROBLEMS.

The USMC built over 5000 merchant ships of all types during the war, the majority being mainly welded and so far as the Liberties were concerned only six were total losses due to structural failure and only two of these caused loss of life but all six were in ballast condition at the time of failure. The majority gave good service though many had cracks of a more minor nature.

There were several reasons for these failures, -

Poor workmanship due to an inexperienced workforce and tight schedules.

In a very few cases, deliberate sabotage; welding rods were placed in grooves and welded over to simulate faster welding rates. Such rare cases were severely dealt with by prison sentences.

Design faults which emerged due to the conversion of a riveted hull design to one to be extensively welded, examples being right angled hatch corners where a radius should have been introduced, and discontinuity where a recess was created to facilitate inboard stowage of the accommodation ladder.

A major cause of failure was low temperature brittle failure of steel this being observed when ships built at Portland, Oregon, where the winter temperature can drop to -20F, were allocated to the Soviet Union and sent to Vladivostok. And operated in low temperatures.

The USDMC requested Admiralty support in solving this problem and Ms. Constance Tipper, a metallurgist researcher at Cambridge University was allocated this task. Ms. Tipper developed a test which related falling temperatures to the brittleness of steels and this test, the Tipper test, is still used in research. The solution was to advise a modified steel formula for the mills so as to supply more malleable steel. After retiring from academic life Ms. Tipper retired to Cumbria and was for some years a metallurgic consultant to the Vickers shipyard at Barrow in Furness during the construction of the nuclear submarines. She died in 1995.

Post war there were 54 propeller losses due to fractured tailshafts and this was caused by bad workmanship resulting in salt water ingress to the shaft cone and stress corrosion. Three of these casualties became total losses.

The original design was for a vessel to operate in the trampship market, i.e take a cargo from A to B, then another from B to C, then another.... Minimising ballast passages which were loss making. To this end the ballast tank capacity totals only 2824 tons. During the war, of course, the majority of cargoes were westbound from the US to Europe and Russia and ships had to return across the Atlantic in ballast which made for discomfort for the crew due to heavy rolling, possible instability and extra stresses on the hull. It was decided that solid ballast would be loaded in the UK and in the case of Bristol (and possibly Liverpool) departing vessels this comprised of bomb damage rubble from houses and other buildings. This ballast was discharged in New York on the banks of the east River at Manhattan and today forms the foundations of the East River Drive in New York.

To be concluded in the next edition.

"Scawfell" Shanghai June 30th 1863

My dear Helen



I now write you for the last time before sailing and hope it will find you and the children quite well as usual. We have had a hard fight in getting loaded and have managed it at last and I intend sailing tomorrow if I can get a steamer, which as yet is doubtful. However, I will sail first opportunity. The season is now getting far advanced and I expect a long passage down the China Sea but I am going the Eastern Passage this time and will not pass Anger without the wind should be favourable for going that way. There are a good few vessels sailing about the same time, some before and some after, so that I must make as quick a passage as possible and not let them all beat me. You will likely see their names in the paper so that I need not mention them here. I enclose a copy of money advanced to crew up to this date, which please keep until I come home. I am sorry that I will not be able to bring good tea for you this time as there is not any to be got here of the same quality I used to bring, but I have bought a little such as it is and I have also bought a toilet set. Japanese ware, which is all the purchases I have made. There are two basins. One large enough to wash the bairns and the other to wash you and I providing we do not want to wash both at one time. With jugs to match and some small things for holding soap etc. they have cost me twenty five dollars (£6). Too much money you will say, and so do I. And that is all the money I have laid out we'll say for your benefit since I have been here. I hope I will get them home without breaking. Now you said in your letter of 25th April that I was to have another next mail, but it has been here a week and I have got neither letter nor paper. Now what do you deserve when I come home. I will tell you when I come. I suppose by this time you will be located with your Irish friends and I hope will enjoy yourself. Do not learn too much of the brogue in case I do not understand you. I hope I will be able to get to London in October but not certain, as I have been so long in getting away. However, I am not so bad as some others who were here before me and no sign of getting away yet. There are too many tea ships here and the freights are getting low. I shall average £5 per ton but the ships that are to load after this will not get so much. Every one is complaining of bad times here and no signs of getting better.

6am July 1st. My dear Helen,

The last of our cargo is now alongside and we sail today about 11 o'clock. I am going on shore immediately after breakfast to clear out and come on board again as soon as possible. I am not sure of getting clear of the river today as the winds are right ahead. Outside, the S. West Monsoon being blowing strong.

Now I must say goodbye until you hear from me again from the Downs which I hope will not be more than four months.

May God bless you and our dear children and kiss them for their Papa and keep one or two for yourself. Remember me to all at home and all friends.

I remain my dear Helen

Your affectionate husband

Robert Thomson

SAFE SPEED?

Some time ago, an article in "Lloyd's List" referring to the collision between the post panamax containership "P&O Nedlloyd Vespucci" and the yacht "Wahkuna" in the English Channel commented on the failure of shipmasters to observe the requirements of the Collision Regulations, particularly Rule.6 (Safe Speed).

It is worth mentioning that this rule applies "in any condition of visibility" but in this instance, despite the fact that the Channel was shrouded in dense fog the French MRCC noted that in a four hour period, of the 19 ships "plotted" 18 did not reduce speed. The container vessel was proceeding at her "passage" speed of 25 knots with her ARPA referenced to ground track - and the yachtsmen were unable to interpret the information given by their own radar. The former was unaware of the collision and the latter sank - fortuitously, without loss of life.

"Safe Speed" has long been difficult to define precisely although Rule 6. of the Colregs gives some pretty clear guidance relating to the factors to be taken into consideration - traffic density, manoeuvrability and visibility for a start.

Those familiar with the container trade know that it is simply wishful thinking to believe that a container ship will, in each and every instance of reduced visibility slow down to the extent that might mean she misses her berthing "slot". Quite simply, everything is geared to her maintaining her scheduled time of arrival and little allowance has been built into the schedule to allow for the niceties of continually observing the Collision Regulations. The owners supply a plethora of electronic gadgetry much of it dedicated to "Collision Avoidance" and the Master is meant to use it to their commercial benefit.

Container ships are not alone in this. The collision between the ro-ro ferry "Northern Prince" and the high-speed wave-piercing catamaran "Diamant" had many of the ingredients of the container ship/yacht collision and here again the tight schedules of these two ferries gave little scope for a speed reduction. Some time later, when this collision was being discussed in the Southampton Master Mariners' Club, the visiting Master of an HSS (High Speed Ship) cross-channel ferry stated quite bluntly "In our trade - slowing down is not an option"

It is certain that he and the Masters of the three commercial ships mentioned were in possession of precise written instructions from their owners regarding navigation in reduced visibility and the importance of adhering to the Collision Regulations so the question must be asked -why do they elect to hazard their ships, careers and certificates by disregarding these instructions?

Ships have long been encouraged to maintain tight schedules, particularly those on "mail runs". The ships of the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company were amongst the most famous "time keepers" in the maritime world and their famous advertisement "Every Thursday at 4.0 o'clock" bore testimony to their punctuality. The required average north-bound passage speed from Cape Town to Southampton was approximately 18.7 knots but most prudent Masters averaged 19.5 through the relatively uncluttered, clear and lonely waters of the S.Atlantic until arrival Las Palmas. This allowed for a meaningful reduction in speed (and the ability to maintain the scheduled arrival) in the event of encountering fog in the Western Approaches. Obviously, in terms of fuel consumption this was not as economical as maintaining the average passage speed throughout but the Marine Superintendents appreciated the wisdom of the policy and never was a Master criticised. In the event of protracted bad weather or severely reduced visibility speed WAS adjusted in the interests of safety and if the vessel arrived late there were no repercussions. The ships were well equipped with navigational aids, the Bridge was manned at all times by two certificated Officers, two Quartermasters and a Bridge Boy, the manning allowed for continuous lookouts (Bridge wing AND forecastle head, if deemed expedient by the OOW) and the Staff Commander was available to relieve the Master to allow him to get essential rest. On "Stand By" the engine room was manned by competent Officers ready for immediate manoeuvring - and fog signals were made. It goes without saying that each and every Master made every endeavour to maintain the schedule but, when circumstances absolutely prevented this, they were, to a man, certain that their jobs were secure. I am sure that broadly similar conditions prevailed on ships of the Cunard Line, P&O, Orient, Clan Line, NZS, Port Line and a horde of other quality companies.

Today's "Just in Time" policy in the retail trade certainly puts pressure on operators to ensure that the goods arrive on schedule - any disruption to the chain of supply will result in shortages in the market place and complaints from the retailer and the consumer. Excess goods on shelves (or in warehouses) exhaust capital and as long as a container arrives on the scheduled day, demand can be met. Competition from air freight is also a factor despite the higher cost.

One possible explanation for the unwillingness to adhere to the instructions to reduce speed in fog is the belief - real or imaginary - that action will be taken against any Master whose vessel arrives late. In this era of a chronic and rapidly increasing shortage of qualified and competent seafarers it is unlikely that such punitive action would be taken but, in any event, the adroit use of log book entries to accurately describe the conditions of visibility (and traffic density) necessitating the speed reduction would be useful evidence when defending the decision to adhere to the requirements of the Collision Regulations - and the Managers written instructions.



Rope Ends

Burns' Night Supper



Hardly will the turkey have settled before it will be time again for haggis. E'en now we have a line up of willing Caledonians brushing off their sporrans to honour their bard at this popular event. If previous evenings are anything to go on you will be well fed and entertained.

1900 on Saturday 19th January
King's Court Masonic Centre
Chandlers Ford



Black Tie

£26 per person

Sea Pie Supper

1st February at the Guildhall
Tickets are now on sale
Price retained at £37
No restriction on numbers.
Members are reminded of the savings to be made by pre-ordering their wines and spirits.

Although the Autumn Dinner Dance at Brook House was less well attended than previously, the raffle, which, I understand, was held in that typical Cachalot manner of elan and efficiency, nevertheless managed to raise

£250

for the Wessex Cancer Trust.

NEW CACHALOTS

D.C. Brodie
S. Collins
J. Coltman
J. Howe
B. Needle
A.M. Smith
T. White
S. Withington

I.O.W. Pilotage District

At a recent luncheon held by the Merchant Mariners of Wight I met one of their members, David Burdett. David, an Old Conway who served part of his career with the Trinity House Steamvessel Service, is now writing a book on TH at East Cowes including pilotage and has sent me an article on same which I hope to include in the next issue. David helped establish the East Cowes Heritage Centre in 1992 and now spends his time running the I.O.W. Society.

He says: *I shall be very grateful if you would include the attached article in an edition of the Cachalot as it will let a wider audience know of my research and provide a chance to correct any mistakes I have made and possibly add to the information. For example I have no information about what happened to the pilotage service during the two World Wars, nor have I included anything about Portsmouth pilotage when the Trinity House service was terminated.*

Please point out that I am not a serious researcher and the article is based on a casual collection of information so is liable to inaccuracies.

That will be nothing new to *The Cachalot*, David. Meanwhile, any information and memories that members might have will be gratefully received.

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\$ **250 Club** \$

\$ September Mary Juelsdorf \$

\$ October T.E. Clark \$

\$ November J. Bowden \$

\$\$\$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

Programme of Events 2008/2009

Correction: Dec 6 Christmas Dinner
Dec 13 Christmas Lunch

“We will not be beaten by just two feet of water!”

On Sunday 21st October, *Stowaway* Admiral of the Fleet Sir Julian Oswald GCB made his way to Stratford-upon-Avon to take the salute at the Sea Cadets Corps Warwickshire District Annual Trafalgar Day Parade. The occasion was being hosted by the Stratford-upon-Avon Unit, TS Gurkha where *Cachalot*, Commander Paul Davies RD** RNR, is an instructor.

When the Unit was flooded at the end of July, it was suggested that they would be too busy clearing up the mess and dealing with insurance claims, building repairs, etc. to have the time to make all the arrangements necessary for hosting the event, but the Unit was determined “... not to be beaten by just two feet of water!”

Nor were they!

The day dawned with sunshine and blue skies and almost two hundred cadets turned out, including a combined district guard and the massed bands of the Redditch and Sutton Coldfield Units. The Colour of TS Coventry was also paraded.

The Admiral was joined by the Mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon, Councillor Donna Barker who is very supportive of TS Gurkha. Every year a “Mayor’s Cadet” is appointed to join the Beadle and Mace Bearers on various civic occasions, the three cadet forces taking it in turns. This year it was quite fortuitously the turn of TS Gurkha, and Able Cadet Rebecca Nadolski took her place with the VIPs.



The Parade started off close by the River Avon, the adjoining gardens being full of visitors brought out by the fine weather, thereby providing an instant audience and the associated exposure and publicity desperately needed by TS Gurkha. Although the flood damage to the Unit itself is covered by insurance, the Unit’s mini-bus was written off and so there is now a fund-raising campaign so that a replacement can be provided. In support of this fund a Charity Auction was held at the conclusion of the Unit’s Trafalgar Dinner on Saturday 27th October and this raised the magnificent sum of approximately £4,500 towards the £25,000 required for the minibus.

Paul Davies



Sir Julian and the Mayor, with Cdr Paul Davies (*back*) and Officers of TS Gurkha.

For more pictures of the parade go to Paul’s web site:
<http://www.lumburn.com/prdphoto>

The Club room is currently open three days a week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 1130 - 1500. Liz will be only too happy to serve you a drink and she can take your orders for meals, sandwiches and snacks. Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure. We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.

The Club’s address is:

**The Southampton Master Mariners' Club,
(The CACHALOTS)
Southampton Seafarers' Centre,
12-14 Queens Terrace,
SOUTHAMPTON, SO14 3BP**

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Dates for your Diary

Wed	Jan	2	Docklands New Year Service, S.S.C.
Wed	Jan	2	Club re-opens
Thu	Jan	17	AGM
Sat	Jan	19	Burns’ Night Supper, Kings Court
Fri	Feb	1	Sea Pie Supper, Guildhall
Sat	Mar	8	Curry Lunch
Fri	Mar	28	Skittles Evening. So’ton Old Green B.C.
Tba	Apr		Wine Tasting
Fri	May	2	Club Buffet Supper (Max 40)
Sat	May	17	80th Anniversary Ball, Warsash
Fri	Jun	13	Club Buffet Supper (Max 40)
Thu	Jun	19	Shipping Festival Service, Winchester
Sat	July	12	Curry Lunch
Fri	Aug	8	Cowes Week Fireworks cruise, Shieldhall
Tba	Sept		Coach tour to Buckingham Palace
Sat	Sept	13	Curry Lunch
Fri	Sept	26	Quiz-SMMC v Seafarers’ Centre
Tue	Oct	??	Last Night of the Proms Concert, Tidworth
Sat	Oct	11	80th Anniv.Club Dinner, Brook House
Sat	Dec	6	Christmas Dinner, Kings Court
Sat	Dec	13	Christmas Lunch, Kings Court

Gone Aloft

C.A. Dowding

K. Grant

A.S. Hands