SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.23 June 2002.

This edition is dedicated to ships of the Reardon Smith Line with names beginning with "U" and "V" which are " Union City", "Vulcan City" and "Vernon City"

S.S. "Union City" 4,672 Gross Tons

This vessel was built in Hamburg 1909 for the Deutsch Australische Line of Germany. At the launching ceremony she was named "Iserlohn".".

In 1914, at the outbreak of WW1 she was discharging in Batavia and the authorities detained her there for the duration of hostilities. In 1919 she was surrendered as a prize of war and allocated to Great Britain. The Shipping Controller appointed the British India Line, of London to manage the vessel, which they did so until 1921, when she was sold to the St. Just Steamship Company (Reardon Smith Line) and renamed "Union City".

By the early 1920's Sir William had built up a large and impressive fleet of tramp vessels trading world wide, many on voyages well in excess of twelve months. Lucrative charters were to be found in the Pacific with bulk and general cargoes from the Pacific Coast of Canada and the U.S.A. to the Far East, Australia, Atlantic Seaboard of North America and Northern Europe. The Company had established an excellent reputation and was held in high regard by shippers and charterers, who it is believed suggested it would be pleasing for some ships to be named after Cities near the origin of the cargoes being shipped. This particular Union City (there are thirteen in the U.S.A.)is in California, located 7 miles inshore of the SE coast of San Francisco Bay.

This vessel was to serve in the R.S.L. fleet for only four years, she was then sold. However, she had a long life ahead of her before finally ending up in a ship breakers yard in Antwerp in 1951. In the intervening years she served 1925 to 1930 as the "Wasaborg" flying the flag of Finland, then for the next ten years as the "Erica" under the Italian flag and whilst flying that flag was captured by the Royal Navy during June of 1940. The Ministry of War Transport renamed her the "Empire Defiance" flying once again the Red Ensign and they appointed Messrs Denholm Ltd. to manage her. In June of 1944 as part of the Invasion operations she was sunk as a blockship on the Normandy Beachhead to help form a breakwater. Eventually, in 1951 she was salvaged and towed to Antwerp for breaking up.

S.S. "Vulcan City" 5,297 Gross Tons.

Built in Vegesack, Germany in 1909 for the Hamburg, Bremen Africa Line, and named "Answald".

Prior to the onset of World War 1 in 1914 she was employed on their African Service to the German African colonies. Nothing is known of her movements during the war years. In 1919 she was surrendered as a prize and allocated to Great Britain and passed to the Shipping Controller who appointed the Cunard Line to manage the ship on their behalf. In 1921 she was purchased from the Shipping Controller by the St. Just Steamship Co. (Reardon Smith Line) and renamed "Vulcan City".

As previously mentioned in the third paragraph of the foregoing article on the "Union City", ships of the Reardon Smith Line were frequently engaged to and from the West Coast of North America. With the very friendly relations and good reputation that the Company had established on the coast, lead up to the Company commencing a twice monthly liner service in the summer of 1928 from Pacific Coast ports of Canada and the U.S.A. to the United Kingdom and North Europe.

She was named after Vulcan City, Alberta, Canada, a small city on the Prairies, situated 50 miles to the Southeast of Calgary, the principal produce is wheat much of which is exported through Vancouver, B.C.

The "Vulcan City" was to remain in the fleet until the summer of 1933 when she was sent to the breakers yard at Blyth. This being at the time of economic depression and advantage was wisely taken of the British Government's scrap and build programme and in so doing continue to build up a modern fleet to meet trading conditions.

S.S. "Vernon City" 4,748 Gross Tons.

Built in 1929 to Reardon Smith's specifications, she was one of five sister ships built that year by William Grey and Company Limited of West Hartlepool to join the increasing number of modern vessels in the fleet of 36 vessels of Cardiff's premier shipping line. She, like her sister ships, some of which have been written on in previous issues of **"Shipmates"**, were ideal for world wide tramping, or if required for inclusion in the liner service inaugurated in 1928. Voyages were frequently well in excess of 12 months duration. These well built ships were reliable and economic and as such was a great asset during the depression years of the 1930's. Simple ships perhaps by comparison with todays sophisticated ships, however they were mainly remarkably trouble free on their extended voyages and credit should be given to those men who manned and maintained them. She sailed on her maiden voyage under the command of Captain Harris of Bideford, who was to be Master on her for a number of years. One of his sons born whilst he was in command of the ship was named Vernon.

Vernon City, British Columbia, is a small City situated approximately 180 miles to the Northeast of Vancouver, B.C. on the N.E. shore of Okanagan Lake. The produce from the surrounding area is mostly exported through Vancouver and New Westminster, B.C.

After fourteen years in the service of the Reardon Smith Line she became a causality of WW2, In June 1943 she was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine in the South Atlantic.

OJ.T.L.

Below is a report given to the Ministry by Captain Malcolm Louttit who was master of the SS Vernon City when she was sunk by 1 Torpedo from a U-Boat on 28th June 1943:-

We were bound from Oban to Monte Video with a cargo of 7,200 tons of coal and coke, and were armed with 1 - 4", 4 Oerlikons, 2 Twin Hotchkiss, 2 P.A.C. J's, 1 Pillar Box and 2 F.A.M.S. My crew numbered 52, including 5 Navy and 3 Army Gunners. Only the carpenter was injured. The Confidential Books and Wireless Codes, locked in two boxes, went down with the ship. There is no chance of compromise. Degaussing was on.

2. We left Oban at 0930 on the 4th June, 1943, and joined the main convoy the following morning, which numbered about 90 ships, my position being No.143. Depth charges were dropped on a number of occasions, but apart from this nothing of incident occurred until the 20th June, when five of the ships were dispersed from the convoy to proceed independently. Before leaving the convoy I received a diversion of 600 miles, which I thought was too large an alteration to be correct, but on querying it, I found that no mistake had been made, so proceeded accordingly. On the 26th June, I received from Washington a further diversion, which was subsequently confirmed from the Admiralty.

3. On Saturday night, 26th June, I intercepted an S.O.S. message from a ship which had been torpedoed in a position about 60 miles off Rio, and a similar message was received from another vessel, in roughly the same position, during the night of the 27th.

4. At 0255 on the morning of the 28th June, 1943, when in position 4° 30' S. - 27° 30' W, steering a course of S.11.E (True), and zigzagging on patterns Nos. 8 - 12, at a speed of 8½ knots, we were struck by one torpedo from a U-boat. There was a S.S.E. wind, force 4, with a moderate sea and swell. It was cloudy, but moonlight, with good visibility. The torpedo struck on the starboard side between Nos. 1 and 2 holds, on the bulkhead abreast the foremast, causing the ship to shudder violently. The explosion was dull, there was a flash, a smell of burnt cordite, and water was thrown up to the bridge.

5. I was on the bridge at the time, and within a matter of seconds the forward well deck was already awash, and the ship was settling rapidly. I tried to use the telegraph to stop the engines but they were out of order, so I ran down and shouted down the engine room skylight. The foredeck was blown open abreast of the mast, the fore topmast had collapsed, and the emergency aerial carried away. I stood by the Wireless Officer until he had transmitted a distress signal, then discovered both aerials down, so I realised that our signals could not possibly have got away. The explosion started the ship's whistle blowing, which I was unable to stop.

6. As our position was hopeless, I ordered "abandon ship." The engines were now stopped, but the ship still had considerable weigh. My lifeboat, which was the starboard motor boat, was lowered quite satisfactorily, and my first intimation of any trouble with the port lifeboat was when the Chief Officer came along and asked if there was any room in mine. Apparently the painter of the port lifeboat had accidentally slipped, resulting in the boat drifting astern with only four men in it . Some of the crew abandoned ship on two rafts, the remainder got into my lifeboat, which had approximately 40 men. The two small jolly boats were also lowered, but capsized on becoming waterborne, and two men were washed from them. We were able to pick both up later. I was the last to leave the ship, except for the 3rd Engineer, who jumped over the side and was picked up; everyone was clear of the ship within ten minutes, by which time the fore deck was well under water. We pulled away, and two or three minutes later I saw the ship sink, bow first, and standing on end.

7. I impressed upon my crew that if the submarine came along they were to say that the Captain had gone down with the ship. Within a few minutes the submarine surfaced on the starboard side of the ship and closed my lifeboat. We were addressed by what appeared to be the 2nd in Command, who spoke to us in perfect English, and asked for the Captain. My crew, in a very convincing manner, shouted that he had gone down with the ship. At this, the German Officer asked for one of the sailors to go on board. Cadet Hodges, a young apprentice, who was sitting in the bow of the boat, immediately volunteered and was pulled on board. There were two ratings standing on deck, one with a Tommy Gun. The following conversation took place:

German Officer	Are you English or American?
Cadet Hodges	English
German Officer	What was the name of your Ship?
Cadet Hodges	"Santa Clara Valley" (a ship that was sunk a little while back belonging to the same company)
German Officer	What was your cargo?
Cadet Hodges	Coal and Coke
German Officer	Where did you come from?
Cadet Hodges	The North East Coast of England.
German Officer	Newcastle? Where were you bound.
Cadet Hodges	Round the Cape Horn to the West Coast of South America
German Officer	What course were you steering?
Cadet Hodges	S.E.
German Officer	I saw you altering course, are you sure there are no Officers there? (meaning the lifeboat)
Cadet Hodges	Positive. You can go and have a look if you like.

Cadet Hodges was then taken to the conning tower and on the way was told that he might be taken Prisoner Of War. The Commander was informed of what the Cadet had said, and made him write down the name of the ship on a piece of paper. The Cadet was also asked some personal questions, such as, "What is your rank", "Where do you live, where were you educated, name, age, etc." On being asked his opinion of the war, Hodges said quite frankly that he thought that although Germany had the best of it at first, the Allies now had the upper hand. The German Officer asked if the boat had sufficient food and water, and told the Cadet to steer West. Cadet Hodges was then put back into the lifeboat, after the German Officer had shaken hands with him and wished him the best of luck. He expressed his regrets at the Captain going down with the ship, and said he was sorry that he had to leave us so far from land, but hoped that we would make land safely. All this took about half hour.

8. The submarine was definitely a German, 750 ton, apparently very new, with no scratches or rust on her superstructure. The submarine looked about 200 feet long, painted light grey, with a deck beam of about 12 feet. There was a wire cutter forward, also a low angle gun. The conning tower had a D/F and a binnacle with a luminous compass card. About four feet below and abaft the conning tower there was a small circular gun deck, with what appeared to be a 22 m.m. Oerlikon gun. The Commander and the 2nd in Command were both very young. They told Cadet Hodges that we were the fourth ship they had sunk that month.

9. The submarine steamed away on the surface at about 0330, so we rested in the lifeboats for a while. I started up my motor, cruised around, and contacted two of the rafts, which I tied together and towed over to the other lifeboat, which was about half a mile away. I then re-distributed the crews so that there were 27 in the Chief Officer's lifeboat and 25 in mine. We took the water and stores from the three rafts, then cast them adrift. Both boats were equipped with all the modern gear, with plenty of food and water, I having made a practice of seeing that extra bottles of water, food, etc., were placed in each lifeboat. I had the boat's wireless set in my lifeboat, but the receiver was useless, having become wet whilst getting it into the boat. I consider that boat's receivers and transmitters should be made watertight.

10. We set sail at 0700 on the morning of the 28th, both lifeboats keeping together, steering W.S.W. true. I did not use the motor, there being a fresh breeze, as I wanted to reserve my petrol supply. I only used the motor on one occasion when the wind dropped (3rd July), to tow the other lifeboat for two hours. I sent out an S.O.S. every night at 1900 and midnight. The battery worked satisfactorily and the set radiated well. After each transmission I sent out my position, course and speed. I think the submarine was picking up our signals and was following us in to shore, as on two occasions we distinctly heard his motors. I thought at first it was the engines of an aeroplane, but we burnt flares and fired Roman Candles without receiving any reply.

11. The food was very sustaining, but I did not care for the Horlicks tablets, which seem to dry the mouth. Everybody kept in good health, and ate well, but I noticed that I developed a craving for salt, which is completely missing from the lifeboat provisions; I somehow felt that my body needed salt.

The massage oil kept the men's skin in good condition, the only man to suffer would not use the oil. During the boat voyage, I found the luminous compass extremely efficient and useful.

12. On Saturday night, 3rd July, we experienced heavy rainfall and a heavy swell. At this time I estimated we were about 40 miles from land, but realising that we might possibly be a lot nearer with the danger of running into the breakers, I kept awake all night, although already exceedingly tired through lack of sleep. I lowered the main sail and ran the boat before the wind with the jib. Incidently, I found the protective clothing was not watertight. In really heavy rainfall the rain penetrates through the zip fastenings on the legs, filling the feet with about 6" of water.

13. During this night (3rd July) I lost contact with the other lifeboat, but at 0430 on the 4th July I saw a red light half a mile away on the starboard bow. This looked too red and steady to be a flare from the Chief Officer's lifeboat, and there was no response when I burnt a red flare. Daylight came about half an hour later, the rain stopped and it was perfectly clear, but there was nothing in sight, which led me to believe that the red light must have been from the submarine.

14. I now estimated I was about 30 miles from the coast, so I started the motor and ran in on the same course, sighting the land at about 0900, and was close in to the shore at 1330. It was then raining again but the sea was smooth and there were no breakers. I could not see any houses or sign of habitation, and was not sure whether I was north or south of Pernambuco. Before I could decide what to do, I saw what I thought to be the Chief Officer's lifeboat two or three miles away, but on closing I saw that it was a Brazilian Schooner, the "AURORA M". This schooner picked us up, by about 1430. The name of the Master was Captain Luiz Ferreira, and I am very grateful for the kindness and consideration received on board his vessel. The schooner was making for Parahyba, Brazil, and at 1700 the same day we contacted the Chief Officer's boat. After taking her crew on board, we were eventually landed at Peurto Cabedelo, a small fishing village, at 2200 the same day. After being given some food, the crew were accommodated in the police station, whilst I was accommodated in a private house.

15. We were taken to Joa Pessoa the following day, where we received clothing, before entraining for Pernambuco, where the British Consul took care of us. Eight days later we were sent by American troopship to Trinidad, and from there we went to Baltimore in an American ship, the GEORGE WASHINGTON. After two days we proceeded to New York, where I paid off the crew and dispersed them into the "pool".

16. At an enquiry in Pernambuco I was asked if I had any complaints, so I enquired how it was possible for me to have sailed my boat into land, taking seven days to do so, without once seeing any patrol, or aircraft.

17. All my crew behaved well, but I think Cadet Hodges was particularly outstanding. Although aged only 17-18, he showed great courage in promptly volunteering to board the submarine, fully knowing there was a possibility of being kept Prisoner-of-War. Despite the shock he had after being torpedoed he displayed great initiative and quick wit in misleading the Submarine Commander by giving false answers to his questions.

18. Chief Officer S.S. Jones, who had charge of the port lifeboat, with 27 survivors, displayed very fine seamanship and leadership in bringing them safely to land, after sailing some 500 miles in seven days.

19. The magnificent conduct of an East Indian fireman in my lifeboat, named Mitchell, was outstanding. Although he cannot read and write, he set a fine example to all my crew by his willing and able assistance. His valuable co-operation throughout the seven days in the boat was of great value to me.

20. This is my third experience, having been torpedoed in the BRADFORD CITY in 1941, and mined in the S.S. EMPIRE SNIPE in July, 1940, at Gibralter.

Terror In The Triangle

Recently, I came across a somewhat aged newspaper cutting from an unknown newspaper, recording an incident which occurred in the Bermuda Triangle and submitted by a Mr. W. Morris.

Quote:- In the summer of 1955 I was serving aboard the M.V "Atlantic City". One morning while approaching Newport News, I was on lookout duty situated on the "monkey island" atop of the wheelhouse.

It was a warm, balmy morning—calm, but with the usual swell. It was dawn but the sun was not yet up. The ship was on Iron Mike (automatic steering).

The officer of the watch joined me after a while for a chat. All of a sudden he gave out a yell. The ship was going mad, steering a circle.

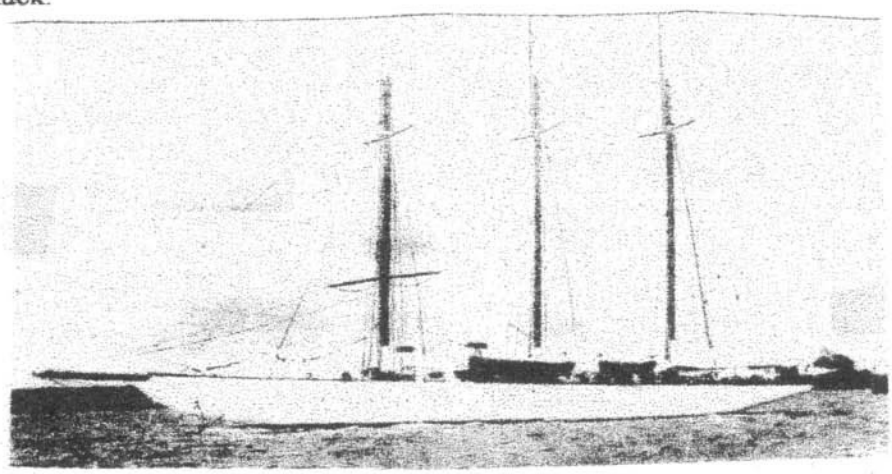
At that very moment we both saw what seemed to be a ball of fire travelling at great speed at us on what seemed like a collision course. I panicked and went to jump over the wind dodger on to the foredeck.The mate, sensing what I was about to do, hit me to the deck and threw himself down also. The ball of fire went over us. There was no noise, no roar, but when we got to our feet, there was a strange turbulence on the sea.

We dashed down to the wheelhouse. The gyro compass was dead, and the binnacle compass was dancing in its bowl. I took the wheel and under the officer's instructions steadied the ship, bringing her back to course.

The ship's gyro and electrical gear never functioned again during the voyage and had to be repaired in port". Un-quote.

The Reardon Smith Apprentice training Schooner "Margherita"

During the 1930's Reardon Smith's owned the three mast schooner rigged yacht "Margherita". She was a fine looking classical vessel with her white painted hull contrasting with her black masts and bowsprit, her two lifeboats and dingy were also painted black.



S.Y "Marherita"

Sir William Reardon Smith, having spent a considerable time in sail himself, believed that sail training was beneficial to the formation of a young man's character and helped to produce good seamen. So when there were Deck Apprentices available at home between voyages they were called on to assist in the manning of the yacht, this was extended to include lads who having completed the three year course at the Reardon Smith Junior Nautical School in Cardiff were awaiting to join their first ship to commece

their apprenticeship.The yacht's usual cruises took her to the Channel Islands and to the Outer Hebrides.

Briefly, the following paragraph may help explain Sir William's love of sail.
In 1868 at the age of twelve he joined his first ship, the small 31 ton sloop "Unity"as a galley boy but apparently he peeled potatoes too thickly and was placed on Deck. This was the commencement of a career which lead to him obtaining his Masters Square Rigged Certificate in 1879 at the age of 22. At the age of 25 he was appointed Master of the Hugh Hogarth's owned barque "Drumadoon. After years in command he decided in 1900 to gain experience ashore in shipping operations and management. In 1905 he entered ship owning on his own account, placing an order for a steamship of 3,000 Gross Tons with ship builders Ropners of Stockton-on-Tees. The vessel was delivered in 1906 and was named the "City of Cardiff". Sir William died in 1935 but within those thirty years the company' fleet had grown to over 40 ships, a truly remarkable achievement and had become Cardiff's premier shipping company and known throughout the maritime fraternity.

O.J.T.L.

News from Members.

Our member Mr. Kunio Terauchi from Daiho, near Osaka, Japan, has sent in a letter with a newspaper cutting to say that the pontoons at Aioi, Japan have been taken out of service. A few of our members will remember these pontoons at Aioi bridging across the stretch of water from Aioi City to the other side near the entrance to the IHI shipyard. This was where the m.v.**"Welsh City"** and m.v **"Cornish City"** were re-engineed in 1973. People used these pontoons to walk or cycle to and from the shipyard, and also as a short cut to get to the other side. These pontoons were in use for 59 years, in the shipyard and engine works heydays 10,000 people used them every day. Because of their ageing condition and lack of use, (now only 300 people use them per day), they have been towed away to be broken up. The bridge consisted of 10 pontoons each 15 metres long and 7.5 metres wide lashed together. Most likely this is another sign of the modern age where people prefer to use theirs cars.

Captain Dennis Jones from Witham, Essex writes to refer to the story in issue No.22 about Captain Ward OBE.

"You mention having sailed with Captain Ward. My meeting with Captain Ward was in Cardiff in 1947. I had decided on leaving the company on arrival in Cardiff on the **"Fresno City"**. On arrival Captains Doughty and Ward talked me into standing by for the discharge of the timber cargo. In the next couple of weeks Captain Ward talked me into staying with the Company; the "carrot" was that on obtaining my ticket I would have the 3rd Mates job on the **"Devon City"** which at the time was in the Channel Drydock. But by the time I was available in a few weeks time, things had changed on the **"Devon City"** and I had no option but to turn down Captain Ward's offer. I have always regretted having done this as I would have liked to have apologised to Captain Ward personally.

Further to the above I thought the following maybe a fun thing for your "Diary". Many years later I was Master of a BP Tanker arriving Swansea at night; the sea pilot

disembarked on arrival in the locks, later the dock pilot boarded and we proceeded inwards to theKings Dock bound for the oil terminal in the Queen's. In the dark of the wheelhouse I hear the voice of the pilot say. "Are you the Jones of Gilfach Goch?" to which I replied "Yes". Then came back what I considered at the time and since a really rich Welsh expletive "Years ago you and I nearly met". To which I advised we would talk about same in my room later after the ship had been docked.

In my room the pilot turned out to be "Mervyn Davies", ex RSL. He told me that he joined the **"Fresno City"** in Cardiff in 1947 a week or so after I left as per the first part of my letter. This, him joining and me leaving earlier was how we nearly met. Mervyn and I were good friends for many years after this. I was very sad when I heard of his having "Crossed the line", a few years ago, I didn't know of it until a few weeks later. And it wasn't until a little while later that I knew that he was Captain Ward's son-in-law. He never mentioned the connection whenever we met.

New Members.

Captain Vic Pitcher has introduced a new member who is Captain David Richardson from Queensland, Australia. They both sailed together on the M.V."**Cornish City**" in 1956-57. Captain Richardson was master with Trinder Anderson and has been in recent years a Torres Strait/Barrier Reef Pilot. Wecome to **"Shipmates"** Vic.

We welcome aboard Jonathan Challacombe from Plymouth who got to know about "Shipmates" through Captain Mike Jones re the RSL reunion. John served with RSL for many years and is now a lecturer of Maritime Business and especially Shipping Finance, at the University of Plymouth.

Mr Trevor Graham-Russell J.P (Tex) has become a member of **"Shipmates"** Tex joined the m.v.**"Queen City** " as a Junior Engineer in Salford Docks in 1963 at that time the Master was Albert Justin, the mate Tony Lightfoot, 2nd Mate Geoff Garlick. The Chief Engineer was Steve Willis and 2nd Engineer Willie Shears. Arthur Thompson was the attending Superintendent who told Tex that he would be doing a short trip to Spain, Japan, Australia and back to the U.K., it was a year later the ship returned to the U.K.

Tex served with RSL until the company went into Liquidation and then worked for Cardiff Ship Management, until they finished and he was made redundant. He went Chief Engineer with Stephenson Clarke on their vessel m.v.**"Donnington"**, he then with Denholms, then Marcon Shipping of Singapore sailing as Chief on a car carrier called the "Cypress Trail", sailing with Ian Stutt as master and Pete Roberts as Mate. His next job was on the m.v.**"Global Mariner"** owned by Northern Marine Ship Management, who were looking for a Chief Engineer with Doxford engine experince. Unfortunately when this ship was sailing from Matanzas,Venezuela, she was in collision with another ship at anchor, the **"Global Mariner"** sank in three minutes. Tex was lucky to get out of the engine room. No one was lost.
Since his retirement he now got a part time job working for McCall Bros Propellers accessing the damage to ships propellers around drydocks on the north east coast. Tex is also a Justice of the Peace.

When coal is broken down into its constituent parts, one of those parts is a smelly black liquid which can be used for covering and protecting metal, it can in effect be used as a paint. R.S.L. in fact used it as a paint, its one big advantage being that it was CHEAP.

Shortly after rejoining R.S.L. from Lloyds, I attended a ship in Liverpool, which during one part of its previous voyage had had a long wait for its cargo, and the Chief Officer had taken advantage of the time, to scale and paint all the holds, the paint being used was Presomet. I commented very favourably on this to Chief Officer (as he then was) Higgins, only to receive a quite violent diatrabe in some quite fruity language, which also included a few swear words I hadn't come across before, the gist of which was:-

1. Working in hot weather Presomet caused quite heavy burning and watering of the eyes, and irritated a sweating skin.
2 it equally caused a sore throat, coughing, and spluttering.
3. the above was so severe in some cases that men were laid up, and in the Chief Officers opinion the stuff was poisonous..

In my interview for Superintendent, I had been given no instructions as to how I should carry out my duties. In Lloyds we had been required to write detailed reports , or fill detailed printed forms, or both, so following this procedure, I now wrote a similar type report and in one section commented on the very favourable condition of the holds, and gave a heavily censored version of Chief Officer Higgins views of Presomet. it was only later that I found that at that time superintendents wrote only comments about items on the repair list, and at the end they wrote views on other matters they thought relevant, but this didn't go before the Directors.

The outcome was my report went before the Director and senior staff's morning meeting which immediately stopped the use of Presomet and substituted normal paint supplies, usually Camrex. I think that Captain Higgins (as he was soon to become) should have been very proud of the few words in his diatribe which I had been able to use to give almost a cultured, but scathing, view on Presomet. Certainly his outburst put right a wrong that had gone on for many years.

Tom Major

Newsletter Articles. I thank those members who sent in an article to be published in the "Shipmates" newsletter. My last request only brought in a few articles. At the moment there is not a lot of stories left in the locker. All you members who have got computers please sit down and write a one page story about one of your sea experiences. For those who do not have not typing facilities, hand written will be alright and I will get it typed up. By the looks of things some of you must have had an uneventful and uninteresting life at sea.

Alec Osborne Editor

A Minor Emergency !!

The following incident occurred during one of my many voyages as Chief Mate on a TMM vessel. It was nothing out of the ordinary for something to go wrong on one of these ships; in fact we would probably have felt that we had been cheated if a whole trip had passed and nothing out of the ordinary had happened !! I suspect that in most cases, the majority of these incidents were never reported back to Greyfriars House. A pity, as there would have been some lively reading from time to time. Some of them may have come to the attention of TMM, especially where the consequences were fairly obvious and a complete cover up job was not practical, but most of the time they passed quietly into the rich tapestry that made up the history of voyages working for our principals in Mexico City.

The vessel in question was, as far as I can recall, the m.v. 'Samia'. (Ex 'Elena' ex Heering Susan? of the Cherry Heering Line of Denmark.) At the time, 1979/1980? the ship was employed on the North European service for TMM trading round all the usual exotic locations from Le Havre to Hamburg and thence out to the Mexican Gulf ports of Vera Cruz, Tampico and Coatzacoalcos. Incidentally, I once had a heated altercation with an officer of the U.S. Coastguard, during one of the much loved inspections by this well respected authority. He asked me for the vessel's last port of call, and on being told Coatzacoalcos he got rather annoyed, as he had apparently never heard of the place. After three attempts at writing it down as I spelled it out for him, he gave up and handed me the form to fill in myself. I believe that by the way he kept muttering under his breath he was firmly convinced that I made up the name as a form of subtle mockery. On second thoughts, I probably imagined it – no American could possibly recognise anything even faintly subtle.

I digress. Or ramble. Many of those with whom I sailed, will be muttering, 'what's new'. On the above mentioned service, at the time, our final loading port was Liverpool. To the best of my recollection, before container mania took complete hold, there were no custom built container shoes on the hatch covers or on the main deck, although at that time we were beginning to carry an ever increasing number of boxes each voyage. These were landed on dunnage on the decks, and occasionally on the hatch covers, and lashed with wire and turnbuckles. On this particular voyage we had loaded a considerable quantity of steel billets and were consequently at a deeper draft than was normal for the average passage. One of the items to be loaded in Liverpool was a quantity of IMO dangerous cargo in drums.

As per the IMO regulations, we were obliged to load these drums on deck, segregated from all other non compatible classes of hazardous cargo. The only available clear space was right forward alongside No.1 hatch. This was not an ideal position. With the vessel well loaded, there was a risk of heavy seas being shipped in this area, in the event of bad weather. Consequently, the drums were loaded on dunnage and lashed right round. Then more dunnage was put on top and lashed in place. Finally, a frame of heavier timber was built round the drums and again more wire lashings held this in place. Looking at the end result, one could be excused for thinking that this little lot would never move.

Bad weather was duly encountered on the voyage across the Atlantic and a fair amount of water was shipped on deck. Our dangerous cargo was safe, but several containers on deck had been walloped broadside by the odd 'greenie' coming aboard, and the lashings had to be replaced and doubled up.

The bar on the 'Samia' was situated on the bridge front. A number of people were gathered there one evening when a decidedly unpleasant smell suddenly became

very obvious. It was soon very clear that these foul smelling fumes had spread throughout the entire accommodation, and the smell had also permeated the wheelhouse. The deck lights were put on and the cause of the problem was immediately apparent. A large heavy sea must have been shipped in the vicinity of No.1 hatch and the entire stow of drums of dangerous cargo had broken completely adrift. A number of drums had broken open and it was the reaction of the seawater with the scattered contents which was causing the fumes.

The drums contained a compound of cyanide. (I cannot remember the exact name, but I believe it was some form of pesticide.) It was obvious that exposure to the fumes was not a good idea, and course was altered immediately to put the wind astern. A party was sent forward to investigate; two men in breathing apparatus, all suitably clad in oilskins, seaboots, gloves, goggles, masks and even the odd balaclava.

There were a number of drums still intact, but in a decidedly woebegone condition and it was therefore decided to jettison all that we could. This was the easy part! The drums were not large; about 25kgs each, made from some reinforced cardboard fibre, and were thrown overboard without much bother. I daresay that this procedure would not have met with official ecological approval, and we possibly poisoned a good few fish. However, about a dozen remaining drums were found to have washed down the deck and had been trapped and crushed against the bulwarks by a 20' container that had shifted on deck. These remaining drums were well broken and were continuing to give off fumes as water swilled around them. The odd small wave was still being shipped from time to time. There was no way that these drums could be dislodged, so it was decided that the container would have to be moved.

The container was conveniently close by the small 10 tonne SWL electric crane. At reduced speed and with the wind aft, the vessel was deemed to be steady enough to be able to use the crane with a degree of safety. Heavy gantlines were fixed to both sides of the jib as a precaution and an intrepid volunteer climbed into the cab. As far as I remember, this was the 3rd Mate. Feeling that I could not justifiably send anyone on to the top of the container, I climbed up myself and, spread-eagled on top of the box, with a couple of lifelines around my waist, managed to get the hooks of the sling into the container posts, and then put the eye onto the crane hook, before beating a hasty retreat.

The container was floated just above the deck and swung inboard to where it could be safely re-lashed. The crane was housed in its jib without any problem. The crushed drums were quickly sent the way of their brethren along with any remaining powder, which had turned to a greeny-white slush. As far as I know, nobody on the ship suffered any harmful effects from exposure to the fumes, either at the time, or later. Nobody that I knew turned up to join a subsequent vessel having grown a second head or suffering from any other post cyanide drum trauma.

I presume that there would have been an insurance claim somewhere for the missing cargo, but do not remember hearing any more about the incident after that particular voyage.

There were a number of wives on board at the time, none of whom were too impressed by the heroic action of their men out on deck. There is no pleasing some people!!

R. Alford.

Accident Report

This one needs an introduction, so you won't be lost at the beginning. This man was in an accident at work, so he filled out an insurance claim. The insurance company contacted him and asked for more information. This was his response:

"I am writing in response to your request for additional information, for block number 3 of the accident reporting form. I put 'poor planning' as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully and I trust the following detail will be sufficient. I am an amateur radio operator and on the day of the accident, I was working alone on the top section of my new 80 foot tower. When I had completed my work, I discovered that I had, over the course of several trips up the tower, brought up about 300 pounds of tools and spare hardware. Rather than carry the now un-needed tools and material down by hand, I decided to lower the items down in a small barrel by using the pulley attached to the gin pole at the top of the tower. Securing the rope at ground level, I went to the top of the tower and loaded the tools and material into the barrel. Then I went back to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to ensure a slow decent of the 300 pounds of tools."

"You will note in block number 11 of the accident reporting form that I weigh 155 pounds. Due to my surprise of being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate of speed up the side of the tower. In the vicinity of the 40 foot level, I met the barrel coming down. This explains my fractured skull and broken collarbone. Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley. Fortunately, by this time, I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold onto the rope in spite of my pain. At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of tools hit the ground and the bottom fell out of the barrel."

"Devoid of the weight of the tools, the barrel now weighed approximately 20 pounds. I refer you again to my weight in block number 11. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the tower. In the vicinity of the 40 foot level, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the two fractured ankles, and the lacerations of my legs and lower body. The encounter with the barrel slowed me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell onto the pile of tools and, fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked. I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the tools, in pain, unable to stand and watching the empty barrel 80 feet above me, I again lost my presence of mind. I let go of the rope . . ."

MEMOIRS OF A SUPERNUMERARY

Some weeks ago, my dear old dad(a.k.a. Captain John Cann) phoned me with an unexpected request. He had been rifling through the Cann family archives and had discovered a piece I wrote for the RSL Newsletter in 1975 when I was 13 years old. He wanted to know whether I would object to my literary effort being used in "Shipmates" at some future date as this would mean that I would have to acknowledge publicly that I am now 40!

This started me thinking about the five voyages we made with Dad and I felt inspired to put pen to paper and record a few more memories of those years. My sister was 6 and I was about 8 when we flew to the USA to join Dad aboard the m.v. "WILKAWA". We were thoroughly spoilt aboard that ship, not least in terms of all the attention we received from all the Officers (as well as our parents). There was always someone available to join in our games and I really don't remember missing my school friends at all. There was a fantastic Second Mate, whos stories of "Fred The Rat" should have been published (move over Harrty Potter) and who constructed hammocks for our dolls using flags, on the wing of the bridge! Yes- you know who you are!!

My sister and I also found a new use for the hatch between the Radio Room and the Bridge- it was perfect for playing Post Office or for serving imaginary fish and chips to the Officers who joined in our games (only when not on duty, of course.) Captain Danny John was kind enough to allow us to use the Owners Suite Bedroom for the duration of the voyage and never complained about our games. By the way- do any of you remember being thrashed by Debbie or I at Ludoon that voyage? At the end of that trip, Dad was made Captain so we had to watch ourselves on subsequent voyages as he threatened to Log us if we stepped out of line!1

Other things I remember are; visiting Japan and meeting the legendary Micky;. Seeing New York when the ill fated twin towers were still under construction; visiting Canada where Dad demonstrated how NOT to ski; Australia where we saw black swans and Dad got attacked by a parrot in the Seamans Mission! We visited South Africa where we travelled up Table Mountain in Cape Town ; witnessed the evils of apartheid, something that really horrified us and Mum celebrated leaving Durban with a monumental bout of "Mal de Mer" We also saw giant moths and sea snakes in India; sailed up the River Plate in Argentina and saw people living along the banks of the river in appauling squalor and poverty. We encountered King Neptune twice, as we had forgotten our certificates which would normally allow us free passage over the Equator.(Thanks for reminding us Dad)

The time at sea was spent reading anything and everything and doing schoolwork. We self tutored mostly, with Mum, Dad and the younger Officers helping out

especially with our Maths. We kept a daily diary, wrote poetry and stories, carried out projects and even kept up our French. We always returned to school ahead of our peers and, because we could fit back in and keep up with our year group, we were able to continue to go away on the ships even when we were in secondary school

Our extended travels came to an end when I began to study for O levels. I passed 12, gained my A levels and a B.Sc here in Manchester. I worked as a speech and language therapist for three years , married Clive and have two daughters -Laura 15 and Hannah 12. I now work in a local primary school with children with special needs.

Seeing my own children grow up ,I realise how unconventional my own childhood was. Dad away for many months at a time then being together , all four of us for 24 hours a day on the ships. It made us all very close -especially Debbie and I- and gave us a certain confidence with people and a different perspective on life.

Just two final ponts I'd like to make. Having crossed the International Date Line a number of times and "lost" a day here and there I'm sure I'm not 40 yet ! Also my dear old Dad finally becomes an "Ancient Mariner" on May 10th 2002 when he attains the ripe old age of 70!! (Revenge is sweet!!)

SEA LIFE

m.v. "Tacoma City" Hirohara 13/09/1975.

By Susan Cann. Aged 13 years

As this is my last trip to sea with my parents and because I hold the disgraceful position of being the only "Cann" not to have contributed to the Newsletter, I thought I would like to write a little bit about "Sea Life"

I have been fortunate enough to do five voyages with my parents and my sister, beginning with a four and a half month voyage on the m.v. "Wilkawa" when I was seven and a half and my sister six. We joined the ship in Norfolk, Virginia with the Engineer Officers (my father who was Chief Officer had flown out six weeks previously). We had our first taste of flying and the weather could not have been worse!

Our first trip was a trip to be remembered indeed. We had Christmas on board and the Officers bought my sister and me what seemed to be a whole department store! The Electrician dresses up as Santa Claus and phoned the Captains room from the bridge to speak to us! He came down in a costume held together with staples (the Engineers equivalent to boiler suit buttons) and, complete with cotton wool covered wellies and a "Ho,Ho,Ho, gave my sister and me our presents! That Christmas will always stick in my mind as one of, if not the happiest one I have known. My birthday too was one to remember , with a

three tiered cake and a card signed by all the Officers which I still have. We hardly spent any time in our own cabin but were in the Smokeroom with the boys, or on the bridge with our parents or the Second Mate. The boys were fantastic and the three Cadets whom everyone called "Gonk", "Squif" and "Ozzy" spent hours reading to us and playing games , as did everyone. The Chief Engineer and Second Engineer , once a day whilst we were at sea would play Ludo with us . We had no time to be bored at all and we did not get sea sick- that is to say that 75% of the family did'nt. (Mum was a different matter!)

The next trip was the m.v. "Welsh City. We joined in Grangemouth the day after Boxing Day 1970. That trip was really the best in the way of ports of call. We went to Canada, East coast of America. South Africa and Australia. We had three wonderful days in New York, visiting the Empire State building. The United Nations, Statue of Liberty and Rockerfeller Centre.

On the "Welsh City" we "Crossed the Line" (or the Equator as some call it) There were about five of us to be "done". A Junior Engineer called Jack, one of the Cadets called Peter , Mum, my sister and myself. We were petrified and Mummy didn't trust anyone so stitched herself up in one of Dads boilersuits!! Peter was really dressed for the occasion with Arrowheads on his shirt and a fender round his ankle! The Chief Officer (who has since been promoted to Master, Ian Crawford) was King Neptune and our Radio Officer was Neptunes daughter. For which he got many wolf whistles. He shall remain nameless for obvious reasons!! My sister and I were so frightened we got off with just a good soaking from the hosepipe.

I again had a wonderful birthday at sea. My birthdays at sea always seem to stick in my memory because they are so different from birthdays on land.

Our third trip was aboard the m.v. "New Westminster City". We had two months in drydock in beautiful Amsterdam and we had Christmas and my birthday in port. Both occasions were very happy but the one that really sticks in my mind was my birthday. That one went with a bang especially when our Deck Cadet blew too much air into a ballon! We had a wonderful voyage and visited some great and some not so great places.

Our fourth voyage was on the m.v. "Tacoma City" and we went to some wonderful ports. My favourite was Victoria on Vancouver Island. We spent six days there and became very friendly with a Customs Officer and his wife. We were driven to the famous Butchart Gardens which was absolutely beautiful (even in the pouring rain from beneath umbrellas on a Sunday afternoon)

On this trip we had several barbecues including one on my sisters birthday which was a great success and another one which took place in the smokeroom (the eating anyway) This was not planned but there was a cloud burst which entailed a giant sized scatter!!

We once again crossed the line and we had to be done again as we had not got our certificates with us Believe me, the first thing we packed for this current trip was our certificates!

Our fifth and final voyage is aboard the m.v. "Tacoma City" again. My mother and sister have both had their birthdays . We have been persued by typhoons and been caught up with, been to good and bad ports but most of them new to me and our last voyage has been very educational.

I love the sea and will miss being with my family on ships- but my schooling is important now.

Even if I don't pass my O levels I have learnt more in the past five years about drafts, sextants, compasses, propellors, ballast, anchors, charts, sights, bearings, pistons and, more than that, about people, than any school could have taught me.

During five years of sea life, I have made many friends and been very happy. Unfortunately, many of the people we have sailed with have left the Company- but I would like to thank those of you who do remain for making the past five years some of the happiest in my life.

"SHIPMATES" MEMORY BOOK OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Tony has now received well over 300 photographs from 28 members and has started putting the book together. He has received a number of good ship pictures in addition to "people" pictures so the book will be a good mix of both. His intention is to have most of the book done in time for the reunion and to get the printing done shortly thereafter. He would however, still like more people to be involved with the book and is again requesting photos to be sent to him by those sitting on their hands. Don't think it's too late when you receive this newsletter - send them off now - it's your last chance to be involved!

Tony is also looking to produce a Reardon Smith 2003 calendar in time for the reunion. He may well use some of the ship photographs sent to him for the book in the calendar. He will assume that all members who have sent photos will be happy with that, but if anyone doesn't want him to use any of their photos in a calendar please drop him a line.

If you still got some photographs to send to Tony and in case you have mislaid his addressd its:- Capt T Crowther, P.O Box 96045, 3080-11666 Stevsoson Hwy, Richmond, B.C.V7A514, CANADA.