



# SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.16 September 2000.

## Shipmates Special Issue.

This issue of **Shipmates** commemorates four years of circulation during which time membership has grown considerably. To mark this milestone I am making this issue No. 16 a special issue with a 16 page newsletter. In the first year in the **Shipmates** No. 3 issue there was a story about the seamen in the port lifeboat of the **M.V."Bradford City"** (3) after the vessel was sunk off the south west coast of Africa by the German U Boat U-68. Captain 'Willie' Cross was an apprentice on the **M.V."Bradford City"** and he was in the port lifeboat. He kept a diary of the day to day events from the time the ship sank, and the time spent in the lifeboat, until they arrived at Cape Town. Captain Cross's widow Alice kept this diary and when **Shipmates** came into circulation she sent the diary to our member Captain Bryan Boyer who kindly typed the story for us.

In February this year "**SeaBreezes**" published in their magazine Vol. 74 No. 65 a story entitled " **A Voyage To Remember on the M.V."Bradford City" 1941**" written by Mr. Blackwell from Scotland and submitted by Mrs. Mair Williams of Anglesey. Mr. Blackwell was a crew member on the **M.V."Bradford City"**(3), he was in the starboard lifeboat after the ship sank and his story is about his experiences of events until he arrived in the U.K.

Captain A.C. Douglas the Editor of "**SeaBreezes**" has kindly given me permission to use this article in **Shipmates**. I thank Captain Douglas and Mrs. Mair Williams for allowing us to use Mr. Blackwell's story.

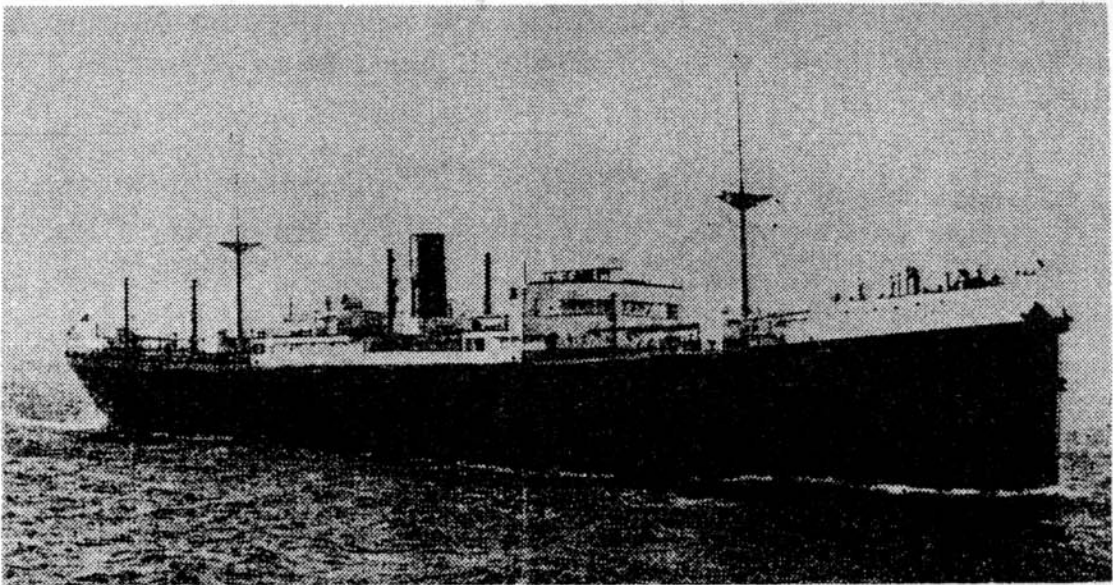
When our article was published in the No. 3 issue our membership was only about 100, at present there is 180 members so many members have never had the chance to read Captain 'Willie' Cross's story. I am combining the two articles together to give the full story of what happened in the two lifeboats after the **M.V."Bradford City"**(3) sank, giving details of the tough, hard time these brave men had fighting for their survival.

*A.F. Osborne, Editor*

The M.V. "BRADFORD CITY"(3) was one of a series of cargo liners built at Furness Shipbuilding Company, the first was the M.V."Devon City"(2) 1933, M.V."Houston City"(1) 1934, then the M.V."Bradford City"(3), 1936, M.V."Dallas City"(1) 1936 and the M.V."Cornish City"(3) 1937. Their overall length was 440 feet, beam 56 feet 3 inches and the depth 25 feet 4 inches. They were modern and fast ships for that day and age, and on sea trials the Devon City did an average speed of 13.5 knots. Fuel oil or ballast could be carried in the Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5 double bottom tanks also in the deep tank giving a total fuel oil carrying capacity of 1,905 tons (not allowed to use oil or ballast tanks these days because of pollution regulations). These vessels had a cruiser stern with a specially designed rudder. They had 5 holds and the No. 2 hold was insulated with cooling pipework installed, this hold was used to carry refrigerated cargo i.e. fruit from the west coast of the U.S.A..

The ships were fitted with a 4 cylinder Doxford engine with Doxford's new method of manufacture, where the bedplate and engine frames were constructed by electric welding whereas before these were made with castings. This new method of manufacture reduced the length of a four cylinder engine by seven feet and reduced the engine weight by 50 tons.

The engine cylinder bore was 600 m.m diameter and the engine could produce 2,900 brake horsepower at 92 R.P.M. There were two D.C. electric dynamos which were driven by two Mirrless 2 cylinder diesel engines with each dynamo producing 129 H.P. running at 300 R.P.M. There was also a 35 KW dynamo driven by a single cylinder steam engine. When the vessel was at sea all the steam was supplied by a Cochran exhaust gas boiler giving sufficient steam to drive the 35KW dynamo which supplied all the vessel's electricity requirements and the diesel generators could be shut down. The No. 2 refrigerated hold was kept cold by a coolant cooled by a CO<sup>2</sup> compressor in the engine room. There were two CO<sup>2</sup> compressors of 42.5 B.H.P., one running and one spare. If a refrigerated cargo was carried one diesel dynamo had to be used with the steam generator. Another modern piece of equipment was the electric steering gear, Donkin-Scott manufacture of the Ward Leonard system, these were very efficient compared to the steam driven steering gears. The electric steering gear ran very quietly when in operation and much more economical than steam steering gears.



Captain Cross's give some names of the seamen who were in the port lifeboat and his diary continues:-

Mr. Loutitt	Chief Mate in charge	Name not listed	Third Mate.
J.Bently	Radio Officer	J. Nash	Second Engineer.
Name not listed	Fourth Engineer	T.Halliday	Electrician.
Willy Cross	Apprentice	J. Scott	Apprentice
P.O'Neil	Ordinary Seaman	'Paddy'Flynn	Apprentice
Names not listed:-	a Cabin boy	a Steward	a Donkyman

**M.V. "BRADFORD CITY"****4,953 Gross Tons****Built 1936 by Furness Shipbuilding Ltd**

**Saturday 1st November 1941** Torpedoed at 0530 hrs. in position Latitude 22° 59'S., Longitude 9° 49'E in the South Atlantic Ocean, about 350 nautical miles west of Walvis Bay. The torpedo struck amidships, on the port side beneath the bridge. Apprentice William Cross, (later Captain Bill Cross), was in the lifeboat launched on the port side. The boat, once in the water, faced great difficulty getting away from the ship's side, owing to a strong swell running on the port (weather) side, and the lifeboat was being sucked into the large hole in the ship's shell plating, made by the exploding torpedo.

A boat painter, (line), was thrown up onto the deck, where the Master, Captain Paul, was supervising the launching of the starboard lifeboat. Captain Paul led the line forward along the well deck and made it fast on the fo'c'sle head. The boat crew hauled the boat forward until they were clear of the damaged hull. They made away at last, shipping a lot of sea water. They had to throw 2 cases of oranges overboard, as the lifeboat was so low in the water.

The "Bradford City" was now on fire and sinking by the head. The port lifeboat, commanded by Chief Officer, Mr Loutitt, joined the starboard lifeboat commanded by Captain Paul which had remained alongside the ship, in better sea conditions under the lee of the ship's side, on the starboard side. Finally, the "Bradford City" sank, going down with her whistle blowing, in about 2600 fathoms depth of water, 25 minutes after being torpedoed.

A submarine was then seen surfacing about 2 nautical miles distant. It closed the two lifeboats and the survivors could see the "Ace of Clubs" painted on the conning tower. The submarine was U-68. The Germans manning the conning tower asked a number of questions of the survivors including a demand that they identify the captain. No acknowledgement was given by the two boats and Captain Paul was not identified to the U-boat.

The narrative continues in Apprentice Cross' own words.

"The submarine moved off and then submerged. Our position about 350 nautical miles from the S.W. African coast, sails set, course easterly. Stores on board: 3 casks of water, corned beef, biscuits and milk. Both boats agreed to keep together and steer for the African coast. Heavy weather blows up, and shipping water as night falls. We are very sick and cold. Night very bad, shipping much water, all soaked to the skin. Lost sight of other boat during night and never saw it again.

**Sunday 2nd November 1941 - 2nd Day** Very rough sea conditions. Decided to heave to and remained so all day, hove to on our sea anchor, wind from south west. Rations: 2 biscuits, half a dipper of water per man, twice a day.

**Monday 3rd November 1941 - 3rd Day** Under way again. No sign of other boat or land. Everybody cheerful, except boatswain who is very ill and can hardly move. Sores breaking out on his legs from sea water. Me and Paddy Neil, apprentice, on 12-4 watch. No sleep for anyone, too uncomfortable. Continuous bailing and keeping lookout. Boat taking spray on board.

**Tuesday 4th November 1941 - 4th Day** Underway and proceeding. Holding course. Boatswain very bad, calling out for water all the time. We can do no more for him - we have no more medical supplies. Fair conditions, continuous bailing. Everybody wet from spray. Tried to catch seabird and finally accomplished it. Later, sun warm. We take watches at bailing, and also Mate Loutitt, 3rd Mate, and Paddy Flynn at steering. Mate and 3rd Mate and self caulked up leakages today. Still a lot of water in boat, wind still blowing from south west, our course east north east, making much leeway. Rations now 2 biscuits each per day with half dipper of water twice a day.

**Wednesday 5th November 1941 - 5th Day** We sighted land at dawn this morning. Paddy Flynn saw it first, still anything up to 20 nautical miles away. Becalmed this morning - taking turns at rowing - tried to light some paper in a tin to make a smoke signal - no success. Lots of seals around. Bosun still ill. Closed land in the afternoon. About 1600 hrs, we were near enough to see the bareness of the beach. We were all agreed to attempt a landing notwithstanding; made three attempts at landing, all unsuccessful due to many submerged rocks and heavy surf. Hove to for the night, very loud surf, weather not too bad. Cold during night.

**Thursday 6th November 1941 - 6th Day** Lit flares during night. Nothing or no one about. Made an attempt to land at first light at dawn. Unsuccessful due to very rocky coast line. After breakfast, saw short piece of beach, sand, about 100 yards wide clear of rocks. Boat steered for it, Mate manoeuvred the boat nicely through heavy surf breakers, eased in stern first - as soon as we were through the breakers, I jumped overside first to steady bow, but was thrown over by surf and tossed up on the beach and cut about on sharp stones. Other crew members brought line ashore and we pulled her up on the beach as far as possible, without a drop of water getting into her. We quickly stripped the boat of all gear and built a camp with stores and gear from the boat. We constructed a water condenser out of old cans, as our water supply were running low. The electrician and Joe Betley, Radio Officer volunteered to walk to Walvis Bay, about 200 miles south, to bring help. In the afternoon about 1600 hrs an aeroplane came over, but probably mistook us for a fishing party. The two men cancelled their walk. In the hope of other planes coming over, we lit a big fire, watches were kept. I was on 12-4. Very cold - made tea.

**Friday 7th November 1941 - 7th Day** We wrote S.O.S. in the sand in large letters (6ft high). Very windy on beach, many seals on rocks, but no other living thing. At about 1000 hrs South African Air Force Plane dropped emergency rations and a note saying "be back later". Chocolate bars and cigarettes in the ration. Our water condenser is turning out about a bucket of water a day. The dry tea in the rations came in very hand for our tea. The plane returned dropping plenty of stores from low altitude, including fresh water. Dropped message, gave us our position and asked if we knew whereabouts of the Captain's boat. Message ended "Love and kisses. S.A.A.F."

**Saturday 8th November 1941 - 8th Day** During night two South African Navy minesweepers arrived off the beach. They saw our beacon and anchored off. Two small boats from the minesweepers attempted to come ashore, but the surf was too heavy. They sent a floating line ashore from a raft in an effort to salvage lifeboat but unsuccessful, as the line broke and they gave up the attempt. Later four soldiers arrived, having walked seven miles, the nearest they could bring their lorries. Made a final meal, then packed up all our clothes and gear. One party led by 3rd Mate and 4th Engineer set out early in the day to reach lorries.

We rigged up a stretcher out of sail and oars for the bosun. We set out at 2.00 pm for the lorries, carrying the bosun, luggage and stores etc. in turns. Heavy going over soft sand. We carried him 7 miles and then waited for the small lorries to return for us.

We set out at dusk in a small lorry, with about half of our second party with the bosun. The truck took us 40 miles to a dried up river bed. There, we got out of the lorries and walked a further 4 miles carrying bosun to an ambulance and then 2 more miles in the dark to the camp where the heavy lorry was waiting. There was hot coffee waiting for us. We slept out on the desert.

**Sunday 9th November 1941 - 9th Day** We got up early to make an early start. First, dig out lorry, stuck in sand. All together now in one big lorry. Bosun gone in ambulance. Stopped at Cape Cross. One man living here, sealing. Went down to Seal station, saw thousands of seals on rocks. A further 200 miles to Swakopmund. Had a good meal, then onto Walvis Bay that night, where we slept. Next day by lorry over 200 miles to Luderitz where a train took us to Cape Town".

Captain Cross (Bill Cross)'s narrative/diary ended here.

Bill Cross' diary is accompanied by 13 photographs which were taken by one of the South African soldiers in the rescue party, and given to him after the party arrived at Cape Town. From Captain Cross' narrative, it is estimated his lifeboat landed on the Skeleton Coast about 20 miles south of Torra Bay in position Latitude 20°20' south, Longitude 12°54' East.

The "Bradford City" was torpedoed and sank in Latitude 22°59'3", Longitude 9°49'E., so the boat with Bill Cross in it sailed about 310 nautical miles, making good a north easterly course. The prevailing north going Benguela current and south west winds will have driven the boat well north of its intended easterly track.

When the survivors were picked up by the South African Army, the dried up river bed was probably the Ugab River. On their journey south, they stopped at Cape Cross of which Bill always made a joke, that the Cape was named after him.

The Bosun survived and the other lifeboat with Captain Paul the "Bradford City's" Master and 23 other officers and crew also made a safe landing on the Skeleton Coast, the lonely coast bordering the arid Namib Desert, in what was South West Africa, but is now known as Namibia.

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Captain Willy Cross joined the Reardon Smith Line in November 1939 as an Apprentice, his first ship was the M.V. "Bradford City" (3). He served on the vessel for twenty three months, until she was sunk by U boat U-68. Captain Cross was promoted to Master in May 1967, his first command was the **M.V. "New Westminster City" (3)** and he gave the Company forty years of faithful service. Captain Cross crossed the bar on the 25th November 1979.

Captain Cross's wife, Alice, crossed the bar on the 5th November 1997 at the age of 87. Alice was a member of Shipmates.

This is the story given by Mr. Blackwell of what happened to the starboard lifeboat of the "Bradford City" (No.3) after the vessel was sunk and his experiences until he reached the U.K.

Quote:- On February 26 1941 we left the shores of old Blighty, as it was affectionately called, and headed out to sea, not knowing as usual where our destination was, but once the sealed orders were opened by the captain all was revealed - Freetown for stores, water, etc. As was the case in the early part of the war, we travelled in convoy for a couple of hundred miles or so, got a 'Bon Voyage' from the escort commander, the convoy dispersed and we all headed for our various ports of call. 'Full speed ahead'. We were lucky if we managed 12 knots.

A zig - zag course was given by the powers to be, hoping, no doubt, to deceive the enemy submarines that might be in the vicinity.

That in itself prolonged the journey to our destination.

So we settled down to the long haul to Freetown through the notorious Bay of Biscay and onwards.

Day turned to night, night turned to day. When ever you woke up in the morning, all was the same. Sea and sky - very monotonous. Days and dates didn't really matter.

Low and behold after many days, land was sighted. We were heading into Freetown, where we got quite a reception from the natives in their canoes - pretty fierce looking characters. It was their practice to bring all manner of fruits in the canoes to barter for whatever was of use to them. I remember getting a huge bunch of bananas for a pair of socks. One of their specialities was to dive for money thrown from the ship's side. They would dive in to retrieve it. Fantastic swimmers!

The heat was awful - very hot and humid. After a few days we left Freetown and continued to steam down to the Southern Hemisphere.

What a relief to make the green sea and its freshness. Cape Town here we come! Thought we would never reach it. What a distance. Seemed strange being in the hot weather and with Christmas not far away. This was their summer. Anyway land came into view. As we drew nearer the land took on a significant shape. A tall and what appeared to be a large, flat, piece of land turned out to be a mountain. Table Mountain by name. It was as we drew nearer to the place of our berth in the docks, high and very flat.

Once tied up at our berth and all the necessary customs officials and the ship's agent had done their business we stocked up with more food and fuel. Couldn't go ashore as we would be sailing pretty soon. Next stop was Durban. Can't remember how long we stopped there, but what little I can recall was that it was a lovely place.

*Off again up to Mombassa and then we left there and sailed down to the Island of Mauritius. Once there we loaded up with sugar and drums of liquid which I thought was undistilled rum or something like that. Off Mauritius I can only remember that huge cockroaches crawled about all over the place. If you stood on one "Gad" what a splatter!*

*Nevertheless, cargo duly loaded, we left Mauritius and headed back to the Cape. Often wondered why it is called the 'Cape of Good Hope'?*

*We weren't very sure where we were heading. Secrecy was of paramount importance to our safety as well as information to the enemy.*

*Into Cape Town, for a short spell again. Then off again leaving the "Mountain" in the distance as it slowly disappeared from view and sank below the horizon.*

*There is one very vivid memory still etched in my mind. As we sailed in the waters of the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic Ocean, the swells created by the two oceans were enormous, and without a breath of wind to disturb the waters it was uncanny. I remember too that during the night watch under a moonlight sky giant whales used to surface close to the ship and blow water through their spouts. The first time I saw them I got a terrific scare. It was just like a submarine surfacing, large, black and shiny.*

*Once round the Cape, the captain told us we were heading back to Britain. That was good news, as sometimes the ships could be away for as long as a year or more. So now we settled down, to the tedious journey northwards and home.*

*On November 1 1941 between the hours of 4am and 7am there was a terrific explosion, and a huge column of water cascaded down onto the ship, the smell of cordite filled the air. It's a strange thing. I was up and washing my clothes in the bathroom when the strike occurred. All of a sudden there was complete silence. The engines has stopped. It was as if time stood still. Then there was commotion everywhere. Not panic. But it was obvious the ship was in a bad way.*

*She caught fire right away. Whatever was in those drums must have been highly inflammable, not only so but sugar would burn as well.*

*I remembered to run to our cabin and pick up my great coat and make for my lifeboat, which was on the starboard side - luckily for us I suppose, the torpedo struck just forward of the bridge into the No.2 hold.*

*We were all allocated our positions in the lifeboat, and mine was to secure the plug, as normally it would be out so as to let any rain or sea-water to drain. I recall a moment of panic. I couldn't find the plug! However before the lifeboat entered the water I could see it was already inserted. We had no difficulty launching it as we were to the lea of*

*the weather. The order was given to abandon ship. All credit to the captain. He was the last to enter the lifeboat. We drew away from the stricken vessel but later we heard that the other lifeboat had difficulties owing to the weather and the gaping hole in the side of the ship, which was causing water to pour in and at the same time creating a certain amount of suction.*

*Thankfully there was no casualties. Once clear of the ship we could only wait and see how long she would stay afloat. Gradually we could see her settling low in the water and down at the bow. Suddenly the stern rose high into the air, still burning fiercely. Slowly she began to sink, bow first as she went down, the siren started to blow, as if in defiance, as she went under there was an explosion as the tanks exploded, water rose into the air and the MV Bradford City went down to her watery grave with her precious cargo.*

*All that was left on the surface were two lifeboats and two anxious crews. Suddenly and without warning, the submarine surfaced and came very close to us. He had been, unknown to us, observing all that was happening. The conning tower opened, the captain appeared. Now what? We thought. Having heard of crews being machine gunned we all sat very still.*

*The submarine captain spoke in perfect English, and asked us where had we come from, what was the name of the ship, where were we bound for, what cargo had we been carrying? Our captain was very reluctant to answer. One and all sighed with relief when he gave him the information. The submarine captain shouted "Good Luck", closed the conning tower and disappeared from view beneath the waves.*

*It transpired we were approximately 200 miles west of Walvis Bay. We hadn't been able to get an SOS out as mast and aerial had been blown away. The most pressing item at that time was to bail the water out of our lifeboat, caused by the timbers shrinking, having been out of the water so long. Very tiring work. This I may say went on for a few days until the wood swelled. If we hadn't air tanks all round the lifeboat it would have been curtains. Not only so we didn't have the luxury of motor engines either.*

*As a young lad of 17 I didn't really appreciate the seriousness of the situation.*

*As we came to terms with our situation it was decided to try and keep the two lifeboats in touch with each other. Looking back now and thinking about it, it wasn't very easy, especially when we hadn't any engines. We had a sail which was better than nothing.*

*As dusk approached on the first night we were in contact with the other lifeboat. The wind increased a little and being in a small boat the motion was very erratic, quite a few of the hardened seamen were sea-sick. It didn't affect me thank goodness as on my first trip to sea I was seasick and it was a horrible experience!*



*The night was very dark, as it was starless and there was no moon. In all a miserable night as the water in the boat was still creating a nuisance, it was a case of continually bailing. Looking back now we had no earthly idea of how long we were going to be in this predicament or how long it would be before someone on patrol would spot us from the air and arrange for our rescue. Dawn broke, daylight came in and we were looking forward to seeing our shipmates in the other lifeboat. Not a living thing in sight! Where on earth were they? Could they have capsized or what?*

*All manner of thoughts prevailed. Suffice to say we had the ocean to ourselves, and a very lonely place it was too.*

*As the day progressed our immediate priorities were food and drink. Little did we realise how meagre were the rations.*

*Two small casks of fresh water and tins - what we affectionately called dog biscuits. They were about 2 - 3 inches square and quite thick. The captain took control and started to dish them out. What I do remember was the small amount of each we were given.*

*So the first day passed reasonable well, but little did we know what lay ahead - thank goodness. So much for day 1.*

*Night descended, still bailing, still keeping our spirits up, even though there was an air of gloom which was to be expected.*

*With so many men together little was said. Two men each took a two-hour watch.*

*Day 2 and daylight came in, which was a welcome sight. Night always can be long and lonely. Still no sign of the other crew, by this time our mast and sail had been erected, and we headed north with wind and current in our favour. Still bailing, but water penetration much less as timber was expanding with the water continually soaking the wood.*

*Thinking about eggs and bacon and all the good things we could have been enjoying. Time dragging. Still looking for signs of deliverance.*

*Night drew in and so we settled down and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. Slept until my turn for watch came around. Nothing else to do.*

*Day 3 dawned, weather similar. Still hoping to see a plane or sky. A little bit of depression setting in, but snapped out of it and trying to be content with our lot. Making steady progress up coast of Africa. Water level in the boat well below the duckboards. Got our daily ration of "water and dog biscuit".*

Darkness again. Weather not too cold, getting used to being exposed to elements. Sky clear. With the stars twinkling brightly, one or two lads thought they were plane lights. Even that gave us a little encouragement.

Day 4. Breakfast same as yesterday. Only thing that bothered us was that we had a job to swallow the biscuit through lack of liquid. Settled down again and keeping eyes peeled for any sign of plane or ship. Continued sailing on. Limbs getting rather stiff, feet beginning to swell.

Day came and went, night-time was upon us again.

Day 5. Understandingly we were down a bit in our spirits but there is always a bit of a comedian in a company of men. Getting more thirsty than hungry. The captain kept strict control over the rations. It was good to see that discipline was adhered to. There was never any sign of dissent. The day wore on still hoping for a sign of life to rescue us. No such luck! Nightfall was again upon us and as before we were like dogs trying to settle down in a comfortable position. So night came and went.

Day 6. More or less followed the pattern of Day 5. The captain suggested that if we sucked a button, it would help to generate saliva. It did too. Food we could do without, but water was a necessity. During these last six days there was never any complaining or grumbling.

There was just one incident. One of the lads was tempted to drink his own urine. A close watch was kept. Advice was accepted. He didn't do it again.

It did not occur to me at any time that we would never survive.

So much for Day 6. As I am writing this many events and happenings become very clear, even although its over 50 years ago. An experience like this is etched into one's own mind.

It must, I am sure, have been night 6 that we all generally began to realise that no matter what, there was a higher power than what was on earth. It was a brilliant night, of clearness and stars. They were shining in all their glory and without any prompting somebody started humming "Nearer My God to Thee". It was taken up by the remainder of us. Then we sang "The Old Rugged Cross" and "The Lord's My Shepherd", but in which order I am not sure.

I, for one, vowed that if we came out of this alive. I would go to church and no matter what I was offered to eat, it would never be refused. Strange that God always comes to mind when man's in an extremity. Not really, when God created the Heaven, Earth and Mankind.

Days, 7, 8 and 9 followed more or less in the same pattern, getting more thirsty. About the eighth or ninth day I was experiencing sore legs feet and arms, a kind of numbness.

Day 10 came and went. Night drew in. Excitement in the lifeboat. Somebody said they saw a light. The feeling was, oh, it must have been Imagination. But no. "There it is" Someone again shouted. Sure enough there it was. Our horizon was limited as we were low in the water so it wouldn't have been all that far away.

Again "Lead Kindly Light" was rendered. The captain sailed towards the light, but kept a safe distance until daybreak. We were beside ourselves with excitement. Patience was paramount.

Dawn broke. Daylight came, and we saw land, beautiful land. After 10 nights and 11 days it was marvellous to behold. As we approached the beach, there wasn't a lot of dwellings. Slowly we drifted onto the beach and jumped into the water just of the sand and although we didn't feel very strong we managed to beach the lifeboat. Legs pretty wobbly. The captain has his camera with him. Lined us up and took a snap of us. A pretty scraggy, but happy bunch.

Then we made our way up to the first building and a man came to meet us. He must have been very surprised. It turned out that he was the radio officer for that area. The land we were upon was called Cape Frio. The man spoke perfect English. What we wanted more than anything was a big drink of water. We were not allowed to just guzzle, but kept to a small amount to start with and then increased gradually. I remember I had to cut me rubber boots off. Feet very swollen. Events are a bit hazy as to what we did after we landed and settled down.

We were told that the other lifeboat had survived. The radio operator must have been in touch with the powers that be to get that information. They had made their way to the coast and landed. It was a barren part of the coastline. A message completed in stone, SOS, was apparently formed. The SOS was spotted, from the air by patrolling aircraft, the crew were rescued and taken to Cape Town.

I remember we didn't get a lot to eat until our stomachs got adjusted. I know we were taken up to a place in Portuguese territory called Mossamedes. There we had a medical check-up and put on a strict diet. My arm was giving me a lot of pain, very swollen. Salt water boil. Had it lanced - "oh the pain"!

After nearly a week of rest we were to travel down to Cape Town on a neutral liner. As we made our way to the docks and preparing to board there was quite a number of passengers lining the railing, and spontaneously applauded and broke into song with "You cannot beat the boys of the bulldog breed", etc.

*We were a bit worried at night as we sailed with all lights burning after the black out conditions. Even being a neutral ship didn't always immune yourself from attack.*

*On arrival at Cape Town we were taken to a lovely hotel "Hotel Ritz". It was indeed the lap of luxury. Too good to last. Expecting to be told we would be flying back to Britain, but we were due for a shock. The captain called us all together and said there was a ship lying in dock minus a crew. We were to crew that ship! It was called SS Botlea. When we saw it. Oh dear! It was an old Q ship. Which is a tramp converted into a naval decoy ship and manned by naval personnel.*

*Next thoughts were, whatever happens to us next? It transpired that we were going to Lorenzo Marques. Cargo was iron ore. Couldn't have been a worse one. When loaded it was like a half submerged submarine. One thing we knew for sure was if we were struck, we wouldn't stand a dogs chance. It would sink like a stone.*

*So off we sailed into the deep waters, with butterflies in the stomach. Many ships had gone down with many precious souls lost, and sailing along in this old tub didn't give us a lot of hope.*

*Progressed up the South Atlantic, crossed the Equator once more, and headed north to link up with a convoy heading for the UK.*

*Eventually met convoy and thankfully there were a few more escort vessels, which made us a little happier not that they could guard every vessel.*

*Had a number of attacks, whether false alarms or not, never knew. Depth charges, going off periodically. One could feel the dull thuds as they exploded. Neither did we hear of any losses, as the ships in the convoy covered a large area. There were always a few stragglers which in case of attack were sitting ducks.*

*One night, which was for a change calm and still, there was an almighty crash and the ship shuddered. Rushed up on deck to see what had happened. A greek tramp steamer came too close and hit us and scraped along our side. The noise of steel scraping against steel was horrible.*

*The notorious Bay of Biscay was looming, sometimes it was calm, but this time we struck a severe gale. Very heavy seas, and being low and heavy in the water, rather than ride the waves they crashed down on us. One huge wave caught us amidships ripped the lifeboat from the davits uprooted the vents or cowls as we called them. The deck planks were uprooted, water poured down into the cabins. What a mess! Water everywhere. Thought we were going to founder, but the old tub kept going.*

*Weather eased, home drawing nearer. The Good Lord had been with us, although at the time we didn't realise it. Home at last, never thought we would see it. Ready for a good holiday, and prepare for our next trip. It was now April 1942.*

*POSTSCRIPT: It was this and other experiences during the war years that I came to realise that the Lord had preserved me and kept me from all harm, that I knew that if I trusted him with my life, all would be well, He has never let me down.*

*This article was submitted by Mrs Mair Williams of Anglesey.*

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### S S "NORWICH CITY"

This article is about the misfortunes which befell the S.S. "Norwich City" in 1928 and 1929 was told to me by William C Willis (affectionately known as the Pirate of Penzance) who served as 2nd and later Chief Engineer on the "Norwich City"..

William and I were shipmates on three occasions. He was Chief Engineer of the S.S. "Bradburn" when I joined her as 3rd Mate in November of 1944, subsequently we were to sail together on the S.S. "Orient City" in 1946-1947 and again in 1953-1954 myself as 2nd and Chief Mate respectively. We became good friends, the voyages were lengthy and the sea passages long and many an evening was spent over a mug of tea (prior to 1950 there was hardly any beer in the ships bond). William would be sitting at his desk, with one 40 watt bulb table lamp endeavouring to tune his "Roberts" radio set to the B.B.C. Overseas Radio Service. He would talk about ships of the R.S.L. fleet on which he had served, names now long forgotten S.S. "General Smuts", S.S. "Siam City" etc.

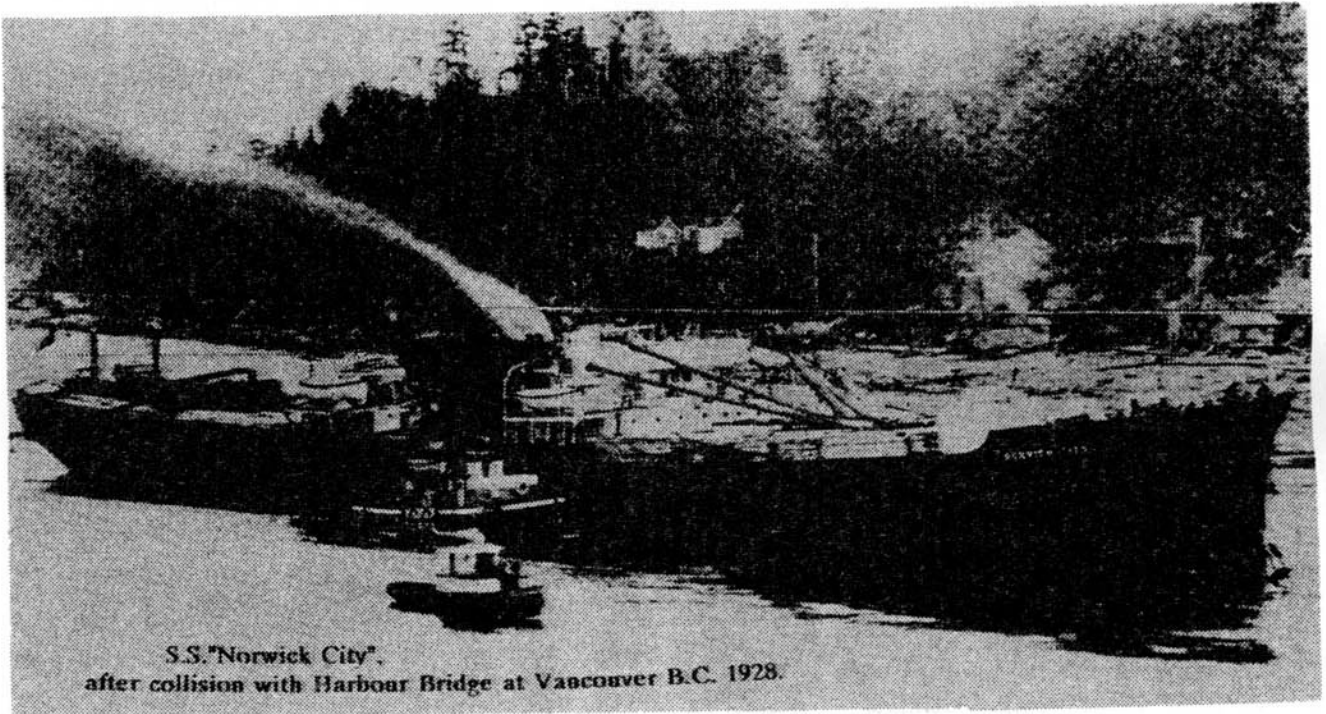
The S.S. "Norwich City" a ship of 4,219 Gross Tons was built by William Grey & Co. Ltd of West Hartlepool in 1911 for Pyman Brothers Ltd of London and purchased by the R.S.L. in 1917. Fitted with a triple expansion steam engine with steam supplied by coal fired Scotch boilers. (Later provisions was made for conversion, when necessary, to oil fired)

In April 1928 the "Norwich City" was loading cargo, possibly, on account of the recently formed R.S.L. cargo liner service from the Pacific ports of North America to the U.K. Whilst in the harbour of Vancouver, B.C., and manoeuvring in the vicinity of the Second Narrows Harbour Bridge, approaching her loading berth, the vessel came into contact with the bridge and damage was sustained by both the ship and the Harbour Bridge.

The ship suffered the collapse of the fore mast and the main mast with associated derricks, damaging the navigating bridge and unshipping and collapse of the funnel. Apart from the Master, on the Navigating Bridge, breaking an ankle I know of no injuries to the crew.

The Harbour Bridge sustained structural damage, consequently there was

inconvenience to both road and pedestrian traffic wishing to visit the communities on the North Shore equally so to members of the communities wishing to visit the City. It was indeed fortunate that the harbour had efficient cross harbour ferries to the developing North Shore. In 1928 there were many citizens of Vancouver who were of the opinion that a second harbour bridge was desirable, and it may well be that this incident was helpful to their campaign. In any event construction of the First Narrows Bridge commenced in 1933 and was completed in 1939. To many of you who know and love Vancouver B.C. will doubtless appreciate the magnificent setting of the bridge and its approach from the City passing through Stanley Park. (The bridge known to the residents of Vancouver as their Golden Gate.)



S.S. "Norwich City",  
after collision with Harbour Bridge at Vancouver B.C. 1928.

Nineteen months after the foregoing incident, between 25th November and the 4th December 1929, four Cardiff ships were lost, one was the S.S. "Norwich City".

The "Norwich City" under the command of Captain Dan Hamer of Barry and William C Willis of Penzance as Chief Engineer, having discharged a cargo of coal at Melbourne, sailed on the 17th November bound for Vancouver B.C. in ballast intending to call at Honolulu for oil fuel. The first week of the passage was uneventful, then on the 25th November the vessel ran into a tropical disturbance with boisterous weather conditions, after two days conditions moderated but on the 29th November weather conditions again deteriorated with a rough sea and heavy swell - the vessel was now navigating in the vicinity of the Phoenix Islands, it is believed that exceptionally strong currents, due to the weather conditions, were running and at about 2300 hours that night the "Norwich City" grounded on the reefs off Gardner Island (Phoenix Group).

With the boisterous weather conditions prevailing the vessel was pounding heavily on the reef. S.O.S. messages were transmitted on the ship's radio and preparations were made to abandon vessel. The intention was to remain on board until daylight but at about 0400 a fire broke out in the engine-room which changed the situation.

By the light of hurricane lamps an attempt was made to launch the port lifeboat, unfortunately in doing so the lifeboat was smashed against the ship's side by the confused sea condition, on the reef, and the lifeboat was lost. The starboard lifeboat was successfully launched and all the crew boarded, however in the turbulent sea the lifeboat in its endeavours to clear the ship capsized, twenty four of the crew managed to reach the safety of the Island but sadly eleven were drowned.

The castaways remained on the Island, which was uninhabited, for 4½ days and, during this time, existed on the provisions which had been in the lifeboat and which were washed ashore. Land crabs were in abundance and during the nights created a real problem.

On the morning of the 30th November a passing vessel sighted the survivors on the Island but due to the weather conditions and the heavy surf on the reefs she was unable to render any assistance, however she reported the sighting by radio and the Administrator of Western Samoa (British Protectorate) commandeered the British Ship S.S. "Trongate", owned by Turnbull Scot and under the command of Captain John Swindell of Cardiff, at that time loading at Apia, Samoa, to proceed to Gardner Island and render all possible aid to the castaways. The vessel sailed with a surf boat and six experienced surf boat men on board.

The "Trongate" arrived off Gardner Island at daybreak 3rd December at about the same time as the Norwegian M.V. "Lincoln Ellsworth". The "Trongate" launched its surf boat manned by the six Samoan crew. Both ships launched their lifeboats. The surf boat proceeded through the heavy surf, handled skilfully by its crew, whilst the ships lifeboats stood by outside the reefs. On arrival at the beach the surf boat had to be manhandled over land to a favourable launching site for its passage back to the lifeboats. Due to the heavy surf conditions on the reef it was only possible to make one return trip, evacuating only three of the survivors that day.

On the morning of the 4th December the weather conditions had improved and the surf over the reefs was less. Between 0700 and 1500 hours the surf boat made a number of trips through the surf and on each occasion had to be manhandled on the island. The surf boat transferred the survivors to the ship's lifeboats standing by outside the reef for ferrying them to their parent vessels. Twelve of the survivors returned to Apia on the "Trongate" and the remainder were landed at Sydney N.S.W. by the M.V. "Lincoln Ellsworth". The 24 survivors owed their lives to the bravery of the six Samoan men who manned the surf boat and to the prompt action and good seamanship of the Master and crews of the S.S. "Trongate" and the M.V. "Lincoln Ellsworth". The Master of the "Trongate" was praised by officials on arrival at Somoa.

*Commodore C.J. Lindsey*

**New Members:-** Keith Fulker is now a member of *Shipmates*. Keith writes to say that it is 15 years since he left Reardon Smith's and went straight into the Managers job at SGS Inspection Services Saudi Arabia, Jeddah. Keith is happily married and has got three sons.

Captain John Norie has been reading a *Shipmates* newsletters and decided to become a member. He was Chief Cadet Captain in Reardon Smith's School from 1929/32 and served his time in the "East Lynn" and "West Lynn". He also service as 3rd Mate on the "Bradglen" with Captain Bill Lawday where after he left Reardon Smith's to serve in other companies.

Captain Peter Bloomfield is now a member he used to read Capt. Tony Crowther's *Shipmates* when they worked together at Noble Denton, Houston, U.S.A.. Peter now works for Gobal Maritime, Marine Consultants, Houston. He is married and got a daughter and lives in Houston.

**Members News:-** Graham Griffiths writes to say that he has been transferred to the Acomarit Branch in Singapore as Technical Manager for Acomarit Oriental Shipmanagement. He expects to be in Singapore for three years. .

Graham says that life in a Shipmanagement Company is very different from the days of the Reardon Smith Line. Crew problems, incredibly tight budgeting, massive legislation and quality systems to be enforced are all now daily issues. Crew training (how to speak English, how to open a valve etc.) and incentive is now a critical issue. I remember receiving the worst "bollocking" of my life from Mr. Major after <sup>part</sup> of my Chief's Ticket at the first attempt. I was stunned I returned to Liverpool and took the exam again and passed it. May be an old fashioned "incentive" but it certainly worked.

We wish Graham and his wife the best of luck in Singapore. If any member is in Singapore please make contact with Graham.

It is sad to read in the July issue of The Institute Marine Engineers "Bullictin" a letter written by our member Mr Tom Newell AMIMarE. After working in the Marine Engineering industry all his life and being a Chief Engineer for twenty years or more find it difficult to get employment. His letter to the I Mar. E alongside explains the suitation. Lets hope it won't be long before you find employment Tom.

*Sir,* I was interested to read the Editor's Comment in the May *MER* on the seafarer shortage crisis; an odd anomaly he calls the 16 000 shortfall. I agree, having just been released from a Chief Engineer's job in a Norwegian company and replaced yet again by a Filipino. I find it disturbing to ring up an agency to find there are no jobs available for Chief Engineers.

Perhaps my 20-years experience as a Chief Engineer on various shiptypes is not what shipping companies are looking for. Could it also be that my 20-years experience, which puts me over the age of 50 (52 actually) is a drawback?

Why recruit? Instead, why not make use of the resources we have? I am sure there are many like myself who have a good few years to go with invaluable skills to pass on.

A few years ago my eldest son wanted to follow in my footsteps.

I dissuaded him, and now he phones me from University to say he understands why — no prospects!

TJ Newell, IEng, AMIMarE,  
Beccles, Suffolk, UK

**Obituary:-** In the last *Shipmates* we announced that Mr. Norman Nesbitt from Ballymure crossed the bar. Norman's sister writes that he crossed the bar on Friday 12th May 2000. He spent thirty-six years at sea as an engineer, and did 20 years service with RSL. He his survived by his wife, Willi, and children John and Willi. Norman funeral service was on Monday 15th May 2000. Norman came from Belfast. Our sympathy goes to his family. He will be remembered by his shipmates