

# ***The CACHALOT***

**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB**

---

**No 78**

**Digital Edition**

**July 2020**

---

## Captain's Log

While the lockdown continues your Captain has no official duties to perform. Consequently, I cannot regale you with tales of luncheons and dinners attended on your behalf. That is not to say that I am losing weight during this period of social inaction, but the household Purser is keeping close tabs on the biscuit tin.

Last month I wrote about George West and his Quicksling rescue device. This month's Captain's Column also has a safety theme in that 6 to 10 July is Maritime Safety week. To misquote Michael Caine, "not a lot of people know that".

Maritime Safety Week was invented by the previous Maritime Minister, Nusrat Ghani, in 2018 so it is into its third year. Despite being something of a novice to things maritime when she took up her appointment, Nusrat Ghani quickly became an enthusiast and threw herself heart and soul into promoting the UK as an important hub for world shipping. However, while trade was at the heart of the policy, she was also focussed on the people, and Maritime Safety week and the Maritime Safety Action Plan were her initiatives.

This year's Safety Week will be very different. No tours of ports and harbours, meeting seafarers and port staff at their place of work, as the activities will all be online. Nonetheless, our new maritime Minister, Kelly Tolhurst MP, has made it her project, and her priorities for this year are to:

- Recognise the excellent safety work that already goes on
- Provide an opportunity to focus on some specific challenges, such as fishing safety
- Facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice
- Capitalise on the momentum of last year's successful week in promoting maritime safety.

During the week, I will be attending an MPs (virtual) Round Table discussion about fishing safety, and expect that most MPs with a fishing community in their constituency has will be there. As usual, I expect the conversations will be robust, and I will be pressed for ways we can improve safety in the UK fishing industry. So, if anyone knows of a manufacturer who makes a lifejacket that can also catch fish, would they let me know as soon as possible?

Keep safe

Captain Andrew Moll

## Letters to the editor

*Due to some last minute technical problems, (read 'editor's cock-up'), I seem to have ended up with some unintended white space here, so I thought I might fill it with the 'Letters to the editor' column.*

*Unfortunately, after a very slow start, 76 editions or 19 years to be precise, it seems to have come to a halt again after just one letter. So Les Morris may not only be the first correspondent but also the only or last one too. Unless somebody else can deny him that distinction.*

*Actually, I have received, by email, some very appreciative comments about this new format so I am not too disappointed.*

*The pretty blue border around this item could be interpreted as a succession of Ds  $\text{---}$ , or Us  $\text{--}$ , in morse code. The former, 'I am manoeuvring with difficulty' probably more apposite than 'You are standing into danger'. They could be Rs  $\text{--}$  too, but there is no allocated meaning for that. Here endeth your DofT signals lesson, but I'm only waffling of course.*

*The real message is:*

All contributions, comments, suggestions or constructive criticism to [editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk)



# Contents

- 01**    **Captain's Log**
- 03**    **Contents**
- 04**    **From the Editor**
- 05**    **Boatsteerer's Locker**
- 06**    **Writing competition**  
Win a bottle of malt whisky
- 07**    **Cachalot on LinkedIn**  
A new initiative for troubling times, Robin Plumley MBE
- 08**    **Stranded on board**  
Global crew change crisis
- 10**    **Impact of the pandemic**  
Reg Kelso sums up the affect on seafarers world-wide
- 13**    **Forgotten navy**  
Comment from Michael Grey in his Dockgate column, SORJ May - June 2020
- 15**    **An invisible workforce**  
More comment from Michael Grey, Baird Maritime Workboat World, July 2020
- 17**    **Ship of State**  
Topical verse from Barrie Youde
- 18**    **SF Panther stabilisers**  
Barry Peck answers Les Morris's question
- 19**    **Don't blame the weather**  
Comment from Michael Grey, Seatrade-Maritime, Opinion & Analysis, June 2020
- 21**    **Heavy lifts and a fruitless search**  
Memories of the end of B I from Gordon Thornton
- 23**    **Rules in sight for underwater cleaning**  
Keeping safe in the garden, Pilot and Harpooner, Noel Becket.
- 26**    **Beira Patrol (2)**  
Memories from Staff Captain Ken Edwards
- 29**    **In command of an Antarctic supply ship**  
Captain Stuart J Lawrence MBE RD RNR
- 31**    **Planet Earth 2004 - 05**  
A scientific cruise of the Southern Ocean, Captain Robin Plumley MBE
- 33**    **No fuel like an old fuel**  
Comment from Michael Grey in his Dockgate column, SORJ May - June 2020



## From the editor

Welcome to *Cachalot* 78, the third digital edition, and in a further development I have produced printer friendly versions of the recent newsletters. This is in response to the realisation that many of you prefer to read it as a hard copy in the hand rather than peer at a screen. The Printer Friendly version reverts to the conventional print size and spacing which reduces it back to around 16 pages and if you are adept at double sided printing you will need only 8 sheets of A4. It is only a quick edit and therefore not up to the standard of the previously professionally printed newsletters. I will attempt to send out both versions together by email but this will depend on the limitations of sending out large files as attachments. Different ISPs, different rules, so if you have any problems you might let me know. All copies of *the Cachalot* are posted on our website, in the members only section and you can now find the PF versions there too.

In this edition we focus, in part, on the growing global crisis concerning crew changes during the current travel restrictions. Governments and the industry are concerned about the effect on global trade while others are more concerned about the very human costs to the poor seafarer.

The ITF has taken the unprecedented move of telling the world's seafarers to stop working if their employment contracts have expired and they are awaiting repatriation home. In my day this was called 'mutiny' but then we signed articles as opposed to personal contracts. And to force your vessel to remain alongside in an unfriendly port could have many self destructive and unforeseen consequences: just where would your salvation come from?

I include two pieces on the subject by regular contributor, Cachalot Michael Grey. They were originally written for different publications so there may be a little repetition but they are right up to date and on the nail, as usual.

The maritime charities are stepping up to the challenge and the latest 'fan' magazine from the **Mission to Seafarers** is a humbling read. They seek support on **Sea Sunday**, 12th July, and hope to raise 60K in 90 days. The **Shipwrecked Mariners' Society** is committed to **Seafarers Awareness Week**, 6 - 12 July, and have set themselves a target of 25K. If you have any spare funds in these strange times I make no excuses for promoting these two charities here.



## Boatsteerer's Locker

Here we are, still on lockdown and just about keeping sane, with the date of my submission for the next Newsletter rapidly approaching, so first the answers to the last Newsletter's quiz.

- ~ Q1 ~ (a) Rotterdam – New York via Holland America Line  
(b) Liverpool – Valparaiso via Pacific Steam Navigation Company (will accept Royal Mail Steam Packet Company – acquired PSNC 1910)  
(c) Southampton – Cape Town via Union Castle Line
- ~ Q2 ~ (a) Symphony of the Seas = 8,880 [ $\pm 888$ ]  
(b) Color Magic = 3,047 [ $\pm 305$ ]  
(c) Waverley = 879 [ $\pm 88$ ]
- ~ Q3 ~ Adonia ... Aurora ... Iona ... Artemis ... Oceana ... Azura ... Arcadia
- ~ Q4 ~ Vasco de Gama (now CMV) / Statendam – built for Holland America Line (1992)  
Marella Explorer (now TUI) / Galaxy – built for Celebrity Cruises (1996)  
Braemar (now Fred Olsen) / Crown Dynasty – built for Crown Cruise Line (1993)  
Kaitaki (now Interislander Ferries – NZ) / Isle of Innisfree – built for Irish Ferries (1994)  
Vitsentzos Kornaros (Lane Lines – Greece) / Viking Viscount – built for Townsend Thoresen (1975)  
Pacific Dawn (now P&O Australia) / Regal Princess – built for Princess Cruises (1991)  
Azamara Journey (now RCCL) / R Six – built for Renaissance Cruises (2000)
- ~ Q5 ~ (a) Wight Light – WightLink (2009)  
(b) Barfleur – Brittany Ferries (1992 - Truckline)  
(c) Queen Elizabeth – Cunard (2010)

~~~~~

In Southampton there is a continuing movements amongst the laid up cruise ships which is making Douglas Gates goggle-eyed in his Hythe bridge lookout abode. Apparently according to a shipping magazine the laid up liners make regular sorties out to sea for 24hrs or more for technical reasons and to discharge their treated grey water tanks as well as taking on clean sea water for distillation into fresh water. Elsewhere many newly delivered cruise ships are going straight into lay up.

Keep smiling, healthy and sane

Ken Dagnall, Boatsteerer



## Writing Competition

Now is the time to put finger to keyboard and polish up your entries to the

“How I kept myself sane during the Covid-19 scare”

composition competition.

That title can cover a multitude of - I nearly said ‘sins’, but that could be interesting too - subjects and themes, factual, fictional, humour or fantasy, so let your imagination run free.

The prize will be a bottle of finest Malt whisky, generously donated by John Noble. The competition will be judged by the three principal officers of the Club, the Club Captain, the Boatsteerer and the Storekeeper. You are invited to submit entries to [captain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:captain@cachalots.org.uk) a.s.a.p. but no later than **31st July**. Word or Libre Office (odt) format please, 500 - 1000 words.



The VLOC STELLAR BANNER, which suffered bow damage in the shipping channel as it departed a Brazilian port in February, was grounded to prevent it from sinking. Subsequently declared a total loss, she was refloated after the removal of ~145,000 tons of iron ore, towed 60 miles offshore and scuppered in deep water, taking the remaining 150,000 tons of ore with her.

If you have not already seen it, you can watch the dramatic event on gCaptain, or [click here](#)

## Cachalot on LinkedIn

The groups aim is to provide a central forum for Cachalot members to stay in touch, especially during the current coronavirus epidemic.

We have now attracted twenty-seven members with four Cachalots who are registered on LinkedIn and who have been invited but have not completed the final action of accepting the invitation.

The group is marked by the Cachalot emblem in place of the usual 'mugshot' and a banner photo which is changed on a weekly basis, normally on a Tuesday. I have a banner photo for next week but will always be grateful for 'new' images of ships you have been on or associated with or marine activities you are involved in.

Hopefully, as a Cachalot member, you are reading this article in the digital edition of the Cachalot and I hope if you have not done so already you will be moved to come and join us. The instructions are included below.

To join the group:

1. Register with LinkedIn if you are not already a member.
2. Search for Captain Robin Plumley MBE
3. Send him a Connect request. There should be a box on his page or you might find it under 'More'.
4. Once he accepts your request, he will send you an Invitation to join the Group.

This is all very new to many of us so please be patient in the event of unforeseen wrinkles.

Important Club news will still be circulated using the *Cachalite* e-bulletin system.

If in any doubt or require assistance please email at [robinplumley@outlook.com](mailto:robinplumley@outlook.com)



## Read it on your Kindle too

We can also send a copy of these newsletters, (including ALL the previous ones, on request) direct to your Kindle device, as well as to your normal email address.

Each Kindle has its own registered e-mail address and to find yours go to Settings → My account. It will look like *your name* @kindle.com

Send this to me at [editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk) and I will add you to the Kindle distribution list.

## Stranded on board

On the 11th June, in a message to the Fraternity of Trinity House, Commodore Martin Atherton OBE RN, Secretary to the Corporation of Trinity House, said:

“I am forwarding a series of letters and articles published over the last few days to give profile to a situation that is causing deep concern across the maritime community, nationally and internationally. The issue relates to seafarers stranded around the world by stalled crew change protocols, with serious implications not only for their welfare (some have been at sea for over 15 months) but also for global trade.”

The letters and articles, too long to be reproduced here, can be viewed on our website [www.cachalots.org.uk](http://www.cachalots.org.uk) under Cachalots Deck → The Cachalot → TH Crew change protocols. Or [Click here](#)

*This from gCaptain, 16<sup>th</sup> June '20*

The International Maritime Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has taken the unprecedented move of telling the world's seafarers to stop working if their employment



Photo: deela dee / Shutterstock

contracts have expired and they are awaiting repatriation home.

The move from the ITF and its affiliated unions comes after months of calls on governments to designate seafarers as 'key workers' and exempt them from COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The inability to conduct regular crew changes has emerged as one the most critical issues facing the global shipping industry amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each month, more than 100,000 seafarers are subject to crew change in order to comply with international maritime regulations governing safe working hours and crew welfare. However, in the early months of the pandemic, flag states requested to extend employment contracts and certificates in order to keep trade flowing.



Although some countries have moved to facilitate crew changes, an estimated 200,000 seafarers still remain stuck at sea, working on expired contracts while caught up crisis.

Until now, the escalating crisis has largely remained a safety and humanitarian issue, but shipping organizations and associations have warned for months that the issue could quickly escalate into a crisis disruptive to global trade.

After working unsuccessfully for 3 months on a solution, the ITF's stated June 16, 2020 deadline has arrived and starting now it will begin working to assist hundreds of thousands of seafarers to exercise their right to stop working, leave ships, and return home.

“We have urged them on the consequences of tired, fatigued, depressed crew – to trade, to the environment. We have worked with industry and the international community to offer solutions,” said ITF President and Dockers’ Section chair Paddy Crumlin. “But enough is enough. We have to draw a line in the sand and today is the day that we make it crystal clear to governments, that from June 16, seafarers are going to start enforcing their right to stop working and to return home. No more contract extensions.” Crumlin added.

ITF General Secretary Steve Cotton said all that governments need to do is make practical exceptions to coronavirus restrictions, and allow these key workers to transit through their territories and return home.

“If a seafarers wants off a ship, then the ITF, our affiliated unions and the ITF inspectorate will do everything we can to assist them. We fully expect port state authorities in all countries where ships dock to honour their obligations under the Maritime Labour Convention to get these seafarers safely home. That is their legal obligation,” said Cotton.

The International Labour Organization’s *Maritime Labour Convention, 2006* sets out that seafarers have the right to repatriation at the shipowner’s expense after serving on a ship for 12 months, or upon request when the employment contract expires. In order for a new contract to be issued, both the seafarer and the company *must agree* on the terms, giving the seafarer the right to refuse the extension. Seafarers also have the right to be repatriated at no cost to themselves under certain circumstances.

If a seafarer rightfully refuses to work, this could create minimum safe manning issues and the ship will be unable to sail.

“If getting seafarers off these ships causes chaos in supply chains, if ports back up from Singapore to San Francisco, and if this causes ship insurance providers to pull their coverage and global trade to grind to a halt; then that is on the heads of politicians, not the world’s seafarers,” added Cotton. “Seafarers have done our part in this pandemic, and plenty more. Enough is enough.”



## The impact of the pandemic

According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development "MARITIME TRANSPORT is the engine of globalisation, with around 80% of world trade by volume carried on vessels such as container ships, fuel tankers and dry bulk carriers". Under normal circumstances, there are over 96,000 vessels and more than 1.65 million seafarers at sea around the world ensuring that the world's trade and critical goods arrive where they are needed to supply our demanding populations.

Most of these seafarers are serving at sea for between 8 and 12 months, working for 7 days and up to 91 hours each and every week. Despite the fact that most Governments, IMO, ILO, and G20 designate these seafarers as "Key Workers", because of the pandemic and the global restrictions on the movement of people, their employers are facing massive difficulties in trying to effect crew changes with many seafarers significantly overrunning the length of the terms of their contract of employment.

Many are several months over their contracted times and many have served at sea for up to 15 months. A recent survey of three "majors" (Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean and MSC) indicated that they had managed to repatriate 66,900 crew members but 61,275 were still awaiting repatriation -with the number increasing daily. Shorebased workers in the shipping industry are also the victims of a huge cost-cutting exercise with many thousands being laid-off and furloughed - and those who have been retained working reduced hours with reduced pay

In late April, the Cruise International Association calculated that if the suspension of cruising persisted for 60 days, the loss worldwide would total 21 million USD

in economic activity, 2,500 jobs per day and USD 7.3 billion in wages. None of the major cruise lines have stated an intention to resume cruising before September or October ( and some even later) and Cruise International Association's current worst-case scenario -that the disruption continues through September- would mean a loss of more than half of the industry's USD 150 billion in annual global economic activity. The impact on the world's cruise ports will also be massive and Cruise International estimates that as many as 240 jobs are lost EACH DAY that cruise operations are suspended. Passengers (and crew) utilise local airports, hotels, taxis and public transportation, restaurants and other local activities. The Director of Port Everglades cited a study which indicated that more than 60% of their cruise passengers spent one or more nights in a local hotel, ate at the local restaurants and visited local cultural activities - all, of which, is of immense economic value to the community.

Many of the seafarers trapped aboard these ships in ports around the world are not being paid but Carnival Cruise Lines announced that those with at least two years of service with Carnival would be eligible for a "small monthly stipend of around 30 to 60 days of their basic wages/base salary". This far-from-generous payment is almost unique insofar as the majority of cruise lines are no longer paying crew members,

Seafarers contracts vary in length across the industry, but the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention stipulates a MINIMUM of 2.5 days holiday for every month served at sea and this holiday must be taken within any one year. As the International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA) points out, many, many seafarers are suffering from fatigue as a result of the excessive length of time they have spent at sea coupled with the stress of worrying about their family at home and the effect the pandemic is having on them. Not all have access to the internet at sea - and the regulations obtaining in many ports today forbids them accessing shore facilities, even for acute medical reasons.

Under international maritime regulations the shipowner must ensure that their ships are manned with personnel that are medically fit. The Master is responsible for the welfare and wellbeing of the crew and shall ensure that they are not exposed to conditions that could risk their health and safety. With a crew that is suffering from fatigue and stress brought on by worry, ships are running a much higher risk in what is already a high-risk profession. When errors are made onboard it is often the Master who is held responsible and a fatigued Master

increases the risk of an accident occurring and increases the risk of them being criminalised and losing their livelihoods.

The international shipping industry has warned of the huge threat to GLOBAL TRADE from this mounting crisis on board the world's merchant vessels with hundreds of thousands of seafarers stranded at sea, in a foreign port or at home by GLOBAL TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS imposed by the pandemic. One German-owned tanker refused to sail unless her fatigued crew was replaced by fit seafarers and the fear is that many others will follow after mid-June when emergency extensions to the labour agreements governing seafarers' contracts expire. Thousands of seafarers have worked several months beyond their contract and the situation is described as "a ticking time bomb" by the International Chamber of Shipping with seafarers refused entry or exit visas and the widespread suspension of commercial air travel Preventing their travel.

Very recently, Carnival announced its intention to sell six cruise ships to enable them to meet ongoing operating and administrative costs of around USD 250 million MONTHLY once all of its ships are in "paused status".

When asked when normal business might resume Carnival said this could not currently be predicted...but it "expects to resume guest operations, after collaboration with both Government and Health authorities, in a phased manner, with specific ships and brands returning to service over time" But, it has also said that the sector may never fully recover after being "centre stage" during the early weeks of the pandemic. Passengers on the "Diamond Princess" were confined to their cabins as early as February 2020 while the "Ruby Princess" was identified as a key importer of Covid-19 to Australia. They had to repatriate many passengers at a huge cost and now face lawsuits from others on virus-hit ships.

So ...what of the future ? BIMCO, the world's largest international shipping association wins few points by warning that 2020 " could become increasingly harsh for the Industry. We need to make sure that local ports and terminals are kept open, to make sure that food and goods are kept flowing to where they are needed- because that's where shipping hands a lifeline to the global public." There is one exception to all of this shipping gloom - the oil tanker section. Demand for tankers has been rising daily following the oil price fall. A spokesman said " There are ships that are being chartered now for USD 230,000 a day as floating offshore storage for when the oil prices recover."

Given the impact of Covid-19 on economic activity globally, energy demand in 2020 is likely to be substantially lower ...so it is possible that these tankers may be storing oil for a while to come.

With many predicting " a decade, at least, of difficulty" all are agreed that coronavirus will have a very profound impact on how global supply chains are organised. It is going to be a political topic in coming years.

CRK 6/20



## Forgotten navy

### **SORJ May-June 2020 Dockgate Column**

When exhorted to noisily celebrate the wonderful British National Health Service every Thursday evening, I preferred to quietly raise a glass to the forgotten navy represented by the thousands of seafarers whose ships carry the stuff we need, Covid-19 or not. I'm sure they wouldn't describe themselves as heroes, but people simply doing their jobs, but it would be nice if governments would recognise their dependency upon these seafarers in even a modest fashion.

In particular, it would be very useful and humane if they could be recognised as "essential workers", rather than treated as something of a nuisance when their ship rocks up to a port when they were overdue a crew change. I don't think that there is any real hostility to seafarers – it is just that despite the useful entreaties of the IMO, International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers' Federation, for this due recognition, governments always have more pressing problems to solve. And if they do think about seafarers, it is the umpteen thousand cruise ship crews that attract all the attention. The 25 folk from a Maersk containership who have worked two months extra or the 20 Philippine sailors off some old bulker just don't register with the port authorities and their plight doesn't escalate to the right decision makers.

Nevertheless, there are a few real heroes, like the master of the bulker *Tomini Destiny*, who refused to take his ship into the port of Chittagong before adequate measures to protect his crew were provided. You can imagine that the dilemma that faced this master being multiplied all around the ports of this virus struck world, with commercial interests being "weighed" against the welfare and safety of the ship's crew. Everyone is

getting exercised about whether the arriving ship is disease-free, but what facilities has the ship's crew to protect them against the contagion that the multiple boarders might bring with them, once the ship is anchored or alongside? You can just imagine the reaction of some fussy customs boarder or a port official if the chap on the gangway whips out a rectal thermometer.

Full marks to the Marshall Islands, flag state of the *Tomini Destiny*, for supporting the crew and sorting it out. It occurs to me that once this is all over, it might be worth having a closer look at the International Health Regulations 2005 and checking on their practical relevance to a world where you can find up to 7000 souls aboard some massive cruise ship turning up in your port. Hoping for the best, because pandemics come along but rarely, will probably not be good enough, when policies for quarantine arrangements in the future are being discussed.

Another sort of hero might be Captain Brett Crozier, commanding officer of the monstrous nuclear aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, relieved of his command by the Pentagon because he put the health of his virus-struck crew ahead of his career and the "proper channels". There will be no tears shed for the Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly, whose tasteless speech to the crew of the carrier demonstrated his utter unfitness for any executive role. You don't get to become captain of one of these giant warships by being "stupid or naïve", even though you might have collected some enemies along the road to this lofty command. It would be good to read that Admiral Brett Crozier has hoisted his flag somewhere, but one fears that President Trump's navy, like its Commander in Chief, doesn't do "sorry".

**Reproduced here with the kind permission of the editor of 'Ship and Offshore Repair Journal' and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

*Michael tells me, "the crack about the rectal thermometer is owed to Mrs Grey, who was once a nursing sister and probably wielded such objects like a Star Wars light sabre. It doesn't bear thinking about." - Ed*



## An invisible workforce

**Baird Maritime Workboat World, Grey Power, July 2020**

This is being written on the “International Day of the Seafarer”, June 25<sup>th</sup>, which, if you consider the way that society is currently treating this essential workforce, appears somewhat ironic.

Since Covid-19 raised its ugly head, and for at least the past four months, the maritime world has been screaming out for governments to recognise that seafarers who carry around the goods and fuel we all depend on represent a special case. They are human beings with rights and deserve to be treated in a more understanding fashion than seeing their case being dumped in the “too hard” basket on official desks. There is a lot of what might be described as “collateral damage” arising from this pandemic, and the plight of seafarers unable to leave or join their ships falls into this category in a spectacular fashion.

Many of those operating cruise ships, have been able to cobble together arrangements for crew reliefs, because of the sheer numbers of staff involved and where necessary, the ability to use the ships themselves to transport their huge crews home. Where charter flights have been a possibility, their numbers have made this a sensible alternative. But for the bulk of the world’s fleet, who operate less glamorous tonnage, it has remained a real struggle with bureaucracy and officialdom, with quarantine regulations being used as a padlock to keep ports shut for any crew relief. It might be suggested that it is the easiest thing in the world for an official to say “no” to any possibilities to exchange a few crew members from a ship engaged on its vital mission, than ever to say “yes”.

There are no airlines operating from the port, at least to where the crew need to travel. There are no hotels open where crew members could await their ship, or stay until a flight is available. The quarantine arrangements will be too inflexible to accommodate the needs of half a dozen seafarers who should have been sent home on leave three months earlier. There are, in some parts of the world, ridiculous conditions attached to crew exchange which are deliberately made impractical, even when a ship is healthy and has been many weeks on passage from her last port. It may be impolitic to suggest that much of this is the time-honoured bureaucratic solution of merely forcing a problem to go away- let some other port deal with the difficulties.

It is really no solution for flag states to merely permit contracts to be extended ad infinitum, hoping that eventually, the pandemic will die down and normal life can be resumed. Neither is it a viable solution for administrations and port state control to get all heavy handed and detain

ships, because the crew are out of their contracts. The operators need solutions as much as their employees, and if it all ends up in a maze of contradictory rules and regulations, with the ship being the “pig in the middle”, that isn’t helpful, either.

When all this is behind us, it would good if there is some sort of inquiry into the way that seafarers have been treated in this global emergency and it is unlikely that officialdom will come out of it well, in very many countries which depend upon the regular passage of ships with their imports and exports. It has not been easy, with airports closed and travel greatly restricted and the imposition of strict quarantine regulations. And while 900 crew due to be relieved on a cruise ship may require urgent solutions, half a dozen seafarers off a bulk carrier don’t register as “urgent”, no matter how grievous their plight. It is small wonder that seafarers’ websites and professional publications are increasingly giving voice to people who are getting desperate about ever getting home. It seems quite extraordinary that governments can quickly agree that people like international lorry drivers are a “special case” as regards quarantine rules, but the plight of international seafarers can be ignored.

In his celebrated book about the Battle of Atlantic, the historian and former seafarer Richard Woodman cited the often appalling treatment of survivors from torpedoed merchant ships, invariably far worse than those from the armed forces. To distinguish these non-uniformed seafarers from the rest of the population, they were issued with MN badges, which, when they had been treated particularly badly, they would turn upside down. The “NW”, they protested denoted “Not Wanted” and there is a bit of this attitude prevailing eighty years on.

In July, the British Government, along with industry partners, which include the International Chamber of Shipping, is to hold an international “summit” on the issue of crew changes, which might be thought important, if overdue. The ICS’ Guy Platten (another former seafarer) points out that this is not an initiative in which there will be demands for money – there just needs to be a willingness to cut through the red tape. It is an international problem that needs international solutions, to provide simple and sensible protocols that will facilitate the exchange of 200,000 crew members. They don’t want their contracts extended, those aboard ship want to get home and their reliefs need to be able to relieve them. Everyone is currently banging on in the industry about the mental health of seafarers . It is scarcely promoting their mental health to deny them the basic human right of going home on leave.

**Published with the kind permission of Baird Maritime and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**



# The Ship of State Under Pilotage.

The pilot of the ship of state is seen as Cummings, D:  
With Boris as the master, heading for catastrophe.  
In circumstances critical in terms of navigation,  
Essential is assessment of the present situation.

Surrounded as we are by reefs, reliant on pure skill  
And knowledge now, to get us through, more needed is than will.  
Integrity is vital in each absolute respect,  
To avoid the sad recital of the vessel badly wrecked .

*When in danger or in doubt, ease her, stop her, go about.  
These the pilot knows full well are guidelines of advice to tell.  
No choice to stop nor go about, yet clearly there remains much doubt.  
Ease her, therefore, has to be the sole availability.  
The summer fog today is dense, with concentration therefore tense.  
Radar is at hand to help, to see us through the rocks and kelp.  
The pilot understands, or not. God help us if he's lost the plot.*

“No regrets. Don't ask me why. I'm trying to see us through”,  
Says Cummings, “Do just as I say. Not as you see me do.  
I nothing care what you might think. I have my own agenda,  
As Boris prays upon his knees for help from his Defender.

Who might that be, you ask? Good question. Boris does not know,  
As onwards through the fog we travel. We have far to go.  
There are no rules applied to me. I do just as I like.  
And, if you do not like it you can go and ride your bike.

Unaccountable am I. And Boris dares not sack me.  
For, such is his incompetence, he knows he has to back me.  
How dare you question what I do? Your life is in my hands.  
And this is now a matter even Boris understands.

The ship of state is in my hands and you are now my crew.  
The day is coming when you'll learn exactly what to do,  
In pure obedience to me, no other and no law.  
And, when this comes to pass, you will have seen it all before.

Because, d'you see, I do not care. And power is all I seek,  
To drive to Durham, there and back. Whenever. Any week,  
As you have seen me do. I hold the rules in much disdain.  
In consequence you make the loss and I will make the gain.”

## SF Panther Stabilisers

In Cachalot 77 Les Morris wrote a follow up article to mine in Cachalot 76 on his time on the SF Panther when she was based in Southampton. At the end he discussed the lack of stabilisers and his recommendation that non-retractable ones within the block coefficient could be installed. He also mentions a story told some years later about the ship when she was the St Clair and losing a stabiliser for some reason in the past. He ends his article with the statement “I still do not know what stabilizers were fitted to the “Panther”, although I suspect I’m about to find out!” Well, I can’t let a challenge like that go, can I?

At the end of the Panther’s time in Southampton at the end of 1975, as I laid out in my article, the ship was destined for the Aberdeen – Lerwick route and before that she had a fifteen month charter on the Aarhus – Oslo run as the Terje Vigen. Both runs often had bad weather, with the charter route having a six hour unsheltered run north/south in the Skaggeiak with frequent beam swells. P&O therefore decided that in the refit before the charter in November/December 1975 the very stabilisers that Les writes about were fitted, so I assume he had made an impact! I believe they were Sperry though as Mate I personally didn’t care so long as they stopped the rolling!

I would not know if there had been any problems when the ship was St Clair. However, the story of the lost stabiliser was definitely in my time, with a bad start. As the ship was being moved out of the dry dock in Falmouth with the newly fitted stabilisers it hit the dock wall and knocked the starboard fin off. As the charter delivery date was looming it was decided to continue with only the port fin and fix the problem at a suitable time.

The single fin did indeed work quite well, stopping most of the roll and only noticeable in a beam swell that the motion was not smooth, but tended to jerk. In the latter part of May 1976 there was an accumulation of small problems that resulted in a short drydocking in the floating dock in Aarhus, so the opportunity was taken to refit the starboard stabiliser. From then on there was only a very smooth slight motion in the worst of weather.

So there you are, Les. You can chalk that up as a major success story for you!

Barry Peck

## Don't blame the weather

### **Seatrade-Maritime Opinion & Analysis June 2020**

It was once a simple, almost routine, matter. If you had suffered from heavy weather on passage, whether the ship or her cargo had been damaged, or even lost over the side, you would make the appropriate entries in the log book and on arrival at port, note protest with the notary public. You would do this even if you suspected there *might* be damage, thus warding off any subsequent problems. Heavy weather was not something you could be blamed for; in some trades there was a lot of it about, although in more recent, less trusting times, there will inevitably be some blighter disputing the facts you presented and demanding weather “hindcasts”, insinuating that it had not been anything like as wild as you had maintained.

That was then and this is now, and in the event that your cargo has been lost in extreme weather, the master of the ship may well end up in court facing all sorts of charges. This indeed was the fate of the master of the *APL England*, which a couple of weeks ago lost some 50 containers in a storm off the coast of New South Wales. A fair number of these ended up on the beach, and as with the current customs, all will have to be located and salvaged. A bond of no less than A\$22m has been demanded and one doesn't suppose there will be much change after the salvage has been completed. The Australian authorities have spent the best part of a year recovering the boxes lost in an earlier incident and probably have an idea of the costs involved. The owners of the ship will also face charges.



But once again there has to be professional concern that it is once again the master of a ship who ends up facing the music after such incidents. In this recent case, the authorities discovered, when the ship arrived in

Brisbane, that there were deficiencies in the lashing of the boxes and corrosion in the equipment, which would negate any protests about the extreme weather and the fearsome rolling that displaced the cargo. Case closed – there was somebody to blame and the wretched master was the person on the spot, facing everything from pollution to neglect of his duties.

Maybe you can understand the anger and frustration when coastal states have their shores despoiled in such a fashion, especially when it happens more than once and is thus surely foreseeable. There are beautiful beaches on the Dutch Wadden Sea that have containers washing up on them quite regularly. People who see container ships passing close to shore note the ludicrous height of their deck stacks and probably wonder how they are secured. And the truth is that they depend on much the same sort of lashing arrangements that they used on first generation ships half a century ago, when a two high stack was about all they could manage.

There may well be people who will suggest that the height of deck stacks is now quite ridiculous, even though well-equipped modern vessels may “rack” the first four or five boxes above deck level, before piling on another half dozen. And haven’t we forgotten the old English law term “reasonable” in what might be expected of the few people aboard a modern containership? Is it reasonable to prosecute a master because he hasn’t managed to inspect every single lashing lug for the onset of corrosion? The *APL England* was a modest size of vessel these days – but would the master of the 23,964 TEU *HMM Algeciras*, currently the world’s biggest box boat, have the same sort of obligations foisted on him? The answer is of course in the affirmative, but where is the fairness in that?

You might argue that the Australian prosecution might persuade ship operators that the present arrangements for inspection and lashing are archaic and that they cannot treat ship and cargo safety as a sort of percentage game. But fairness, and that wonderful word “reasonable” demands that we should no longer treat the the ship’s people as a convenient sacrifice, should the weather cut up rough on passage.

**Published with the kind permission of the editor of Seatrade-Maritime [www.seatrade-maritime.com](http://www.seatrade-maritime.com) and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

## Heavy lifts and a fruitless search

A short account from the diary of Gordon Thornton when he was Chief Officer of the B.I.S.N.Co heavy lift ship "Aska"



12th September 1971

We commenced our trip around the Japanese coast at Moji. Proceeding thence in order, Yokohama, Nagoya, Fukuyama, Kobe, Nagoya, Yokohama and finally Kudamatsu.

1st October 1971:

Writing now as a P&O officer, BI having ceased to exist after 115 years and become subsumed into P&O's General Cargo Division.



9th October 1971:

At Kudamatsu loaded the following heavy lifts. An 196 ton Depropanzen (top half); a 116 ton Depropanzen (bottom half) vessel; an 188 ton, 126 ft long pressure vessel. With the mobile crane loaded at Nagoya, we were full and down. 547 tons of deck cargo and 18,900 tons deadweight on a draught of 31ft 01". Freeboard 10 ft.



12th October 1971:

Sailed for Damman. 30 days around the Japanese coast.



16th October 1971: Taiwan Strait, 1200 noon:

SOS picked up by MARDEP Hong Kong that the engine room of 9VVY "Precious Pearl" was on fire.

We were 7 hours steaming from her given position, began preparing boarding nets, coils of line for the life rafts and nylon strops for the lifeboats, and cabin warm clothes etc for survivors, The weather was Force 7/8 N.E. with a heavy swell of 10 to 15 feet. The problem was now how to turn the ship in a search pattern with a heavy swell running and such a low freeboard and with a heavy lift projecting over the bulwarks.

The cargo lashings became subject to more than the usual vigilance!

1800; approaching the datum, watches doubled up. Commenced a square search from stated position with regard to wind and tide. MARDEP HK requested that we would be the co-ordinating ship, as three other ships, "Amelia", "Wanliu", and a Chinese Navy ship had answered the call.

The Chinese Navy ship then spent a lot of time signalling, however they were unreadable, so she got in a huff and went off on her own.

17th October:

0000; Weather improving, wind and swell decreasing making life a lot easier, proceeded down wind and swell to the SW of datum. The master of the "Wanliu" informed us that the "Precious Pearl" was a floating rust bucket when he last saw her in Kaohsiung, so perhaps we should be looking for Lifeboats/Debris.

0130: No flares, no nothing, various other ships were joining in and reported seeing nothing, they did not stay around for very long.

0600: Dawn, So far no trace, with "Wanliu" now on a parallel search 2 miles apart, SW then NE courses in a wedge from datum.

0730: Message from "American Astronaut" "Precious Pearl" found afloat smouldering amidships, crew all have lifejackets and are on the poop, one lifeboat missing and one damaged, and they were attending to her.

Only one small problem.... She was found 100 miles away due west of her given position, and the "American Astronaut" only happened upon her by chance.

0800: Said our goodbyes and thanks to "Wanliu" and resumed our course. Still, we received a nice message from MARDEP thanking us, and then later in the day telegrams from P&O/ BI Tokyo agents thanking us for our help, planning, and co-operation in taking the highest earnings out of Japan: £230,000 (£100 in 1971 is equivalent to £1425.00 today, so that's £3,277,500)

29th October: Arrived Dammam for discharge: Charted depth 30ft. but that is another story, but rather glad we had a stern anchor.

Gordon Thornton

## Rules in sight for underwater cleaning

**Baird Maritime   Workboat World   Grey Power   June 2020**

It is quite strange how the issue of biofouling rather crept up on the industry, with the surprise rejection from New Zealand waters of a ship, because of hull fouling, only a couple of years ago. It was a problem that had been identified as far back as the 1970s, when mysterious colonies of Japanese seaweed suddenly appeared on the shores of the Solent in the UK. At the time it was put down to the arrival of fast containerships from the Far East, which unlike their break-bulk predecessors were not being “cleaned” every time they arrived in the toxic waters of European enclosed docks, seaweed spores adhering to the hull free to fall off and breed.

But then a far worse problem emerged with the appearance of many alien species and pathogens which were being spread around the world, not primarily on hulls, but in ballast water. This has been a major issue that took the best part of forty years from its identification (arguably far too late) to international and mandatory control measures in the shape of ballast water management. If anyone thought about hull fouling, it was in terms of its effect on the ship’s performance, and fuel consumption, which became an all-consuming matter as fuel prices rose.

Coincidentally, there had been a continuing effort by owners to prolong the intervals between dry-docking – once a regular “wash and brush up” that would see anti-fouling renewed, to several years, which is a major saving in dry dock fees. The emergence of a busy industry sector capable of cleaning ship’s hulls while afloat has been a consequence of this demand, exacerbated, it has been suggested, by a shortage of very large docks for giant ships.



Initially, this underwater cleaning would be accomplished by divers “driving” large revolving brushes, the detritus merely falling into the sea. This itself was soon regarded as a form of pollution and bio-fouling in its own right, leading to local prohibitions. This, in turn, has given rise to better hull cleaning equipment, often remotely controlled and with measures to recover everything cleaned off the hull, from organisms to coatings which may carry contaminants. There have been a limited number of locations where this process was permitted, for obvious reasons.

Even with this more sophisticated equipment, ports and coastal states have needed convincing that any cleaning was being done to a high and approved standard, properly certificated and that inspections would not reveal anything living in rudder trunks, intakes or any other underwater parts of the ship that were hard to access. The New Zealand intervention, refusing contaminated ships access to their ports with their pristine waters, was soon followed by Australia and elsewhere. Moreover, in the absence of any agreed standards for in-water hull cleaning, the NZ authorities made it very clear that such a process would not be permitted in their waters and that ships must be cleaned elsewhere. Faced with this problem, the shipping industry needed to react. And while there were unsympathetic noises suggesting that the solution lay in more regular dry-docking and better anti-fouling coatings, the real problem was the lack of any globally approved standard for in-water hull cleaning .

All of which is the background to an announcement by the major shipping organisation BIMCO that the process of completing a global set of guidelines for in-water hull cleaning is well under way and which, when in place, will hopefully increase confidence in this important and very necessary requirement. The ultimate aim is to develop a standard that is acknowledged by the International Maritime Organisation following a process that has engaged industry experts, governments, scientists and port authorities, along with shipowners, coating manufacturers and hull cleaning companies.

According to BIMCO’s head of marine environment Aron Sorensen, who has led a working group producing the first draft of the standard, the next steps will see practical tests of the standard undertaken with a hull cleaning company and a ship owner, scheduled to take place this year. An approval standard, it is suggested, will address minimum requirements for approving



in-water cleaners , based on testing by verified laboratories and certificates issued by internationally recognised classification societies. In the absence of such a standard, coastal authorities, ports and environmental agencies have no common basis to assess the quality of the cleaning that might have been done on a vessel entering their waters, or to grant permission to a cleaning company to operate. BIMCO also suggests that such a standard will reduce the risk to divers cleaning ships' hulls. It will also address those "harder to get at" areas of a ship's hull, such as bow thrusters, niches and propeller shafts.

This is an important matter, both from the need for greater bio-security right across the maritime world and to prevent a patchwork of different standards emerging as different countries develop their rules on biofouling. There are already strict rules developed in New Zealand, Australia, some Pacific nations and territories and California, and it might be expected that the need for bio-certificates on arrival will be demanded in many more places around the world. And for the shipping industry itself, it is important that hulls are kept clean to maintain efficiency, with in-water cleaning that is itself environmentally sustainable.

**Published with the kind permission of Baird Maritime and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

*[rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk](mailto:rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk)*



## [Approaching Calshot](#)



The marinas are open again. The new normal seems pretty much like the old normal- yachts and power boats everywhere. A lot of them blissfully unaware of the Collision Regulations

Bill Hargreaves

## The Beira Patrol (2)

### **Staff Captain Ken Edwards**

I was interested to read Reg. Kelso's report on the Beira Patrol. It was a reminder of some interesting things that happened with regards to me during the time I spent with the RFA in that area.

I was just completing almost two years as a Second Officer on RFA Fort Class Ammunition ships in the Far East on station in Singapore, but I was flown home because of my father's ill health in July 1965. After a few weeks at home I was asked if I would relieve a Second Officer who had just received some sad news of his father. Of course I could not turn the appointment down, although I had quite a lot of leave due. I was told it would be a one trip from Lock Striven to Trinidad and back to Portsmouth. I would not require much in the way of gear. The train trip from Southampton to Glasgow, then on to Greenock and by ferry to Dunoon over the mountain to Lock Striven by truck was far from enjoyable. I joined the ship at 1900 which sailed on my arrival. I was up again at 2330 for the midnight to 0400 watch.

The ship was RFA "Pearleaf" a 26,000 ton tanker owned by Jacobs of London and was taken over by the RFA on a 20year bareboat charter. She was equipped with over the stern refuelling facility, although in later years was fitted out for beam replenishment by derrick.



[RFA Pearleaf before the beam replenishment derricks were fitted](#)

After loading a full cargo of FFO in Trinidad we set our course for home (Portsmouth)! I was on the midnight to 0400 watch and had just picked up the Lizard Light when "Sparks" came into the bridge and said we have to proceed to Gibraltar immediately, orders will follow. We passed Gibraltar and were told to proceed to Aden and adjust our cargo as we were to support the carrier group off Beira. We had to adjust cargo as HMS Eagle was running low on avcat (aircraft fuel). We met up with the

carrier group in the southern Indian Ocean and did a pump over into one of the RFA issuing tankers taking about 12 hours steaming at 10 knots. Our job was to load in the Gulf and then back to top up the other issuing tankers. This we did several times until on one occasion once we had discharged our cargo we were to proceed into Beira to offload fuel from a tanker that had managed to get through the blockade. I think the tanker was “Joanna V” which sailed in on top of the Spring Tide. The authorities agreed not to discharge the ship but there was then not enough water to get her out! So we were told to part discharge her so she could sail. That was not the end of it, as on our approach to Beira we developed a problem with our steering and could only use 10 to 15 degrees of helm! So we managed to get back to sea, now we had to load from an issuing tanker then proceed to Singapore to discharge and possible dry dock. The issuing tanker then had to load from another tanker doing the same freight trips as ourselves. Half way to Singapore we were diverted to refuel the Royal Yacht 20 miles off Cape Leeuwin (Australia) through our stern hose. When the Admiral in Command of the Royal Yacht found out that we had steering problems he wasn't very impressed!

On our way now to Singapore and waiting for us at the top of the Malacca Strait was an Admiralty tug waiting to escort us for the rest of our passage. We discharged our cargo and our steering problems were investigated but no dry dock was available for some time. It was decided to sail back to UK with the known problem. On our way back to the UK we were told to load in the Gulf and call in at Little Aden to adjust cargo. While In Little Aden there was a dispute in the cargo figures so I was sent ashore to dip the tank with the refinery manager, this was no joke as while I was on top of the tank the tank the next to the one I was on blew up and caught fire! I am still here to tell the story but as I was being driven back to the ship I noticed them letting go! They thought I had had it. Our cargo figures were right after all!

Then we were on our way again through Suez, then on to Iraklion (Crete) to discharge into NATO storage tanks so that we could tank clean on our way home (Falmouth) arriving August 1966. Just a short trip!

My next trip to the Beira area was on RFA “Stromness” a new air store ship for supporting carriers in the Far East but of course the carriers were in the Beira area so our job was to keep them topped up with stores loading in

Mombasa then south to top up the fleet before going on to Durban load to load stores for the fleet then on to Mombasa. It was quite a nice run as we had about 3 or 4 days in port each time. One time we had to go to a port in Madagascar called Majuhga to drop off mail canisters which were used to do mail drops by the RAF to the ships off Beira. There were no proper charts for that area and the only way to find the entrance channel was by star sights! It was overcast the day we were supposed to arrive so we had to steam around for a day. When we did get in we were told to get out quickly as there were reports of Plague!



RFA Stromness

Next we were sent to Singapore to load stacks of beer for the fleet as Christmas was only a month away and the fleet was getting dry. We must have taken all the beer there was in NAFI Singapore which was stowed by the stores people in the lower holds. Would you believe it that when we met up with the fleet again and issued all the stores and spares, after 4 hours on completing the replenishment we had a signal "Where is our beer!" I think the carrier was on her way to the Seychelles and we were off to Cape Town so too far apart to do anything. After a few days in the Cape we stored up for the other ships in the Beira area and then went on to Gan (Maldives) transferred all the beer into our sister ship before proceeding to Hong Kong for Christmas (We had a Chinese crew) After 11 months on that ship I flew home to join another new Ness Class ship "Lyness" as Chief Officer.

You can now see how the 100 million pounds was spent!

My next trip was on "Lyness" to South America, on a sales mission to sell military equipment to Argentina!

Ken Edwards

# In command of an Antarctic supply ship

## **Captain Stuart J Lawrence MBE RD RNR**

It was in November 1974 that I took over command of the RRS Bransfield, the British Antarctic Survey's (BAS) ice-strengthened logistics vessel supporting the 5 scientific research stations that BAS operated in the British Antarctic Territory. The RRS Bransfield, 4816 grt, 1577 nrt, launched in Leith in 1970, of Lloyds 100 A1, Ice class 1, 325 ft in length, 60 ft in beam, 22 ft draught, service speed 13.5 knots. Diesel electric propulsion with a controllable pitch propeller. The bow plating was 32mm and side plating 28mm.

After rudder problems whilst crossing the North Atlantic resulting in our having to dry-dock in Baltimore that we did not depart the BAS Grytviken research station on South Georgia 54S 37W bound towards the BAS Halley



research station on the Brunt Ice Shelf 75 30S 26 40W, until the beginning of February, 2 months later than the ideal date for departure. Despite the fact that we had, thanks to the Americans, an approximation of the pack ice edge and vague details of the ice cover of the Weddell Sea, we were still to follow, at least as far as Halley a similar route to that taken by Ernest Shackleton 60 years earlier.

We knew that by applying the "Golden Rule" to avoid having to work pack ice when one could sail round it, It made sense for us to follow the northern ice edge eastwards to a longitude which gave us the shortest passage through the pack ice before arriving at the Continent made sense, so we followed the pack ice edge eastwards as far as Southern Thule, the southernmost island of the South Sandwich Islands, this still gave us at least 600 n.miles of pack ice to navigate. Needless to say we arrived in our planned position 60S 20W to head south in darkness in the "normal" storm force winds, such that the ice floes on the edge were being picked up and tossed around like leaves. So with all three searchlights blazing and one radar on short range in an attempt to assess the pack ice coverage and the

leads therein the other radar on a longer range to pick up the positions of all icebergs, I made my slow speed entry into the maelstrom, heart in mouth and a short prayer to Poseidon.

I should point out, at this stage, that we were carrying all the materiel for a rebuild of the station, plus a 64 strong building team and my 36 strong crew, so not only was I under pressure to make up the time lost, if possible, I knew that I had approximately 900 miles of pack ice to work, and given the normal 8 octas of cloud cover, my only method navigation since leaving Southern Thule was to plot a significant iceberg ahead on our intended route with the hope that there would be another one beyond that and so on, such that I was at least able to have a vague idea of our position. The only other alternative was from the record of headings and times on each heading to at least attempt to work out a DR, but given the frequent variations in heading and speed this would be singularly inaccurate.

Fortunately as we progressed, slowly, further and further south, we began to get 24 hours daylight and whilst the pack ice conditions did not improve until we were about 72S, where one meets a shore lead created by the cold air, winds, flowing off the continent. From that point to Halley was about another two days steaming. Now as we only had a very approximate idea of our position and one section of ice cliff looks much the same as the next, it was only thanks to the commonsense of the scientists at Halley, who had built a colossal "H" out of 45 gallon drums on the most prominent headland in their vicinity, that we were able to establish that we had arrived at the correct position, such that all that was left to do was to create an "ice port", secure alongside, and commence discharge with International Harvester bulldozers and sledges up an ice ramp from tjhe sea ice to the Station, approximately 10km from the ice cliff edge.

A very respectable 9 day passage. Subsequently I completed 30 of these passages and despite the advent of GPS, satellite photograph receivers and drones, on the worst occasion it took me 30 days, we have been keeled over by 20 degrees, and the stern has been lifted so far out of the water to make the propeller useless, hence it should be no wonder that my hair and beard are white!!



# Planet Earth 2004 - 5

## **Captain Robin Plumley MBE Polar Medal**

### ***R.R.S. Discovery***

Across the New Year from early November 2004 into mid-January 2005, I was Master of *Discovery* working two scientific cruises in the Southern Ocean from Cape Town, finishing in Durban with a mid-call stop at Port Elizabeth in mid-December.



A group of 28 scientists from the Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC), now National Oceanography Centre (NOC), were studying the annual bloom which occurs around the Crozet Islands, in an experiment named CROZEX. This involved determining the ocean circulation; measuring iron and radium, among other trace chemicals; and sampling for phytoplankton, all of which are considered to be prime developers in the bloom process.

During our first cruise we completed an underway transect about 1.5Nm off the east point of Ile de la Possession adjacent to the base, and large surface measurements of radium were noted.

Radium isotope ratios can indicate when the water was last in contact with sediment. One theory is that there could be a considerable run off of radium and other chemicals from the slopes leading down towards the Baie Americaine area. A request to gather additional water and sediment samples, remotely and from a beach, quickly followed from the Principal Scientist. An outline proposal and request for permission were sent to the diplomatic co-ordinator in La Reunion. Within a few days a positive reply was received followed by a declaration from Le Chef de district Crozet. A Hazard Evaluation and Risk Assessment were compiled utilising existing elements from the company documented management system and a Safe System of Work developed. This took into account arrangements for preparing and launching the semi-rigid workboat, delegation of crew and scientists, boarding procedure, the sampling process (in the waters close to the beach and on the beach) and making the beach

landing. The reverse processes were also covered. An additional assessment included what sort of wildlife may be encountered. This was obtained from the French Chef de district who advised many penguins on eggs and elephant and fur seals were to be expected. He also offered a field party to be available in the beach area to provide assistance. To help smooth the process further, one of the scientists assigned to take part in the landing was French, although undertaking her studies at SOC.

Three quarters of a century ago, on Saturday 19 October 1929, *Discovery I* had left Cape Town as part of the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Expedition (BANARE), course being set for Crozet Islands. On 2 November, the *Discovery I* anchored in Baie Americaine, Possession Island, only to find a sealer, *SS Kilfinora*, anchored closer inshore. A motorboat and dinghy were used to land the scientists who found themselves witness to the slaughter of large numbers of Elephant Seals. The scientists stayed for two days in which time they managed to catch and catalogue numerous other specimens. Further, opportunity was taken to correct the chart which was wrong. *Discovery I* was blown out of the bay and away to the east by a summer gale lasting some sixty hours.

Leaving Cape Town on Wednesday 3 November 2004, *Discovery III* arrived off Baie Americaine on Wednesday 22 December 2004, to a NW gale, precluding any intention of making a landing. Our benefit was to have a vessel capable of holding station, even in adverse conditions. A weather map indicated a front passing within a few hours and conditions were such that it was clear the passage of the front was happening as we approached the bay. The wind was blowing from the WNW at 45-50kts and heavy cloud poured down from the mountains on the island. The French party ashore confirmed that little or no swell was present at the beach but the vessel was unable to find a lee safe enough to launch our semi-rigid boat. Although the barograph was reasonably steady, indications were that the wind would increase further. As we held position a mile off the headland of Morne Rouge, a striking red volcanic outcrop, we could see great areas of kelp amidst numerous breaking reefs protecting the inner bay. A narrow entrance just south of Cap de l'Antares and a large waterfall, appeared to give access into the beach. However, on this occasion the intended landing was cancelled!



View from Baie Americaine into Moby Dick River. Morne Rouge lies to the left and Cap de l'Antares to the right

*A fuller account of the expedition, with many pictures, can be found on our website, in the members only section, under The Cachalot, or [click here](#)*



## No fuel like an old fuel

### **SORJ May-June 2020 Dockgate Column**

If I was thinking about renewing my fleet (instead of sitting “locked down” in my garden idly wondering whether to buy a few cheap enormous cruise ships, or a couple of hardly used Airbus A380s), how on earth am I going to propel any vessel I might get around to ordering? Assuming a shipyard can be found that can build me some tankers or bulk carriers in the next year or two, these ships are going to be around for the next quarter century, and this question really needs to be answered before we sign the contract.

There are a growing number of people, not all of them the nose-ringed middle-class “activists” – I nearly wrote “terrorists”- of Extinction Rebellion, who suggest that hydrocarbon fuel is really operating on borrowed time. If I opt for conventionally fuelled big diesels which operate to the economic criteria and horsepower that is needed for large, ocean going ships, are they going to retain any value, ten years into their lives? All ships represent deteriorating assets, but might such an investment today amount to a reckless waste of my shareholders’ cash. And with the banks increasingly seized with a sort of green “wokeness” where they are more interested in your environmental credentials, than the returns you need to pay the blighters back, it could be increasingly hard to finance conventionally powered tonnage.

There is no shortage of advice about the “fuel of the future”, although with the exception of LNG, which is allegedly only a “bridging solution” to the sulphur problem and really leaves the carbon conundrum un-addressed, most remain very much in in the realms of the future, rather than the present. There are experiments being undertaken with ammonia, on a small scale, although these look promising. There are various small craft operating with hydrogen fuel cells; the same fuel is being used in some buses in London and other progressive cities. Just a matter of scaling up, you might suggest. Except that another desktop study concluded that if you wanted to power a big bulk carrier with this splendidly clean fuel, on a ten thousand mile voyage, the payload would be so small that you could load it in wheelbarrows.

Waste vegetable oil is regarded by some as a useful fuel that will answer the dual problems of harmful emissions and what you do with the inedible

products of several million deep fat fryers. There are a few brave suppliers already offering various blends of bio-fuels that are said to have excellent calorific value and don't smell like burned cod. But could you eat enough fried food to fuel the big diesels of whole fleets of ocean-going ships? These are, once again, early days and small scale business that only a brave owner would put his shirt on to fuel a future fleet. Maybe somebody will achieve a spectacular breakthrough, although one wouldn't suggest that it would be soon, and the years are ticking away to the zero-carbon deadline. It is suggested that both the industry and government will need to put their collective shoulders to the research wheel, but we are still just talking about these matters.

On the subject of waste, it was not many years ago that I corresponded with an Italian engineer who had devised a design to burn solid waste in a large containership, once again answering the problem of "fuel poverty" with the need to dispose of waste that might otherwise end up in a landfill. This was no eccentric inventor, but a bone fide professional mechanical engineer who made his living building waste-fuelled shore power stations and felt that there were ideas that could be "marinised". It was an elegant notion, with the waste, sorted to exclude stuff, like old fridges, that could not be burned, containerised and with a system that would automatically empty the fuel containers (not the cargo) into the furnaces. It was, in fact a marine version of what was being done in progressive power plants all around the world. Filtration systems, exactly like those cleaning up emissions ashore, would ensure that what came out of the ship's exhausts was environmentally acceptable.

There was mild interest and some sporadic correspondence, after the ideas were given an airing in the BIMCO Bulletin, but the real problem was that the power plant provided for a steam turbine, which was obviously a technical step too far backwards. Forty or fifty years ago it might have flown – after all the Australians were actually building modern coal-fired tonnage. There was also at that time a fanatical interest in cramming as many boxes as possible onto a ship, and if a lot of them were to be carrying the fuel for the voyage, it was rather defeating the object.

But it was a nice idea, to have machinery on board a ship that could burn pretty well anything. It reminded me of stories of the very first steamships, which were always having trouble in adverse weather, the crew having to

hurl the furniture, derricks, hatchboards, cargo, teak decking etc, into the furnace to keep up the steam pressure.

So the sad fact, after you have taken the trouble to plough through these musings, is that there are still no answers to the future fuel conundrum. Perhaps you should just hedge your bets, opt not for duel fuel but “multi-fuel” machinery, assisted by photo-voltaic cells, telescopic sails, a couple of kites and as many Flettner rotors as you can cram onto the foredeck.

**Reproduced here with the kind permission of the editor of ‘Ship and Offshore Repair Journal’ and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**



**The CACHALOTS**

**The Southampton Master Mariners' Club**

**1st Floor, Southampton Royal British Legion Club, Eastgate Street  
SOUTHAMPTON, SO14 3HB**

Tel: 023 8022 6155

Web site: [www.cachalots.org.uk](http://www.cachalots.org.uk)

E-mail: [office@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:office@cachalots.org.uk)

[captain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:captain@cachalots.org.uk) [staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk)  
[boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk) [storekeeper@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:storekeeper@cachalots.org.uk)  
[postcaptain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:postcaptain@cachalots.org.uk)  
[functions@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:functions@cachalots.org.uk)  
[membership@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:membership@cachalots.org.uk)  
[editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk)

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.

**250 Club**

The 250 Club is another casualty of the coronavirus lockdown. Although we could have used an online random number generator to produce some numbers, the draw has always taken place in public so as to be seen to be above board. It has been decided to resume the draws when we regain access to the Club room, when draws for each of the missing months, from March onwards, will be held.