



SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.31 June 2004.

**This edition is dedicated to the "BRAD" SHIPS of the
LEEDS SHIPPING CO., LTD.
(SIR WILLIAM REARDON SMITH & SONS CO.,LTD.)**

In 1919 the newly formed Leeds Shipping Co. Ltd. (RSL) purchased from the British Shipping Controller three war time built standard steamers built in 1918, namely the "WAR CASTLE" of 5,685 GRT, "WAR PANTHER" of 5,186 GRT and "WAR VULTURE" of 5,204 GRT. These ships were renamed "BRADCLYDE", "BRADBOYNE" and "BRADAVON" respectively. These ships were the first in the Reardon Smith fleet to have a single name with the prefix "BRAD".

Unfortunately the "BRADBOYNE" was to serve in the fleet for only a matter of months. Late January of 1920 found her loading a full cargo of grain in the Hudson River for Dunkerque. On sailing New York she encountered a North Atlantic that was in turmoil, the weather conditions unabated with storm force winds with very rough seas and a very heavy swell. In such conditions she rolled and pitched heavily and shipped heavy water. On the 6th February she suffered a shift of cargo and a heavy list developed endangering the ship and the lives of her crew. The Master realizing the peril his ship was in and that she could not be saved ordered the radio officer to transmit an SOS and requested immediate assistance from ships in the vicinity. The first ship to arrive and render assistance was the S.S. "OXONIAN" her Master appreciating the dire peril that the crew of the "Bradboyne" were in, ordered two of his lifeboats to be launched. On the return trip of the lifeboats, one boat capsized, sadly some of the crew of the "Bradboyne" along with the gallant lifeboat crew of the "Oxonian" perished in the terrible conditions. The lifeboat crew gave their lives in the finest tradition of the sea, endeavouring to save the lives of fellow seamen in peril.

The S.S. "ATLANTIC CITY" of 4,707 GRT., built in 1912 for the RSL Group was transferred in 1920 to the Leeds Shipping Co., Ltd. and re-named the "BRADBURN". She served in the fleet until 1929 when she was sold to another Cardiff tramp ship-owner for further trading. She survived until November 1950 when the vessel was wrecked near Cape Vilano.

The afore mentioned "Bradclyde" served the line until 1934 when she was sold to another Cardiff tramp ship owner for further trading. Eventually, in March of 1953 her life ended, as most ships do in the ship breaker's yard, in her case that of T.W. Ward at Briton Ferry.

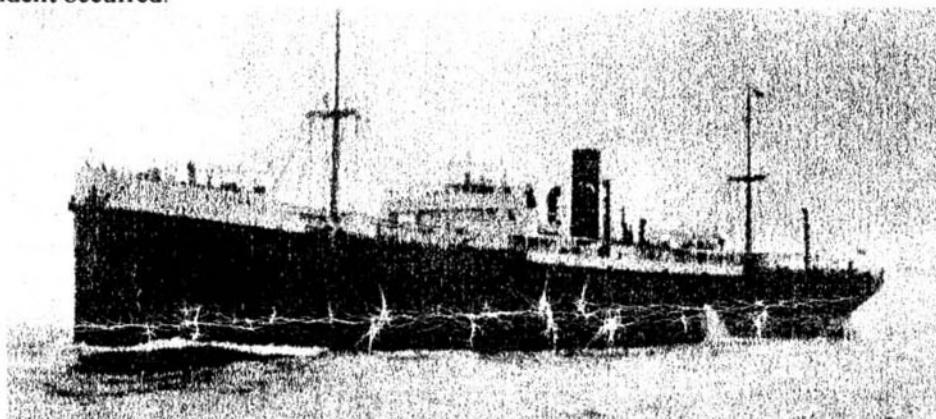
The "Bradavon" was sold in 1933 to a well known Japanese ship owner. She survived under the Japanese flag until March of 1944 when she was sighted East of Mindanao by an America submarine who torpedoed her. She sank in position Lat. 5.5 degrees N. Long. 125.6 degrees E.

In 1926 the Leeds Shipping Co. Ltd. (RSL), placed an order with ship builders Napier and Miller of Glasgow for two steamers, identical sister ships of the three island type, to be built to Reardon Smith's specifications. They were both delivered in 1927 and named "BRADDOVEY" of 3,359 GRT and the "BRADESK" of 3,353 GRT.

These two ships were frequently employed on the West Indian /USA sugar trade. Usually loading in Cuban ports for USA East Coast ports, principally New York. The "Braddovey" was disposed of to Turkish interests in 1938. She continued to trade until March 1944 when she was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine off the Turkish coast. In 1936 the "Braddesk" was sold to a Finnish shipping company, she survived WW2 and at the end of hostilities she was taken as a prize by the U.S.S.R.

S.S. "BRADFYNE" of 4,740 GRT Built to Reardon Smith's specification in 1928 by the well known ship builders William Grey and Co. Ltd. of West Hartlepool for the Leeds Shipping Co. Ltd. Prior to WW2 she traded successfully, tramping all over the world. However she became a casualty of war when sailing in a North Atlantic convoy loaded with a full cargo of steel was torpedoed and sunk by the German U100 on the 22nd Nov. 1940 in position Lat. 55.1 N., Long. 12.2 W. to the South of Rockall. The Master, Captain Vanner and 38 of his crew perished in the cold waters of the North Atlantic, there were only 4 survivors.

S.S. "BRADGLEN" GRT 4,741 Built in 1930 by William Grey and Co., Ltd of West Hartlepool for the Leeds Shipping Co. Ltd., to the same specifications and in the same shipyard and as her sister ship the S.S. "Bradfyne". A ship suitable for word wide tramping and on occasion when time chartered to liner companies for general cargo. She too became a war casualty on the 19th September 1941, when under the command of Captain Lawday, having loaded naval equipment and general cargo in the USA for London she was mined in the Thames Estuary near Barrow Deep. Of the crew, sadly 9 lost their lives. The survivors, including the master, Captain Lawday were picked up by the destroyer HMS "Vivian" who was near by when the incident occurred.



S.S "BRADGLEN On pre-delivery sea trials, North Sea 1930)

S.S. "BRADBURN"(2) of 4,736 GRT Built in 1930 by William Grey and Co. Ltd. of West Hartlepool for the Leeds Shipping Co., Ltd. in the same yard as her sister ships the "Bradglen" and "Bradfyne". Like her sister ships she was a successful general purpose vessel suitable for trading all over the world. In peace she was a profitable and valid unit of a successful company. During the 6 years of W.W.2. she fortunately suffered no enemy damage.

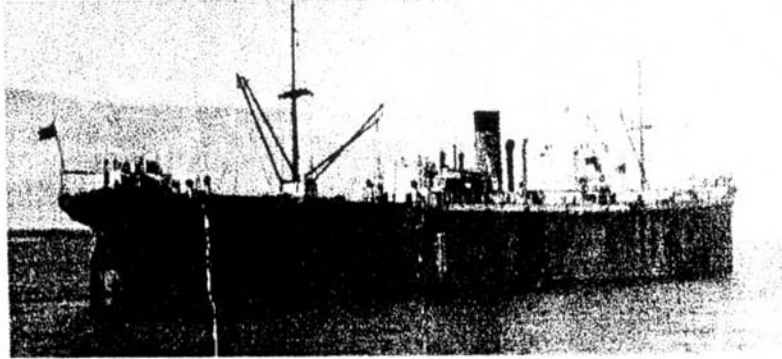
However, October of 1944 found her loading a full cargo of wheat at Albany and Poughkeepsie on the Hudson River for Barry Dock, at the time she was under the command of Captain V.C. Hornsby, the Ch.. Engineer was Wm. Willis and Ch. Officer D. Young. On her departure from New York she joined up with an East bound Atlantic convoy. She was positioned in about the centre of the convoy, astern of an elderly coal burning Greek vessel which each watch, as is usual for a coal burner had to clean furnaces, resulting in a reduction of speed. One morning the Greek not only slowed but slewed ninety degrees, as a result of this the "Bradburn" collided with her and suffered severe damage to her stem bar and adjacent plating.

She arrived Barry Dock on the 2nd November and berthed at Ranks Flour Mill, on completion of discharge she shifted into the Barry Graving Dock to repair the afore mentioned collision damage. The attending Superintendent was Mr. T. Major (Snr.) a popular, respected and friendly gentleman. November and December were particularly cold with very heavy frosts, and even though the deck steam pipes were drained at the end of each working day, pipes did freeze up at bends requiring the defrosting with small fires before the start of the working day. Christmas Day was quietly spent in the dry dock, the roar of riveting having ceased for Christmas and Boxing Day. Repairs were completed on 9th January, 1945 after which she sailed in ballast and joined a west bound North Atlantic convoy for St. Johns, Newfoundland en route to Port-aux Basque, to load rolls of newsprint paper for Manchester.

Towards the end of January 1945, whilst on passage, escorted by HMCN Frigate, from St. Johns, Newfoundland to Sydney Cape Breton to await favourable ice conditions to enter Port -aux-Basque she had a very close encounter with a rather large iceberg. The incident occurred at 0050 hours on a calm night, with

bright moonlight and mist patches, in the prevailing conditions the visibility was hard to judge. An Iceberg was sighted close ahead and at the same time the Frigate also sighted the iceberg and sounded the alarm signal on her siren. The "Bradburn's" helm was put hard a starboard, she was fitted with rod and chain steering and the noise from the bevel gearing over the Masters cabin brought him immediately to the bridge, he found the iceberg to port with the ship clearing and standing into safety. Fortunately, a "titanic" incident had been avoided. It is indeed rare to find a large iceberg in that location in January..

A few years after the end of the war the ship underwent extensive modernisation to the bridge and officers accommodation and a deck house was constructed on the after-end of the boat deck for the apprentices with cabins, messroom and bathroom facilities. The deck and engine ratings accommodation was under the fore-castle head and as far as possible this was improved and made more comfortable.. The photograph below was taken in Port Churchill, Hudson Bay shortly after the modernisation.



She remained in the company until 1951 when she was sold to Taiheiyo Kaiun K.K. and renamed "Kaiyo Maru", the vessel continued trading until 1967 when at the age of 37 she was sold for scrap and was broken up by Japanese ship-breakers
O.J.T.L

6th June, 1944 -----"D" DAY

Sixty years ago, at daybreak on the 6th June, 1944 the largest armada that the world had ever seen, or will ever see again, arrived off the beaches of Normandy, the "Liberation of Europe" had commenced. The might of the USA and Great Britain, along with their allies had arrived. In the darkness of the early hours mine sweepers had been sweeping off the beaches and in the early light Infantry and Tank landing craft were disembarking troops and tanks on the beaches, the British landing beaches code named Gold, Juno and Sword and the USA landing beaches were code named Utah and Omaha. The assault fleet itself comprised of 1,213 ships, including 300 warships. The massive scale of the undertaking required overall a transport fleet of 4,126 vessels.

Involved in the operations were 7 ships of the Reardon Smith Line.-

S.S. "Imperial Valley" 4,573 GRT, Built 1924. M.V. "Bradford City" 7,266 GRT, Built 1943.
M.V. "Houston City" 7,262 GRT, Built 1942 (**Designated MT86**).
S.S. "Indian City" 7,079 GRT, Built 1944. S.S. "Dallas City" 7,079 GRT, Built 1944..
S.S. "Fort Norfolk" 7,131 GRT, Built 1943. (Managed) Mined and sunk off beachhead. 8 crew killed
S.S. "Ensigne Marie Saint-Germain" GRT 3,139 Built 1923 (Managed)

The crews of vessels so engaged all signed "Liberation of Europe" Articles

The **MT86**, under the command of Captain Blake Carnaffan., sailed from the Thames Estuary on the late evening of the 5th June, 1944 having loaded at Tilbury military equipment and 600 troops for the Juno Beachhead, arriving there sunset on the 6th June. On completion of disembarking troops and discharge of her military cargo at the Beach Head she embarked walking wounded for repatriation. She performed 6 round trips to the Beach Heads from the Thames, loading and embarking troops at either Tilbury or Royal Docks

Having completed my apprenticeship I left the "Houston City" at Tilbury at the end of July 1944 on her return from the 6th trip to the Beach Heads. . (O.J.T.L.)

OBITUARIES

Mr Charles Robert (Bob) Chatterton who was Chairman of the Reardon Smith Group from 1970 until the company went into liquidation in 1985 crossed the bar on 3rd March 2004 aged 90. His funeral was held at St Nicholas Church, St Nicholas, Vale of Glamorgan on the 15th March. He was born and bred in Cardiff and Penarth and, after studying accountancy, joined RSL in December 1929 as a junior accountant. He became Assistant Company Secretary in 1961, Financial Director and Company Secretary in 1963 and Chairman in 1970. Bob served in the company for 55 years.

Bob joined the Territorial Army in 1937 and on the outbreak of war briefly served in the Welsh Regiment. He obtained his commission and rose to the rank of Major. He was transferred to the 34th Regiment R.A.T.A. as a Battery Captain, serving with them in Belgium and Holland being twice mentioned in Dispatches.

During his lifetime Bob was also Chairman of the Horton & Port Eynon Lifeboat Committee, Chairman of the Cardiff Station of The Missions to Seamen a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights, London. He joined the Board of the Commercial Bank of Wales in 1970 also served as the Chairman of the local British Transport Dock Board also governor of the South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education where this institute had a Marine Studies Department.

Following the demise of the RSL in 1985 Bob became the part-time Chairman of Cardiff Ship Management before retiring in 1988.

Bob is survived by his son and daughter. Our condolences are extended to his family.

Bob was not a member of "Shipmates".

It is with great sadness that I inform you that, our member, Mrs Helen Young Grant crossed the bar on Friday 12th March 2004 at the age of 62.

Helen was the dearly beloved wife of David Grant, an Electrical Officer, who served with Reardon Smith for many years and lived in Lossiemouth.

Many members will remember that Helen was at the Reardon Smith Seafarers Reunion at Ockbrook in September 2002 and I enjoyed her telling me of her experiences when she voyaged on one of the RSL ships.

On behalf of our members I sent a sympathy card to David and his family. A great loss to husband David, children Fiona, Iain and Yvonne, sons-in-law David and Peter and daughter-in-law Deborah. Helen was also a much loved grandmother to Stuart, Emma, Nathan, Jason and Louise.

I thank our member Fred Taylor for sending me the information about Mrs Grant.

The First Command
m.v. "Prince Rupert City"

I had been meaning to write this article for a long time but like many of us, there never seemed to be quite enough time to get it done. I have just received the sad news of the passing of the last Chairman of the Line, Mr. Bob Chatterton.

This article then, is my small tribute to Mr. Chatterton, whose influence on my own career was as great as that of Captain Lionel Ford, described in detail in an earlier article.

On the 15th July 1971, at Rotterdam, I joined the 27,018 gross tons geared bulk carrier m.v. "Indian City" The vessel was built in 1967 at Fairfield's Yard, Glasgow and for the forthcoming voyage would be sailing under the command of Captain, later Commodore, Mark Higgins. We sailed on the 16th July, in ballast, for Tubarao, Brazil to load about 42,000 tons of iron ore for discharge at Antwerp. I served as Mate on the vessel.

The voyage to Brazil and the loading of the cargo proceeded without incident except we had the usual argy-bargy with the Brazilian stevedores who were quite prepared to pour iron ore into the ship at a rate in excess of 12,000 tons per hour. We managed to get our way, but still had to endure a loading rate of over 4,000 tons per hour.

Homeward bound, Captain Higgins received a cable from the Cardiff office, which he showed me. I have never forgotten the words. "Intend promoting Boyer on return UK/Cont. end present voyage stop please instruct him in Master's duties – message ends"

So there it was, the culmination of every deck officers' ambition – Command.

After our arrival in Antwerp on the 23rd August I was paid off and received instructions from the attending super that I was required to attend the Cardiff office by 0900 hours the day after I arrived home.

On about the 25th August 2001, I presented myself at the front desk at Devonshire House and was directed up to the Chairman's office. There I was met by Pam Ward who settled my nerves and ushered me into Mr. Chatterton's office. The Chairman asked me to sit with him while he explained that he was re-introducing a system that had lapsed for many years. All deck officers, who were in line for command would, in the future, be personally appointed as Master by the Chairman of the Line himself.

Mr. Chatterton explained that he felt that such appointments were very significant steps in the careers of the officers concerned and in the life of the Company and he felt that such appointments should be marked more formally by the personal action of the Chairman of the Board.

So, shortly before 1100 hours that morning the Directors of the Board all arrived in the Mr. Chatterton's office and he made a formal announcement that "as of 11 o'clock today, the 25th August 1971, Captain Boyer is hereby appointed Master in the service of Sir

William Reardon Smith & Sons Ltd., the Reardon Smith Line Ltd. and the Leeds Shipping Co. Ltd.”

It was for me one of those magic moments of my life and one I have never forgotten.

Before I left the Chairman, he told me that I should always remember that I had enormous back-up in Head Office and that if I had any problems when away on board ship, I should not hesitate to approach him or any of the Directors or Department heads who would do anything they could to help. I found all his advice to be very reassuring.

Then I was sent off to the various departments in Head Office to be briefed and it was funny but every one I met called me Captain Boyer, as though the memo announcing my elevation to the peerage had just preceded my arrival at each office floor.

Everyone was very pleasant and helpful and it would be difficult to single out any one person or department that impressed me more than the others. Except just one that is. A gentleman who was introduced to me as Oliver John looked me carefully up and down and I got the distinct impression that he did not quite approve of Masters in general and me in particular.

“ My name is Oliver John and I am the one who will twist your tail,” he said and over the following 14 years serving as Master in RSL ships until the Company ceased trading in 1985, letters with the initials OJ/SB at the head under the date always raised the hairs on the back of my neck. The content was usually a bind about expenses!

After the Line ceased trading in May 1985, I continued serving as Master in the TMM vessels managed by Cardiff Ship Management until December 1993, when I decided that the game was no longer worth the candle as far as being Master was concerned and took early retirement. My connection with the sea continued however as I trained and studied for a year and then presented myself to the Elder Brethren of Trinity House London, for examination. I was successful and was duly licensed as a Deep-Sea and Coastal Pilot on the 1st November 1994.

I served as a pilot until I was offered the position as Chief Surveyor for a well-known P. and I. Club.

After a very interesting and enjoyable five years doing my bit to deny PandI cover to the owners/managers of sub-standard vessels, I spent the last two years of my working life as consultant surveyor and expert witness to a consortium of marine lawyers and insurers based in the City of London

As you always remember your first trip to sea, my first voyage in command remains as vivid a memory today as when it took place 33 years ago.

Following my moment of glory in Head Office, I very quickly received my sailing orders. To travel to Iraq with a number of other officers and three accompanying wives and join

the m.v. "Prince Rupert City" which was lying at anchor off the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab river awaiting a berth in Basrah. The letter from Mr. Bissett advised that we would join the vessel at about 1700 hours on the 7th September 1971. There I would relieve Captain Joe Thornhill of command and wait on the charterer's pleasure.

The trip out to the ship turned out to be an unusual and exciting journey. We assembled at Heathrow on the 6th September and boarded an Iraqi Airways jumbo jet for the flight to Baghdad.

In my party, I had Mr. M.E. (Mike) Jones as Mate, Mr. Brian Richardson, 2nd Mate, Mr. Paul Hames, 3rd Mate, Mr. Paul (Spickle) Bidmead R/O, Mr. Mike Ridley, Chief Engineer with his wife, Judith, Mr. Rod Binns, 2nd Engineer with his wife, Dorothy, Mr. Pat Silcock, 3rd Engineer, Mr. Colin Hughes, 4th Engineer, a junior engineer, cannot remember the name, Mr. Kenny Hampton, Electrician, with his wife, Theresa, one or two deck apprentices and Mr. Keith Llewellyn, Chief Steward.

We arrived at Baghdad on time, spent the night in a pleasant hotel and next morning took the early flight to Basrah. On our arrival at Basrah, we were met at the airport by a driver with a boy assistant and a Mercedes 25 seater bus, which was going to take us to the river port of Al-Fao at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab. There we would transfer to a motor launch for the final 20 miles out to the general ship anchorage.

The coach took off with all our luggage on its roof. For the first five miles or so, we traveled fast along a fine tarmac road, which ended suddenly as though a line had been drawn in the sand. From there on, until our final arrival at Al-Fao some eight hours later, we traveled across the desert up and down sand dunes, always keeping the line of date palms in sight on our port side. That was the river.

The temperature inside the bus rose to uncomfortable levels aggravated considerably by Pat Silcock's intestinal workings, which made the opening of the bus windows a matter of survival. But the opening of the said windows allowed hot blinding sand to blow into the bus together with numerous biting sandflies.

After about 4 hours of such torment, I asked the driver, if there was any chance of a drink? The driver nodded and we swerved off to the left. "Crikey" I thought, "He's taking us to the river for a drink!" But no, the bus lurched up onto a rough track and shortly afterwards we passed a sign which said "Welcome to Salina. Please drive carefully." We could have been driving into an English country village !!

A little further on, we came to a hut or rather a roof standing on 4 legs, underneath which stood a large General Electric fridge, chugging away, powered by a small diesel generator. Inside, we found it stacked with ice cold bottles of Pepsi Cola. A water tap nearby provided us the chance to have a quick wash.

Adequately refreshed and with Silcock's bowels at last in a state of grace, we carried on our epic journey. Sometimes we had to get out and walk up the sand dune as the bus

laboured its way to the top. We also saw a number of wrecked locomotives lying half-buried in the drifting sands. They looked like they had been there a real long time. Did Lawrence have battles with the Turks in the southern deserts of Mesopotamia?

Within a hour or two we began to see signs of habitation and apart from a near miss when we just avoided being swallowed up by salt marsh quicksands, we arrived safely at the offices of Iraqi Maritime Transport, the ship's agents at Al-Fao. A welcome greeted us as we came into the cool high room with three large ceiling fans rotating above us. Laid out on a long table were bowls of water, wash flannels and plates of sliced watermelon. The Iraqi staff treated us with great respect and courtesy, behavior that I found the whole time I spent in Iraq both on this visit and on further visits in the future..

After we were all refreshed and given an opportunity to change into some fresh clothes, we boarded a large Russian built air-conditioned launch and were transported at great speed to our home for the next 6 months or so.

We boarded the "Prince Rupert City" at a little after 1730 hours a mere half hour later than the time given me by the Personnel Department. Not bad considering our desert travels.

After a short handover Captain Thornhill left the vessel together with his Mate, Brian Jones, Chief Engineer Len Taylor together with the other outgoing officers. Their journey back through the desert by night was not to be without incident. Captain Thornhill and Len Taylor were provided with a car while the remainder of the officers used our bus. Halfway across the desert in pitch darkness, the car conked out and Joe and Len had to sit there watching, as in the far distance, the headlights of the bus weaved around. No doubt they had their fingers crossed that the bus would pass close enough to see them so that they could bum a lift as it were.

I understand their adventures continued when they reached the tarmac section of the road to Basrah. The bus managed to run right up the chuff of a cart being hauled by a camel.

Our time at anchor waiting for a berth to discharge the ship's cargo of Canadian grain extended into many weeks. More than 60 ships were waiting in the anchorage, including our sister vessel, the "Vancouver City", Captain Jake Vaughan in command. We finally were sent to Umm Qasr to lighten our draft by a part discharge and finally after more than two months berthed at an upriver berth in Basrah.

The "Vancouver City" was allocated a berth at the grain elevator but her discharge although faster than ours was slow. Captain Vaughan and I would make daily visits together to the local agents to find out if discharge could be speeded up and to check whether any crew mail from home had arrived. We would go ashore in full tropical uniform, long white trousers, white shirts and shoes and uniform hats and badges of rank. Our appearance at the agent's office was always greeted with great respect and whoever was already sitting in the Manager's office was turfed out to make room for the two British captains!

I noticed that on most of those visits, those being turfed out were usually slab faced Russians. Needless to say, the Ruskies were dressed like tramps.

I received a daily visit from the Iraqi secret police. How did I know they were the secret police? Well, they told me they were. I asked them how they could be secret police if they told everyone they were. Big smiles all round. They took their usual daily bribe of 200 Marlboro and a case of beer, but I had no trouble from them and they also delivered the crew mail to the dock office for us to collect.

Because the cargo had been in the ship far longer than is usual, insect infestation was very prevalent. All the insect eggs which came on board with the cargo in Canada had had ample time and ideal conditions to hatch out and when the ship's hatch-covers were rolled back each day, the top of the grain looked alive with creepy-crawlies.

The Iraqi receivers were not too happy about the insect infestation but were prepared to accept the whole cargo provided I signed a document admitting the cargo was insect infected. I refused to sign such an admission and took my Chairman's advice and contacted Cardiff for assistance, since the Iraqi receiver had threatened to arrest my ship. Head office management department arranged for me to speak to the London correspondents of the Company's Protection and Indemnity Association. The Iraqi supervisor kindly allowed me to use his telephone at home although he did warn me that all calls to numbers outside Iraq were 'bugged'

The U.K. PandI Club in the person of a senior claims manager advised me to sign the document thus avoiding detention and they would contest any future claim against the Owners in respect of the insect problem.

Towards the end of our discharge but with no definite completion date in sight, I received a message from Cardiff asking me to estimate how much fuel and diesel oil I would have on board on completion of discharge and prior to sailing from Basrah. I replied along the lines that fuel oil would be some hundreds of tonnes but diesel oil would be in the worst case, empty tanks.

I received a wonderful response from Captain Lemon along the lines that my reply giving the nil estimate of diesel had in his words "caused much head scratching in the Operations Department," and he went on to remind me that "as Master, I was expected to show more than ordinary common sense, as well as having a crystal ball on my shoulder."

I have kept that letter to this day.

Four months after arriving on board the "Prince Rupert City", we finally sailed from Basrah. The ship's underwater shell plating was badly fouled by heavy marine growth due to the long period stationary in tropical waters and we were ordered to Singapore for dry-docking. That done, we received orders to load a grain cargo ex US West Coast for Japan and after nearly six months, my first voyage as Master came to an end when I returned home on leave from Kobe, Japan.

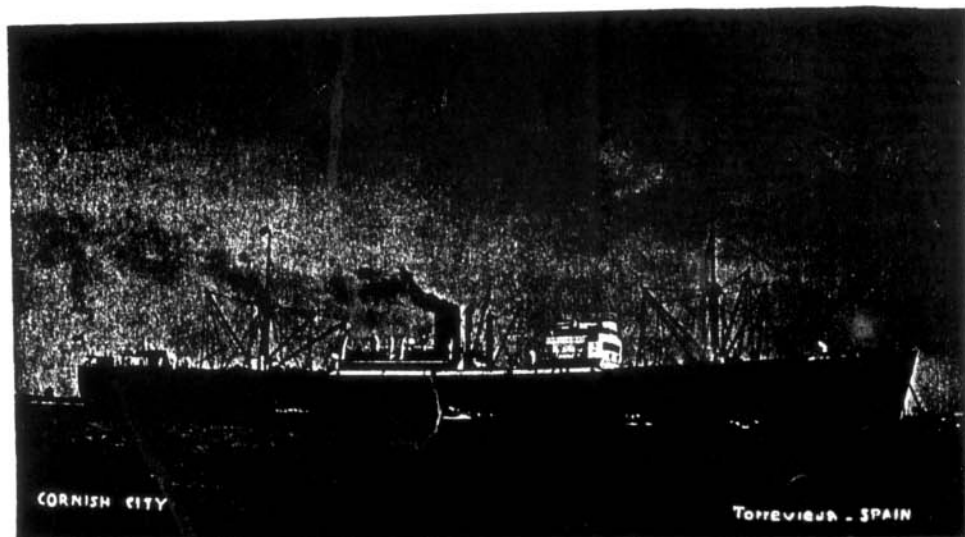
In Cardiff, for an end of voyage debrief I again met Mr. Chatterton who complimented me on a successful voyage and confirmed that the Company had received the full amount of demurrage that had accrued due to the "Prince Rupert City's" long delay in Iraq and that there had been only a nominal claim against the ship in respect of the bugs in the cargo.

I will always remember with great respect the kind assistance and reassurance our Chairman gave this rather nervous first trip Master and this help was always made available during all my time in the Reardon Smith Line. I am greatly saddened that Bob Chatterton has finally 'crossed the Bar' and will always remember him.

Captain Bryan A. Boyer M.N.I.

"Salt in the Wound"

Colin White tells his story of his apprenticeship with Reardon Smith while serving on the M.V. "Cornish City" (4) and at the time when the S.S. "Paris City" (2) was aground at Torre Vieja, Spain, April 1951.



11
One last trip

When I did my last trip with RSL in 1976, after serving in both the Royal and Merchant Navies, I felt sure that my seagoing career was over. I still remained in very close contact, however, working for British Telecom Maritime Radio Services at Portishead Radio, a name familiar to all seafarers. In 1986, the service entered the first of many manpower reductions, brought about by a number of factors not the least of which was the demise of the British flagged shipping. I was then on detachment at North Foreland Radio in Kent, and took the opportunity to volunteer for redundancy. Some eighteen months working for an insurance company followed, but I never really came to terms with this, and late in 1988 I successfully applied to join GCHQ as a Radio Officer. Security vetting was (and still is) stringent and time consuming, and having already resigned, I faced a gap of some six or seven months before I could take up employment. Luckily, working at shore radio stations ensured that my seagoing ticket remained valid, although almost 'timed out'. I had also done the odd trip on B.T. Cablesips, and so, if a little rusty, wasn't entirely out of touch. A few phone calls and filled applications brought an invitation one September day from Denholm Ship Management of Glasgow to attend an interview. Included was an air ticket. It seemed the interview might be a formality when I was asked to pack for six months, with a view to joining a vessel arriving shortly in Hull! I had already posted my M.P.G. Certificate by registered mail, and a brief but very pleasant interview with an Engineering Superintendent (doubling I guess as a Radio Super.) saw me presented with a Bahamian Certificate, a rail ticket, and the details of the Hull agent. I was to join a chemical tanker, the m.v. *Blue Bird*, at that very moment under pilotage in the Humber. 'Oh, by the way', I was advised as I took my leave, 'she's not very big, only a couple of thousand tons or so. The old man's a Yorkie, but he's O.K. and they all seem to get on well, all twelve of them.' I thought he was joking.

The Hull agent picked me up, and after a drive to the farthest reaches of the Humber, and a tanker jetty I got my first view of the ship. She was certainly small, but not unattractive although her blue hull was heavily streaked with rust. The Sparks I relieved had little good to say, however, pronouncing her 'a little pig of a boat' and expressing the hope that I was a good sailor. The Mate later told me he was prone to seasickness having never before sailed on anything less than 150,000 tons and couldn't wait to pay off. Within a short time of my arrival *Blue Bird* sailed in ballast, into the teeth of a southerly gale, for Rotterdam to load a mixed cargo of chemicals for the Mediterranean. The movement was interesting to say the least, but this was the one and only tanker I ever sailed on, and I soon discovered that, small as she was, the ship had a good 'feel' when laden.

Blue Bird was built in 1980 in the West German yard of Krogerwerft Rendsburg for German owners as the *Chemtrans Explorer*. In 1983 she was 'jumboised' to a net tonnage of 2,401 and 3,600 deadweight, so she could not have been too big when constructed. She was powered by a four stroke, single acting 8 cylinder MAK diesel engine developing 2206 Kw at 600 rpm. Generators and auxiliary machinery were all German, and she had sixteen cargo tanks (8 port, 8 starboard) with a total capacity of 3663 cubic metres. As *Chemtrans Explorer* she was registered in Hamburg with a radio callsign of DAET until 1987 when sold. Her ownership and management then became complex, but all too typical of shipping at the time. She was owned by Danish interests (rumour had it that this was a private venture by a director of A.P. Moller - Maersk shipping), and managed by Denholm Hong Kong via their subsidiary office in Aberdeen, which was responsible, with the Glasgow office, for manning. She sailed under the Bahamian flag, was registered in Nassau, and when I joined was chartered to a Portuguese shipping line with an office in New York. Under the German flag, she was crewed by 15 Officers and 7 Ratings (combined deck and engine room). Manning now was pared to the bone. *Blue Bird* sailed with a Master, Second and Third Mates, Chief, Second and Third Engineers, a Radio Officer, a Cook/Steward and Four Ratings. She was, of course, UMS.

This was certainly a fascinating mixture. The Master was indeed a Yorkshireman, from Hull whose large red beard and equal frame reminded me instantly of Hagar the Horrible. He was, however, good to sail with. Like the Chief Engineer, his career had seen better days with both B.P and Texaco. It is a measure of just how big those companies were in the seventies that although both had sailed at the same time in these fleets, their paths had never crossed. The Mate was an Ulsterman who had spent several years with the P and O tanker fleet. The Second Mate, also from Northern Ireland, was ex Furness Withy. The Second and Third Engineers, both Geordies, had sailed on Dalgleish ships. The Third Mate was Indian, and paid not much more than the deck crew. If he knew this, he never resented it. All of us were paid in U.S. Dollars, which had a favourable exchange rate at the time.

The deck/engine crowd were all from deepest Ireland, and interesting to say the least. Like the cook/steward they were all ex Irish Shipping, and nearly all of them had been stranded in Singapore on a *Celtic Bulk Carrier* when that company went to the wall. They were fearsome drinkers, and wasted little time in clearing the gangway when as soon as we tied up. On more than one occasion, the Master had to negotiate their release from the local lock up prior to sailing, though they never gave the slightest trouble onboard. They gained some respect by never failing to turn to, despite the state they were in on return. Skeleton manning meant they had to work hard, and they did, sometimes beyond what was reasonable. On one occasion, arriving at Livorno in Italy a mooring rope fouled the bow thruster, a considerable problem for a ship that regularly moved in confined spaces. The old man and I watched in amazement, and not a little horror as, without prompting, one of the Irish stripped to his underpants and plunged into the freezing January water from the fo'c'sle armed with a large knife to clear the obstruction. He was quite content with a bottle of rum as reward having, in all probability, saved the owners a large sum.

Conditions were much more basic than we had ever been used to, although cabins and bedding were clean. All of us, Master included, were responsible for our own laundry and tidying. I never saw a single item of Merchant Navy uniform worn. Boiler suits for the engineers, and roll neck sweaters for the rest was the general theme. The food too was good. Although plain and simple in general, it was nourishing and there was plenty of it. You might have to help yourself though, if alongside, as Paddy the cook/steward was generally the first ashore. He never failed to leave the galley keys on a peg outside before leaving and, somewhat optimistically, a recipe book alongside the range.

Blue Bird was a busy ship radio wise. Voyages were never long, and there were several messages to exchange on arrival and departure and, indeed daily. Fortunately she was fitted with radiotelex, a new experience for me, although Morse was still frequently called for. The general pattern on sailing would be a range of cargo and admin messages for Denholms (via Portishead Radio), the Danish owners (via Lyngby Radio) and the charterers, with occasional contact required with stations such as Capetown, depending on a particular cargo. For a reason I never established, the charterers, despite receiving direct telexes from me, insisted in replying by cable through Lisbon and Chatham Radios, an expensive option for them, and one that required Morse contact. Fortunately, these were good stations to work, and the ship's call sign, C6CZ3 was familiar to both.

The radio equipment, all manufactured by the German company DEBEG, was a pleasure to use, and extremely reliable. I had few breakdowns to worry about, and none of these needed complex repairs. The two medium frequency transmitters were identical. Both could be switched to emergency batteries, and one was nominally designated the reserve. The H.F. transmitter, for radiotelex, telegraphy and telephone, was a DEBEG 7313, frequency synthesised 1 – 30Mhz, with an output of 400w, quite adequate for the service required. All transmitters tuned into one of two foldable whip aerials aft of the bridge. The two main receivers, and the M.F. transmitters, together with the autokey and autoalarm were console fitted, together with the telex equipment, a DEBEG 7902 with a Creed Teleprinter. We had the luxury of three VHF sets, two on the bridge and one in the radio room.

Unusually, to my great delight, and against all my expectations, I discovered soon after joining that I had no responsibility at all for electronic equipment outside the radio room. Indeed nobody had. Instead, I would be paid a lump sum bonus if I deigned to fix any major breakdowns. The radar and navigational equipment were, however, as reliable as the radio sets so I earned little money, apart from a nice little sum for fixing a relatively simple fault on one of the two Raytheon radars. I lacked any spares to fix the Magnavox Satellite Navigator when this developed a major fault in the middle of Biscay. We had come to rely on this and its failure caused some consternation among the deck officers, as dust was blown off sextants and navigational tables were turned out. I was quite pleased when the D.F. fixes I was asked to produce coincided closely with those of our navigational experts.

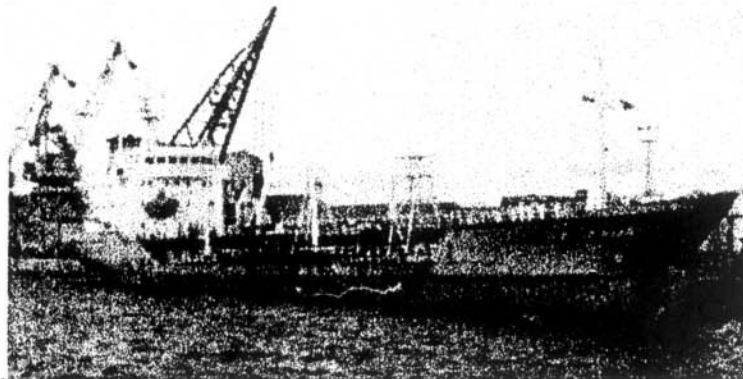
It was, in fact, rare to be out of the sight of land for very long. *Blue Bird* traded, in the main, between European and Mediterranean ports. The longest trip I can recall was Rotterdam to Naples. I lost count of the number of times we visited Rotterdam, never berthing at the same terminal twice. We carried a variety of chemical cargoes, usually ending with 'ate' or 'xene', and the vessel had the perpetual smell of something akin to nail varnish. I lost interest in the precise details after asking the Mate the properties of one particular variety and being told that if it went up we would burn with an attractive blue flame that would light up the sea for miles around and would probably be visible from outer space.U.K. ports visited during the six months I was aboard were Leith, Teesport (often), Thameshaven, and Swansea. Some time was, not surprisingly given the charter, spent on the Portuguese coast. Although built for carrying specialist chemical products, we did occasionally carry other cargoes, such as aviation

fuel and even marine diesel, something the Mate considered a waste of a good ship. Chances are if you holidayed near Faro in late 1988 we carried the aviation fuel that got you home.

Unlike larger tankers that usually berth miles from anywhere, *Blue Bird's* small size meant she often tied up to small terminals close to town. This was particularly true of ports like Antwerp, where we were able to negotiate the smallest canals, and often arrived in the suburbs. All this was a definite advantage in going ashore. The downside was that discharge and loading were usually completed in quick order, and it was usual to sail within 24-48 hours of arrival, depending on the terminal. All who could would take advantage of this brief period to go ashore. Christmas was one of the best I can remember at sea. We had sailed a few days before from a Norwegian fjord, all very wintry with the Northern Lights glowing, and arrived at Stade near Hamburg on Christmas Eve. Despite exhortations from the charterers, the terminal made it quite clear they were finishing work early, and that we would not be ready before Boxing Day. Paddy excelled himself in cooking Christmas dinner, despite being well under the influence, and the whole crew spent the rest of the evening and most of the night in the Master's cabin enjoying the festivities. New Year's Eve was a much quieter affair, and saw us yet again, at sea.

In February the Master paid off, and the Mate was promoted to take his place. As it turned out, this was the Mate's last trip too and he was pleased, even if briefly, to make the dizzy heights of Captain. We still exchange Christmas cards. His replacement was a Filipino on considerably less pay, a sign of things to come. It was almost time for me to go too, since GCHQ had processed my security clearance and were ready for me to start. Co-incidentally the time-charter finished and *Blue Bird* was immediately sold to German interests. Within days of my leaving, the ship was re-named *Multitrans Explorer* and registered in Burma. No longer under Denholms management, this was also the end for the British Officers, and the ship became Filipino crewed, a much more economical option for the owners.

I left the ship in mid March. This was the third time in my seagoing career I had paid off a ship in Lisbon. *Blue Bird* was berthed on the opposite side of the Tagus at a small jetty directly underneath the bridge, so I got a long backward view as the agent drove me to the airport. I must admit to not a little sadness, not only because I had greatly enjoyed this trip, but also because I knew for certain that this would be the last time anyone paid me to go to sea



M.S. "Blue Bird"

Our member Graham Griffiths writes to say that he now lives in Kerry, Nr. Newtown, Powys. Due to a health problem he has stepped down from his position with Golar LNG, at their London Office and now works from home on an advisory basis to the Frontline Group. Graham is now enjoying the lovely countryside and indulge his passion for model engineering.

"Shipmates" needs more short stories.

1 or 2 pages would do fine. Please send them to the Editor.

The Last Doxford??

When did you last sail with a Doxford ?

No doubt there are many ex RSL staff who will recall sailing with a Doxford Main Engine in the past but I wonder if any have sailed with such an engine in the recent past or for that matter even knew they still existed.

Last spring as part of the initial stage in the preparation of a major dry-docking specification I joined m.v. P..... at Perth Amboy, New Jersey for the voyage to Bayside, New Brunswick to collect an amount of data and drawings.

Although I knew beforehand that the vessel was powered by a Doxford there was still a degree of anticipation in seeing one of these engines again and, most probably, for the last time to see one in service.

This particular engine, a 4J76CR, is reputed to be the last ever built and was installed in m.v. P....., a Great Lakes SUL, in 1980/81 at the time of newbuilding.

Controllable Pitch Propellers are routinely specified for Great Lake vessels and whilst medium speed engines are the more commonplace in some cases slow speed engines are employed, as is the case with m.v. P..... This was the first Doxford that I have encountered in such a configuration and consequently is uni-directional with no means of reversing fitted.

Other than this the engine is very similar to that installed on the last Welsh City, possibly more compact with only one turbo-charger mounted at the aft end and with the associated air cooler integrated into the scavenge air manifold.

The original Servodyne governor, some will no redoubt recall this ?????? piece of equipment, is still fitted and judging by the number of labels and extra wiring attached to it has been as much trouble as it was to RSL.

Needless to say the passage to Bayside was totally uneventful as one would expect from a Doxford!! The writer would admit to spending more time than he should have in the Engine Room just to see this last example of British marine engineering working. After so many years of sailing with other slow speed engines the lower level of vibration, particularly in the accommodation, was noticeable and something that had been forgotten by the writer.

The ship is still in service and following dry-docking last autumn has been trading in North European waters but shortly will cross the Atlantic to the North American East Coast.

Spares are still available in limited quantities, I believe Dr. Orbeck has a corner in this market now, if not then most of the drawings.

The writer recalls a conversation he had some three or four years ago with some marine spares people in Piraeus from which it transpired that there were still some 50 or so Doxidors operating worldwide then.

David Litson

Life after R.S.L.

Having seen Mike Riggs' article a couple of issues back, where he mentioned my name as being one of the other cadets on his first trip, I am prompted to put both fingers to keyboard to relate some of my own experiences.

If for no other reason, I will always remember Mike for introducing me to sliced beetroot & raw onion sandwiches! It was his turn to make the supper for the bar occupants of the Sara Lupe and that was all that could be found in the pantry. My belated thanks to Ch. Steward, Keith Llewellyn for such wonderful catering!

Anyway, my years in RSL passed from 1971 to 1985 and for the most part were very enjoyable. When I was at college and spoke with people from other companies, I realised only too well that Smiths wasn't so bad, as we used to moan. My last two trips were as Mate on the Amparo and without hesitation I can say they were the most 'job satisfying' and fulfilling periods of my career to date. The variety and responsibility I had to undertake taught me a great deal and served me well in later years. My especial thanks here to Ray Skinner and Tony Lightfoot, who were Masters through most of this period.

At the beginning of 1985, my then wife was expecting our first son and times & prospects with the flagging out process were not good. It was time to move on. So, I took a brave (rash?) step one Friday afternoon after the pub and asked for voluntary severance. After more than 13 years it wasn't an easy decision. Fortune however smiled on me, as I was phoned the following Monday by an offshore drilling company called KCA Drilling. I had applied to them the previous year and now with a vacancy in the offing, my name had popped out of their files. It transpired that my name popped out of their files partly because of my RSL connection (and I thought it was because of my good looks!) Their Marine Manager had been part of the Atlantic Drilling combine of which Smiths had been a founding partner in the late 70's. This was my first encounter of the situation in the offshore world, that its often a case of who, rather than what, you know that can count!

The offshore industry moves fast and by the following Sunday, I was being hoisted by Billy Pugh basket aboard the dynamically positioned drillship "Polly Bristol", offshore Taragona in Spain. (An old haunt of my Amparo days).

I thereby entered a world that was both familiar (it was a ship) and totally strange (they were doing a different job and spoke a completely different language (Go have a look in the Possum Belly they said!) I thought this remark was along the lines of "go get the candlesticks for the church service". I fell for that big time one Sunday morning in 1971, by going banging on the door of Griff Jones, my first trip Master! (Cheers for that to Jon "Jersey Joe" Challacombe!)

Anyway it turned out that this actually was the name of a genuine tank and they did want to know what was inside. A very steep learning curve ensued, but was ably assisted by the fact that I had almost doubled my old Ch. Mates salary and was working 3 weeks on,

3 weeks off! Unfortunately the oil crisis was just over the horizon and the following year I found myself in the very unaccustomed position of being on the dole, having a small son and a very big mortgage (the oilfield mentality hadn't taken long to acquire).

As I chased the money to survive, I proceeded through the next few years working on a variety of offshore vessels – Dive Support ships, Cable layers, Ro-Ro's, Drilling Ships and Semi-Submersible oil rigs. I worked all over – Brazil, Egypt, Atlantic coast of N. America, Singapore, Mexico (Tampico – another old Amparo haunt) the North Sea and Angola until in 1997, I finally ended up where I am now and that is as a Master on board a Semi-Sub drilling rig working for an Italian Drilling company called Saipem. With them, I have worked most of the time in West Africa (Nigeria, Congo, Gabon & Cameroun) but also Norway, Italy and Egypt. Going back to Mike Riggs article, I must have been working in very close vicinity to him, as he said he was also working in the same the part of Nigeria at the same time.

The years since 1985 have been varied and generally good. The offshore life gives regular time at home with only relatively short periods away, but there is a downside. One piece of sea looks pretty much like another from the deck of a drilling rig and the work can become very 'routine'. I still miss the variety of different ports, different countries and different cargoes as the trip progresses. This may be a 'rose tinted' memory of my deep sea days, as I can still remember being bored stiff staring out of a bridge window on a long Pacific or Atlantic crossing in January on the way to 36 hours at an iron ore terminal!

Two points to summarise and finish off with – the first is, that at the reunion last year it was great to meet up with so many old friends and colleagues and to find what they've been doing since RSL. No disrespect Ollie, but I would prefer to hear more of things like this in Shipmates, rather than what ships were in the company fleet in 1926!

(Readers note: He will probably sack me for the third time for that comment!)

¹¹ The second and most important point for me, is that to this day, I'm still pleased that in 1971, the old BSF (British Shipping Federation) office in Cardiff sent this 'Valley Boy' along to a local company to see what I thought of them. If they hadn't, I'm sure I would have neither done nor seen so many of the things throughout my life, nor had the career I've had.

I've been living in Plymouth since 1978 and for anybody who'd like to get back in touch, my e-mail address is ian.stewart@blueyonder.co.uk.

Ian Stewart

"THE RIGHT KIND OF BOY"

A friend of our member Captain John Gordon has published a book called the "The Right Kind Of Boy" written by Captain David Thomas. A portrait of the British Sea Apprentice from 1830- 1980. It is an interesting history with lots of anecdotes and first hand accounts of happenings on ships. The price is £27.50 per copy anyone interested in buying a copy contact:- Captain D. Thomas

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