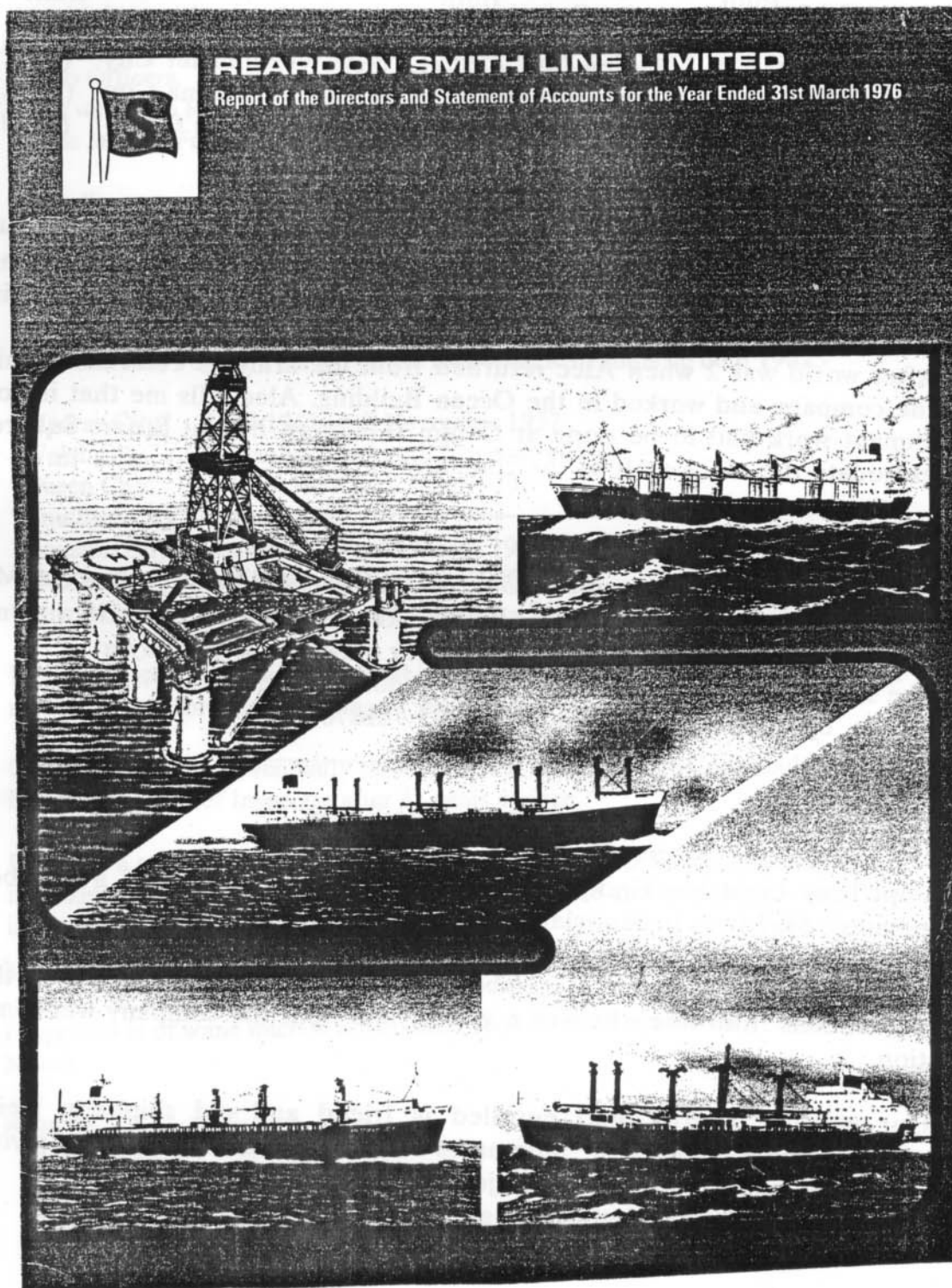




SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.38 March 2006.



30 years ago.

On the front page of this issue is a copy of the picture that was on the Reardon Reardon Smith Line Limited, Report of the Director and Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31st March 1976. The back ground of the original picture was coloured in red. In the statement it read, "The trading profit of the group, excluding investment income amounted to £3,098,997, compared to £6,838,433 in the pervious year". The price of the shares at that time were 350 pence per share. The fleet at that time was:-

	Built	Built	Built	Built
"Cardiff City"	(1975)	"Cornish City" (1969)	"Devon City"	(1975)
"Fresno City"	(1970)	"Indian City" (1967)	"New Westminster City"	(1972)
"Port Alberni City"	(1972)	"Prince Rupert City" (1970)	"Tacoma City"	(1972)
"Vancouver City"	(1970)	"Victoria City" (1970)	"Welsh City"	(1968)

Merthyr House following my story in "Shipmates" issue No. 37 our member Alec Westall ex Chartering Director of the Reardon Smith Line enlightened me to say that after Merthyr House got destroyed by the fire in 1946 the company moved to the Ocean Building.

After world war 2 when Alec returned from the army he returned to his job in the company and worked in the Ocean Building. Alec tells me that major refurbishment work had to be done at Colum Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, to accommodate the office staff of the company before they could move in.

CAN YOU HELP our member Gary Watts' would like to contact a Mr P.J.BARKER an ex Radio Officer with the Reardon Smith Line, if anyone knows Mr.Barker's address or telephone number please contact Gary at:-

The Bungalow, 40 Helmsdale, Swindon, SN25 1PN.
or phone telephone No. 01793 721870

New Members.

Capt.Tony Light has kindly enrolled Max Mitchell to become a member of "Shipmates". Max lives in Monclar de Quercy, France.

Mr.Kerry Thomas is now a member Kerry work at Cardiff Office in the stores department from when he was a young man until the company went into liquidation.

Our member Laurie Judd enrolled is friend and old shipmate Keith Pearson to become a member of "Shipmates". Keith sent me a nice letter giving details of his sea time career before he joined the police force.

On page No.3 is Keith's letter giving his sea time career.

Dear Alec

Many thanks for your letter and the "Shipmates" Newsletter.

It was very kind of my old friend Laurie Judd to enrol me on your list for this year. I must reciprocate and pay his subscription next year.

It was interesting to read the newsletter and some of the names contained therein did "ring bells".

My own RSL "history" dates back to 1956. After 2 long years on a pilgrim ship (s.s. Mohammedi) shunting pilgrims around the Indian Ocean and Red Sea I resigned from the Marconi Company and started looking around for a private employer of Radio Officers. I was most fortunate in finding that Sir William Reardon Smith and Sons were also looking for Radio Officers. I travelled to Cardiff and was interviewed by the late Mr Frank Sully and got the job!

Mr Sully sent me to Doxfords in Sunderland to have a look around the "New Westminster City" which was fitting out. Shortly afterwards I joined my first RSL ship in Rotterdam, it was the "Eastern City" (July 1956 until February 1957) It was here that I met with Laurie Judd who was third mate at the time.

After that first voyage I served on the following RSL ships up until 1962:-

"Madras City" April 1957 until November 1957
 "Welsh City" December 1957 until November 1958
 "Queen City" January 1959 until June 1959
 "Bradford City" August 1959
 "Houston City" October 1959 until March 1960
 "Welsh City" June 1960 until October 1960
 "Devon City" February 1961 until January 1962

It was the last rather long voyage which made me decide to leave the sea as I had married just before the beginning of the voyage!

On leaving the sea I eventually joined the then Herefordshire Constabulary and retired in the rank of Chief Inspector after 31 years service.

I do have a sea story which was published in the Radio Officer's Association magazine but I am afraid it relates to the pilgrim trade and may not be of much interest to my ex 'tramp ship' colleagues.

My days with the RSL were great and I enjoyed serving on all the above ships.

I hope this is of some interest to you and I look forward to receiving "Shipmates" in March.

Regards

Keith Pearson

Below is Malcom Bennington's note to the Editor

My Memories of Reardon Smiths Liquidation 20 Years Ago.

I joined the Eastern Valley (ex Cardiff City) in Rotterdam on 31-12-1984 as 4th Eng/Elect. My memory fails me as to what ports we loaded & discharged at, but I do remember that towards the end of voyage time we were bound for Odessa with a load of grain.

I was due to be relieved in the Suez Canal which I was looking forward to.

On the way up to Suez Canal one evening I was on the 8-12 watch, Chris Barton CH/Engineer phoned down to the engine room and asked me if I wanted the good news or the bad news, anyway he informed me that I was not being relieved at Suez and RSL had gone into liquidation.

We continued on to Piraeus where we anchored to await further news and orders.

We had no news of what was happening but we were in touch with Newmast who advised us not to sail until they could get guarantee's as to who would pay our salaries plus voyage leave. I felt sorry for Capt. John Porteous (a real gentleman) . being master of the ship could not join in on this.

After about 12hrs of discussions between Numast and the bank who held the mortgage on the ship (National Westminster I think?) the outcome was if we discharged the ship and sailed it back to England they would guarantee we would be the first to receive all monies due to us by putting a 'lien' on the ship on arrival.

So we discharged the cargo and sailed for England and anchored in River Blackwater where if my memory serves me there were one or two other RSL ships anchored.

I and a few others stayed on board for a few days taking an inventory and putting the ship in mothballs. I finally paid off on 24-7-1985.

Farewell Eastern Valley I enjoyed my voyages on her.

I did hear afterwards that the RSL office staff were told to drop everything they were doing and leave the building which was then locked?

Malcolm Bennington. 4th/Eng / Elect.

Obituary's.

Our long time member Captain Dennis O.W. Jones of Witham, Essex, crossed the bar on the 1st October 2005, I have no details of the funeral. He went to the Reardon Smith Nautical School and served his apprenticeship in the RSL ships on the "Bradford City" and "Fresno City". He left RSL and went to BP tankers. May we express our deepest sympathy to his family.

I am sorry to give the sad news that Steve Donavon crossed the bar on 1st January 2005 at the age of 51 years. Steve worked for Reardon Smith at head Office in the Purchasing Department ordering spare parts for the Ships. He remained with the company until they went into liquidation. He then worked for Cardiff Ship Management ordering spares for TMM ships, also running the CSM store at Portmanmoor Road. When CSM finished Steve worked for Graig Shipping Company, Cardiff. Many who worked and knew him from RSL and CSM went to the funeral service at the Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff. Our very deepest sympathy goes to Steve's wife, son and daughter. .

Mrs. Frances Hardy crossed the bar on the 9th February 2006, Frances was the wife of Graham Hardy who was the personnel manager at the RSL head office who had personal contact with seafarers and their wives. When Frances was young she worked in the RSL head office where she met Graham.

Our deepest sympathy goes to Frances family.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DADDY? By Ken Clatworthy

An Introduction by Cyril Hudson

ANGLO-AFRICAN (2) (1929-1943) O.N. 161339. 5601 grt. 3369 nt. 10066 dwt. 426.0 x 58.0 x 26.0 ft. 439.7 ft. loa. Shelter deck.

Q. 4- cyl. Engine by North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. Ltd., Newcastle. Cylinders 23.1/2"/ 32.1/2"/ 47"/68"x48" stroke. 3 boilers 220lb. pressure, 2000 ihp. Speed 10.1/4 knots.

4.6.1929; laid down. 28.10.1929 launched by Short Bros. Ltd., Sunderland (Yard No.439); completed 13.12.29. for Nitrate Producers' Co. Ltd., (Lawther, Latta & Co. Ltd. managers, London.

In 1943 sold to Reardon Smith Line, Ltd., (Sir William Reardon Smith & Sons Ltd., managers Cardiff; 1948 renamed NEW WESTMINSTER CITY (2); 1949 to Ships Finance & Management Co. Ltd., London: renamed LORD CODRINGTON, Registered under Normanton Steamship Co. Ltd.; 1952 to Tozai Kisen K.K. Japan, renamed TOZAI MARU No. 7; 1956 to Kusa Kabe Kisen K.K. Japan renamed RISSHUN MARU No. 3; 1965 broken up in Japan.

In the London office of the Nitrate Producers' S.S. Co. Ltd., Sir John Latta had no successor with the death of his son on 26 December 1937. This was followed by the news from Belfast of the death of his business partner Robert Lawther on 22 March, 1941 aged 75. Sir John Latta meditated upon whether to dissolve the company, and on 27 November, 1942 the decision was made to sell the 2 remaining ships of the 5 the company had owned at the outbreak of the war in 1939.

A buyer was found in Sir William Reardon Smith & Sons Ltd., Cardiff who paid 125,000 pounds for the ANGLO AFRICAN and 164,000 pounds for the ANGLO INDIAN early in 1943. Under wartime regulations it was not permissible to rename ships so they retained their original names until 1948. The ANGLO INDIAN became the TACOMA CITY (2).

An abridged section of an autobiography by Kenneth Clatworthy of Queensland, Australia

Early in 1942 I applied to join the Merchant Navy. 16 years was the minimum age for deck hands and 16 for catering staff. I persuaded my mother to sign the necessary forms. In September 1942 I entrained at Paddington Station for Lydney, a small whistle stop near the Severn River railway bridge. On arrival at Lydney I found about 30 other boys all enroute to the training ship. The hut, which comprised the station, was covered with the names and initials of past travelers. Later in the day a train arrived to take us over the Bridge to Sharpness Docks, and

after a short walk we arrived at the TV "Vinditrix". The "Vindi" as she was affectionately known was an old German sailing ship and was moored in the canal.

Thirty boys arrived every Monday and the procedure was always the same. Allocation of a bunk on the bottom deck, then up to the mess deck for a supper of cold ham and bread and butter. This was great, but why did the rest of the trainees hang over our shoulders and ask "do you want that bit of fat?" Breakfast the following morning supplied the answer to this question. She was a hungry ship. A plate of porridge and a thick slice of bread with a mug of tea was the ration. Dinner and Tea comprised of equally sparse meals. Sausages, potatoes, cabbage and steamed puddings were the order of the day. On Sundays we were given a boiled egg or black sausage for breakfast. As each long table finished their tea there was a rush for the gangway. Down onto the pathway beside the canal, up the hill, over a field and into Sharpness Docks. The first five or six boys to arrive at the docker's canteen would be able to buy a plate of dinner, the next group could get the remaining sandwiches, the next a slice of cake, the rest had to be content with a mug of tea.

As I said earlier, a total of 30 boys joined the ship every Monday. By Friday morning there would be 15 left of the original group. To get away from the ship they crawled out of bed deck portholes in the middle of the night and over a pontoon to the shore. They then walked to the next railway station down the line and caught a train home the next day. If they were older than 17 years the police were informed and Call Up papers would be issued, under this age nothing more could be done. I personally would have liked to go home but that would have meant losing an awful lot of face. While I was there one boy was stabbed with a fork, and one of the Training Officers was floored in a fight.

We were divided into two watches, and on alternate mornings one watch cleaned the decks and the other took part in physical exercises. The worse part of cleaning ship was emptying the sewage bin that had been used during the night by approximately 150 boys during the night. The physical exercises involved running about 2 miles to the Severn Bridge and back. The training officer would run at the rear and use a branch of a tree to keep any stragglers moving. When you reached the ship there was a row of buckets waiting by the side of the canal. We were lined up in two rows and one line dipped their buckets in the water and proceeded to throw it over his opposite number. This was repeated for the benefit of the second line. My experience of this rather basic hardening up procedure was somewhat acute as this was winter time. Discipline was strict and talking after lights out was a punishable offence. One night the Officer asked for the offender to come out, no movement, so the entire area of some 20 boys were marched out onto the deck in the cold November wind and made to holy stone the quarter deck for one hour. The training course was for five weeks, first week learning to box the compass, (to the uninitiated this meant learning the 32 points of the compass and being able to

quote them in the correct order). Second week, learning knots and splicing (how I hated splicing the one inch freezing steel cable). Third, week contents and stowing of gear in a lifeboat.

Fourth week, boat handling (how to sail a dipping lug). As part of the sailing lessons we rowed a lifeboat into the dock area to collect the days supply of bread. On one occasion the Officer turned his head away from us and within a split second one boy grabbed a loaf, a second tore a piece off and within seconds the loaf was torn to pieces and eaten without a trace. The fifth week was for the lifeboat test. Each boy was summoned to the Captain's cabin where he questioned you on the lessons you had learnt. The last questions were based on boat navigation. He would place a piece of wood on the table and say "this is your boat" then another piece of wood which indicated the direction of the wind. He then instructed you to sail the boat giving him the sail and rudder orders as he changed the wind and destination directions. As I did the wrong thing on the third tack, he picked up the wood slammed it on the table and repeated the orders, I fouled it up for the second time. "Get out of my cabin, you fool".

Now, once you had attempted your test and failed you were not allowed to leave the ship until you eventually passed the test. This meant no running to the docker's canteen. After dinner the Captain sent word that any boy who wished to try again that afternoon could come to his cabin. The thought of no extra food was greater than the fear of Captain Mussard, so I went up to his cabin. I made no mistakes this time and breathed a sigh of relief when he asked, what we knew was always the last question. "What would you do if your mast and sails blew away?"

At the end of the training session we were given a weeks leave. Returning to Sharpness we worked at various jobs in the everyday running of the ship, such as cleaning the brass and cooking the meals. British and Allied shipping was suffering tremendous losses in the North Atlantic at this time so replacement crews were urgently needed, so early in the seventh week I received my orders. A train voucher a letter to the Pool Office and a training report card. With a kitbag, bearing the painted insignia of crossed flags (a Union Jack and the Red Duster) a peaked hat (without any insignia). I left Sharpness and arrived in Liverpool at 4.00am in the morning. I was given a bed at the Lime Street Flying Angel Hostel, given breakfast and instructions on how to find the Pool Office. Fingerprinted and issued with an Identity Card. My uniform, a plain silver coloured badge bearing the initials MN, was given to me. Later that day I received instructions to report to the s/s "ANGLO AFRICAN" berthed at Birkenhead.

It was dark when I arrived at the ship and I found the geography of a 7,000 ton merchantman something of a puzzle, resulting in sore shins from hitting unidentified objects. Anyway this was what I had wanted, and a life and world lay ahead. Here I was a galley boy, pay 4 pounds per month plus 10 pounds per month Danger Money. Somebody told me my cabin was aft and that I would be

sharing with the cabin boy. The cabin boy told me that I should turn to at the galley, and in the morning, still in darkness, showed me the way to go. I stood waiting, and at 7.00am the second cook arrived and wanted to know why I had not lit the galley fire, and why I had not started to get things ready for breakfast. The Chief cook, somewhat hung over arrived soon after and asked me the same questions. Apart from helping in any way the cooks ordered, a galley boys job is to keep the galley clean, wash up, light the fires and peel the potatoes. Outside the warmth of the galley it was cold and damp as we steamed slowly down the Mersey, past the Liver Building and out across the bar to the open sea. The "ANGLO AFRICAN" had a big "S" on the funnel, the insignia of the Sir William Rardon Smith Line, but the crew said it stood for starvation.

Before the war the life of Merchant Seamen was hard and poorly paid but since the beginning of the war all ships were run by the Ministry of War Transport and Board of Trade regulations which laid down the minimum rations were strictly adhered to. The regulations called for the issue of 1lb meat, 1lb potatoes, and 1lb bread per man a day, 3oz tea; 3oz coffee; and 3oz pickles per man per week. Eggs were to be supplied for breakfast twice a week. In actual fact the men did not collect these rations with the exception of the tea, coffee and pickles. All meals were cooked in the galley, collected by crew members and taken back to their quarters. The ANGLO AFRICAN was considered to be a lucky ship. She was built in 1929, riveted hull (none of this welded stuff that the Kaiser Shipyards were producing in the United States at the rate of one ship per day) slow and solid. Flat out she could make over 11 knots, and was usually found at the back of the convoy at daybreak keeping company with the older Greek vessels, shepherded and cursed by the Royal Navy destroyers. She had had two sister ships, the ANGLO AUSTRALIAN which had been lost "by an act of God" in the Pacific in 1938 and the ANGLO SAXON which had been torpedoed in the North Atlantic in 1941 and which made its way into the history books due to the fact that the only two survivors established a record for survival,

They were 81 days adrift in a lifeboat before landing in the West Indies. One of them, the 3rd mate after a spell in hospital and three weeks leave was posted to the SIAMESE PRINCE. Three days out from Liverpool she was "bumped" but this time he was not so lucky and did not survive. Why we were considered lucky when the other two "Anglos" had met watery graves, I do not know. The crew comprised of the Captain, three Mates, three Wireless Operators, five Engineers, one Bosun, one Donkeyman, one Carpenter, eight Seamen, eight Firemen, one Chief Steward, one Second Steward, one Assistant Steward, one Cabin Boy, one Cook, one Assistant Cook, and one Galley Boy. We also carried six Royal Navy ratings (DEMS: Defence of Equipped Merchant Ships). The six DEMS were carried because we were armed with a 12 pounder and a 3.5 gun fitted on our stern and two Orlikan Machine Guns on the wings of the bridge. As you can see from the

above listing the Galley Boy is the lowest form of life aboard on the ship. In fact there is one lower category, that is the Scullion. For the most severe penalty to be meted out to the Cabin and Galley Boys would be the threat of demotion to Scullion whose rate of pay was one shilling per month. Other than washing up all the dishes in the galley and keeping the woodwork scrubbed down the never ending job was peeling potatoes. (Oh how I wished I had one of today's potato peelers). Every morning I accompanied the cook down to the cold room to bring out the day's meat. Sometimes I would hide a couple of eggs in my trouser pockets but the cook was up to this trick and would give me a sharp slap as we ascended the companion way to the main deck. Scrabbled eggs in the pocket were no use to anyone.

An early morning job was to pump up water to the Captain's bathroom. The pump was in an exposed position on the deck and six o'clock in the morning, in the North Atlantic winter, was not the happiest of times. Before leaving Liverpool the ship had been fitted with steam piped to all outside cabins, and the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund had distributed thick woolly jerseys and socks. Our cargo was mixed supplies together with bombs, ammunition and 493 tons of High Octane Fuel. Why 493 tons? Because if a merchant ship carried over 500 tons they had to pay the crew an extra one pound per month. As deck cargo we carried crated aeroplanes and two huge locomotives. All this added up to one thing, we were bound for Russia and a very low chance of survival.

We joined a convoy of some sixty ships escorted by six destroyers and several corvettes and sailed North West up towards the Denmark Strait. Every night you could hear explosions and sometimes see huge pillars of fire as some unfortunate merchant ship became a victim of the war in the Atlantic. In the morning you could see gaps in the lines of the convoy before the Royal Navy, acting like any good shepherd, put us all back into a more compact and manageable fleet. We turned south and eventually feeling the weather getting warmer we turned due east and sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar. Part of our escort now comprised of submarines (I've never been able to figure this out).

The German planes would sometimes strafe the lines of the convoy with machine gun fire. It was somewhat disconcerting to see the bullets sparking on the steel deck and to know that just below was the 493 tons of gasoline surrounded by bombs and other firepower. I once had the opportunity to man the Orlikon. The only problem was that when the magazine was emptied I didn't know how to reload. About three days later we tied up in Algiers harbour. The invasion of North Africa by the Allied troops had begun a few weeks before and we were the second convoy to arrive. For me the gates of the world were opening, this was my first step on foreign soil. When a person has been born and lived all one's life in a city and had very little exposure to the outside world everything one sees and hears is, or rather should be, of interest. To me the harbour and town of Algiers was no

exception. At the far side of the dock area there were trees with lemons growing on them. I had never seen a lemon tree before this. On the dusty streets the Arab merchants sat on, or walked besides little carts drawn by donkeys. In the distance we could see the Casbah district. When we docked a British Army officer came on board, and we were assembled on deck to hear him tell us of the dangers of visiting various bars, and in particular the dangers that lurked in the Casbah. He told us that since the troops had landed there had been 54 murders of soldiers who frequented the Casbah. They had been killed for nothing else but their clothes and boots.

Naturally the first place a sixteen year old boy made for was the Casbah. Across the main square, past the Post Office, and up a narrow street that wound upwards towards the top of the hill overlooking the town, the rules were simple. Don't go by yourself, don't stay in the district after dark, don't get drunk. Passing the darkened doorways many voices call you to buy the many wares offered. The range was from the brassware to the dirty postcards, and from the bars to the offers of young girls. Having sold my old somewhat dirty raincoat for the princely sum of 200 French francs, the second cook asked me if I would sell his old suit for him. He said he wanted at least 400 francs, I gave him 400 francs and considered the extra 400 I had received to be payment for the risk. In port the work of the galley boy in peeling potatoes continued in its endless brainless daily task. The cook remained drunk most of the time, the saucepans in the racks in the galley were filled with vino and the cook always sang songs. He said he always sang so the Old Man would never know if he was drunk or not. The song "When in dreams it seems it's a memory, a memory of old San Antoine" was one of his favourites". Any scraps of food left on the plates or scraped from the cooking pans was a source of a deal with one of the Arab dock workers. I agreed to save all scraps in a tin and give it to him every night. In exchange he gave me his dagger. I still have that knife. It was made from an Italian bayonet, cut short, and inserted into a wood and leather sheath. We discharged our cargo and left Algiers for home, or rather we thought we were going home.

In a small convoy we made our way back to Gibraltar where we lay at anchor for nearly a week and were not allowed ashore. We eventually steamed out through the Straits in convoy then we turned south. This was not the way home. Six days later we were in Freetown harbour in Sierra Leone. It was hot and sticky and during the three weeks we sat anchored we were only allowed ashore for one afternoon. The Freetown I saw was a very dirty town, open sewers and unmade roads, dogs roamed everywhere and children played in the rain sodden dirt and filth. I bought a beer that was served in a "glass" made from the bottom half of a bottle. I understand they pour oil into a bottle and then splinter the glass at the level of the oil with a red hot piece of metal. One hot afternoon soon after we arrived several of the crew dived over the side for a swim. We were quickly

ordered out of the water and threatened with dire punishment. Why? Because not only did the harbour contain all the effluent from the town, it was home to many sharks. I rate this episode as one of the more stupid things I have done in my life. We fished and caught large Catfish. If you boiled all the flesh of the head of the fish the bone structure resembled a crucifix. One afternoon while the Chief Engineer was having his siesta we hooked a fine specimen on his line, by the tail. He was not amused... Several of us caught malaria in this country which was once known as the white man's grave. Two crew members died from Blackwater fever and I caught a type that remained with me on a recurring basis for many years.

At long last we left Freetown and joined a convoy of 19 ships steaming south. After three days each ship received their orders as to their destination. Under cover of darkness the convoy scattered, and all the Captains ordered to maintain radio silence and to steam as fast as they were able, if they sighted the smoke of another vessel. We learnt that this last order was because the German pocket battleship "ADMIRAL SCHEER" was raiding merchant ships in the South Atlantic. As most of the ships were not capable of any great speed it was a somewhat unnecessary instruction. During the journey south we only saw smoke on the horizon once, the old ANGLO AFRICAN did all of her 10 ¼ knots that night. The very rivets seemed to shake as we sped along. It was probably another ship of our original convoy but neither ship would ever know.

Being consumed with the never ending task of peeling potatoes and knowing that in the storeroom were cartons containing tinned potatoes, I evolved a plan to cut down on the hated task. For every potato I peeled I threw one over the side. We did eventually run out of potatoes but only within a couple of days of reaching port. As we entered the Rio de la Plata the Radio Officers were picking up messages and sending our own signals for supplies to be ready on the dock. Remember we had embarked on what was to be a six week trip, two weeks out, two weeks in port, and two weeks home. Now we were already twelve weeks from home. In the Rio de la Plata we saw the GRAF SPREE lying scuttled in the main channel within sight of the coast of Montivideo. The Uruguayan and Argentine authorities were both neutral, although pro German. All merchantmen armed, as we were with a 12 pounder and a 3.5, had to remove the breech blocks from the guns and the customs sealed the magazines. On arrival in Buenos Aires we found the ship in the next berth to us was flying the swastika on her stern. The British Embassy sent a man to give us instructions as to how we should behave and which bars and establishments were used by the Germans. After the blackout cities of home and North Africa it was good to walk through the brightly lit streets of the capital of this vibrant South American city. One night I was with the cook in a bar with a somewhat unsavoury reputation. It was either the Derby Bar or the Colon Bar, in the Passe Colon, (I'm not sure which, but the reputation of both was much the same). Late in the evening they short changed the cook who by this time

was feeling no pain. His reaction was to pick up the table, full of empty glasses, and hurl it across the room. In the fight which followed (there were other crew members present) the Police arrived and arrested the cook. Someone had pushed me into a taxi and returned me to the ship, and it was not until I awoke the next morning I had any recollection of the previous night's activity, nor did I know what had happened to my teeth. They were missing from my mouth. Since a ship cannot function without the cook, the Captain secured his release and after a day in a BA jail cell he was returned to the ship.

The Liberty Inn was a club established for the use of Allied seamen. It was run by a very large lady named Big Kitty. I think she was a Londoner now living in the Argentine. The evening after the bar episode she served me a drink and then proceeded to upbraid me, a silly 16 year old boy for drinking, and getting drunk, causing disturbances and losing my teeth. At the end of her tirade she said to come to the bar to see her at 10.00 o'clock. At the appointed time I was introduced to an Englishman who presented me with an envelope containing my false teeth. It appears that the teeth had been arrested with the cook but this man, who ever he was, had been able to secure their release without further questions. The shops in Buenos Aires were full of all the things that were either unobtainable or rationed in England. The ship was fumigated while we were in port and we loaded hides as was the German ship tied up ahead of us. While we were in Buenos Aires the government of the day (the Ramirez government if I remember correctly) was over turned and I witnessed the riots in the Plaza del Mayo where buses and trams were wrecked and set on fire. After leaving BA we went to Montevideo to load a cargo of canned dehydrated beef before steaming north back to Freetown. In spite of fumigating in BA the ship was alive with rats within two or three days at sea, they must have come aboard in the hides. We used to chase them round the deck with clubs of wood and throw their carcass to the sharks that always followed the ship. A convoy was formed at Freetown and we returned to Liverpool some three weeks later.

I had developed a hernia while trying to move a large barrel of flour in the storeroom and left the ANGLO AFRICAN after "working by" the ship while other crew members went on leave. I had purchased a large stalk of bananas in Freetown to take home to my mother and each day I carefully removed any of the over ripe fruit. The end result was one banana packed in cotton wool and protected in an empty Bourneville cocoa tin sent by mail to mum. I doubt if she was able to eat this blackening offering. The hernia which turned out to be a double hernia, was dealt with at Dulwich hospital. I had had visions of the thing strangulating at sea and the Chief Steward operating on me on the saloon table, and reading how to do it from some medical book. About this time I suffered my first recurrent attacks of malaria. Every third evening about seven o'clock I would start shivering, running a high temperature and singing songs like ("Ten little men

with hammers keep hitting me on the head") By eleven o'clock all was normal and I slept all night, and awoke next morning feeling somewhat weak. The funniest thing was when I went to the local cinema and at the appointed time my teeth started to chatter, and nothing could be done to stop it. We had to leave the show and go home. Eventually a visit to the doctor stopped this evening entertainment by the administration of quinine tablets. These interludes continued for many years at ever decreasing intervals.

On reporting to the Pool Office in London I was posted to the FORT ST. JAMES a new freighter of some 7,000 tons. I joined the ship as cabin boy, now I was one step up from the bottom.....

Post Script by Cyril Hudson

Ken made two trips on the FORT ST. JAMES, on the second trip he was promoted to Assistant Steward. In early 1945 the ship was in Port Louis, Mauritius loading a cargo of sugar for Sri Lanka (Ceylon). On his one and only night ashore there was in the town an epidemic that was not known at the time, he contracted Polio. A few days after sailing from Mauritius he became ill, which was believed to perhaps his malaria flaring up. When the Fort St. James reached Colombo on 11th March, 1945 he was taken to the General Hospital where he was diagnosed with Anterior Poliomyelitis (Polio). After treatment he was returned to England as a DBS (Distressed British Seaman) on the REINA DEL PACIFICO arriving in Liverpool about 12th June, 1945. He was later declared "Unfit for further Sea Service."

Readers with access to the Internet may read the remainder of Ken's story of his time on the FORT ST. JAMES in his story "What Did You Do In The War, Daddy?" which was renamed "Life in the Merchant Navy, Training, Rations, Dangers, and Exotic Sights" by the BBC. The web address is WWW.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2 Go to the Story Archive, then Merchant Navy. A list of all the stories is near the top of the page, right hand side.

"M86" (M.V. "Houston City") JUNE 1944

On one occasion when sailing from the London Royal docks on a glorious warm afternoon in late June, outward for the **Normandy Beachheads** with pre slung military cargo and about 600 British army personnel on board which were massed on the afterdeck and boat deck. The sailing entailed passing through a road cutting between the docks, buses were waiting and pedestrians were gathering waiting for the ship to pass and the swing bridge to close. Most of the people giving the lads a cheer and a wave, there was an attractive young lady standing very close to the road railings dressed in a black summer dress, suddenly she lifted the bottom of her dress up to her waist, poor lady, she must have used all her remaining clothing coupons to purchase that dress. There was a spontaneous three mighty cheers from over 600 husky throats for the 'Mona Lisa'. Moral for the troops was boosted, it put a mighty smile on their faces, for some of them it would probably be the last memory of their homeland. Within 36 hours they would no doubt be in combat. It was rumoured that the power of the cheers could be heard by Mr Churchill in Downing Street, much to his consternation, the red hot ash fell off his cigar burning a hole in his 'siren-suit' causing him great discomfort. C. J. L.

In the Footsteps of Magellan.

Historical Note:

Fernao de Magalhaes (1470 - 1521). A Portuguese navigator who sailed on a circumnavigation of the known world before Columbus was able to persuade Queen Isabella of Spain to fund his expedition to the New World. In 1518, Magalhaes (or as we now know him, Magellan), approached the southern shores of the great South Continent closing the coast of what we now know as Argentina today. He was like other great maritime explorers that were to follow him, looking for the route to the Indies and China. His lookouts reported a wide entrance in the land ahead and so he entered into the Strait that was to bear his name and was the first European to navigate the stretch of water that lies between the Tierra del Fuego and the South American mainland.

His was the first expedition to circumnavigate the world, but he did not live to see his homeland again. He died of a fever in the Philippines only 51 years of age.. Only one of his ships completed the voyage.

Some 475 years later, another intrepid bunch of mariners were to follow in Magellan's wake. The officers and crew of the Panamanian flagged bulk carrier "Azteca I" This 39,000 tons deadweight bulker was powered by a Sulzer 6RTA58 at 9,700 B.H.P. The ship was owned by R.L.Streamer S.A. of Panama, chartered to T..M.M. of Mexico City and sub-chartered for the current voyage by Compania Sud Americana de Vapores (C.S.A.V.) of Valparaiso, Chile. The ship was under my command with Gerry Hughes as Chief Engineer. If my memory is correct, Reg Smith was the R/O but he will correct me if I am wrong. The rest of the officers and crew were all Mexican..

The time charter to C.S.A.V. had begun some three months earlier at Vancouver B.C. where the "Azteca I" had loaded 28,000 tons of bulk wheat for discharge in Brazil by way of Long Beach for bunkers and transit through the Panama Canal.. The vessel cleared the Atlantic port of Cristobal after taking further bunkers on the night of the 20 July 1993, and set course across the Caribbean and South Atlantic towards Santos. Discharge at Santos was followed by completion at Paranagua. The time charter to C.S.A.V was generally very hit and miss throughout, as the time charterers were finding it very difficult to find suitable cargoes for our type of ship. After a long delay at anchor in Paranagua, C.S.A.V finally were able to fix the vessel to load about 14,000 tons of steel products at the Cosipa Steel Works in Santos. After loading at Santos, we were then to proceed to the River Plate and to pass into the River Parana to the small port of San Lorenzo 30 miles above Rosario, to load about 14,000 tons of soya bean

With many changes in cargo bookings we finally sailed from San Lorenzo in early September 1993 to return to Santos for more steel products. Our return to Cosipa in the upper reaches of the Santos River was marked as a hell on earth for all of us,. Lying alongside the steel works we were treated to frequent blasts of hot air from the steel furnaces as they de-coked the fires. The mosquitoes were as large as bats and the outside temperatures were over 35 degs C.Of course the A/C was on the blink due to the failure of the managers to arrange for the delivery of the necessary spare parts.

Finally on the 29th. September we sailed from Santos but with no orders from the time charterers. A few hour's later orders were received from Valparaiso that instructed us to steam due south to Latitude 45S and then to lay to until the markets reopened on the following Monday. Bearing in mind that we were being ordered to lay drifting in the infamous "Roaring Forties" with a metacentric height of over 13 metres, I queried this instruction with Valparaiso and also requested Ocean Routes San Francisco to provide us with a surpic of the weather to be expected

at the 45S position. Ocean Routes strongly advised that we should not venture south of Latitude 30S due to a deep depression being forecast to move through the southern Ocean. I told CSAV that we would lay to some 40 miles south of Santos and await their further orders. CSAV agreed that their previous orders were in error claiming that they had been sent by a junior official

CSAV finally came up with the goods and we received orders to proceed via the Magellan Strait to Valparaiso for bunkers and then on to Antofagasta to load copper products for discharge in Kashima, Japan, Shanghai and Qingdao in China. After which the vessel would be re-delivered to T.M.M.

We shaped our course south westward towards Point Dungeness at the eastern entrance to the Magellan Strait. The weather worsened the further south we went and by the time we passed abeam of Dungeness it was blowing a severe gale from the West. I was so glad that I had resisted those orders to lay to in the "Roaring Forties"

We received VHF radio advice from the Chilean pilot office that due to stress of weather the Magellan Strait pilot boat could not wait for us at the Bahia Possession, the usual boarding position and we were asked to come further in to the Primera Angostura (First Narrows) some 20 miles further into the Strait. We embarked two pilots shortly after midnight on the 8th. October and continued on into the First Narrows.

The weather moderated as we passed the port of Punta Arenas, the most southerly port on the South America mainland, however as we rounded Cape Froward, the most southerly point on the mainland of South America, the wind freshened quickly and within the hour was blowing from the northwest at 90 knots.

The landscape around us was a true wilderness with high mountains, extensive glaciers and steep shoreline. No sign of human habitation was apparent. The weather was violent but because we were sheltered from the full force of the wind we made good progress. Due to the strength of the wind, all crew were confined inside the accommodation.

In similar conditions we passed through the narrows off Cape Crosstide where theoretically, the tides from the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans merged. There was certainly a fierce tidal race running in the pass and because of our poor engine power we found ourselves actually going backwards at one stage. The pilots aware of the ship's low engine power took us close aboard the north shore of Carlos Island and we slowly gained headway. We crawled out of the Paso Tortuoso. Strong Fohn winds flowing down the sides of the mountains around us caused whirlwinds to circulate on the sea surface. They made quite spectacular whirlpools.

Our passage took us through narrow passes, between steep mountain sides with numerous waterfalls. On the afternoon of the 8th. October we entered the wider Paso Largo. On our starboard side the snow clad peak of the 5200 foot high Mount Wyndham loomed high above us. By the early evening we had moved out into the Paso del Mar some 45 miles southeast of Cape Pilar, where we would enter the Pacific Ocean. We were now feeling hurricane force winds with gusts to 100 knots from the West. Although the sea was short, we could feel the heavy swell moving down the Pass. By 1900, I decided that we could not venture any further westward and instructed the pilots that we were going to reverse our course and return to the comparative shelter of the Paso Largo.

In the early hours of the next morning, we again returned to our base course towards Cape Pilar, but again found that the weather conditions were very bad.

It was then that the Chilean pilots advised me that they were licensed to take ships through the Chilean Fjords northwards for another 350 miles in sheltered waters to exit into the Pacific Ocean at Golfo de Penas. At least that way we would be progressing our voyage. I agreed and we altered course at the end of the Paso del Mar to enter the inland waterway system at the Canal Smyth. During the next 39 hours the pilots guided us skillfully through the inland water ways. The system was reasonably well buoyed with range marks. We passed real close to many small islets, reefs and sand bars. Here and there we passed the rusting hulks of ships that had met their

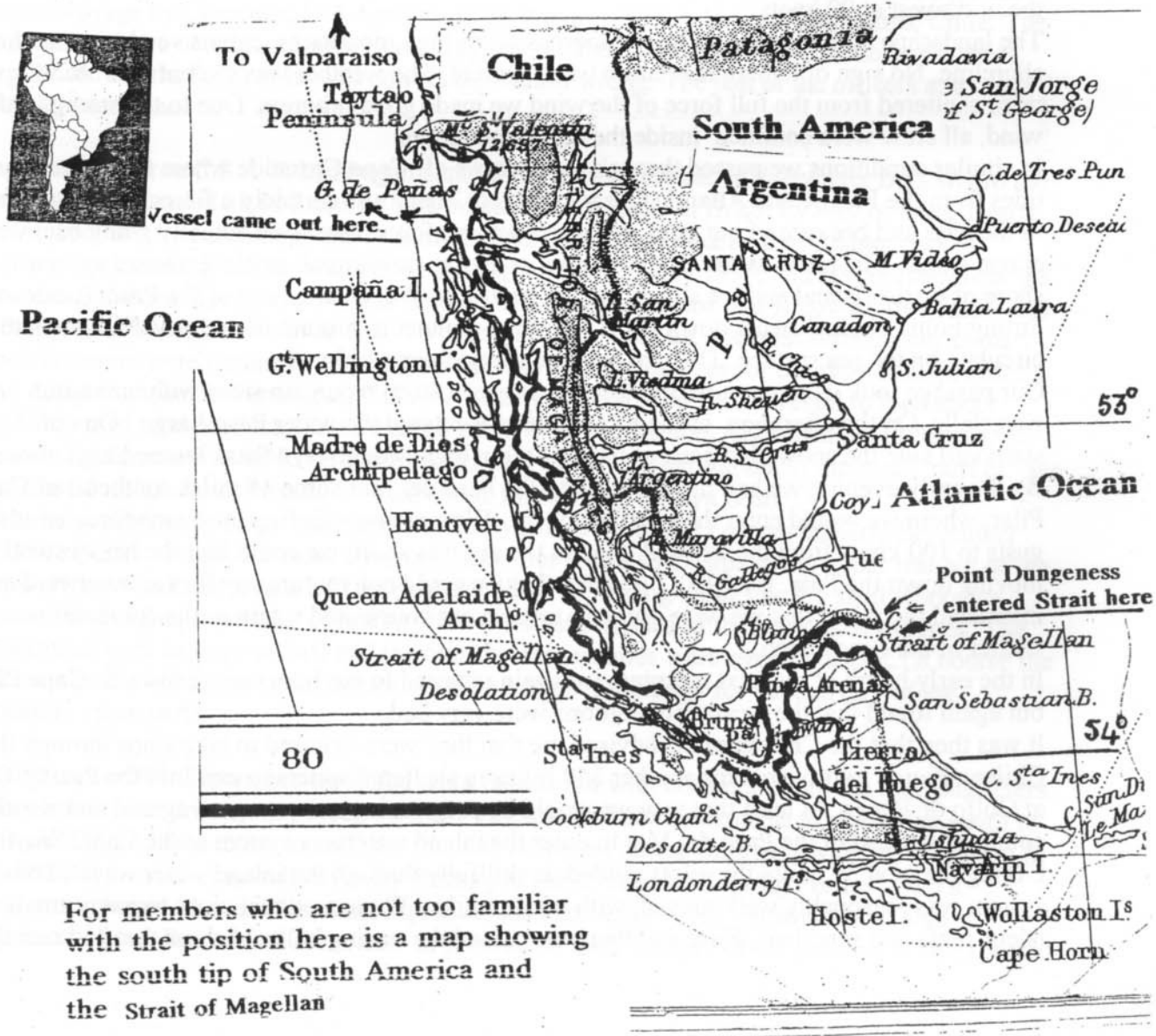
end on the ragged teeth of the rocks and reefs. "They tried to do it without a pilot." The pilots grinned, gesturing towards the wrecks

As we moved northwards the pilots advised that we would have to get the permission of the Chilean Coast Guard, before we could transit a very narrow stretch aptly named the Angostura Ingles or the English Narrows. This narrow pass was only navigable at the high water slack water period and we would need to anchor off a small fishing port named Port Eden to await the correct tidal window. We duly anchored in the small hours of the morning of the 10th. October. The pilots received confirmation from their office that the Coast Guard had agreed that we could proceed. After weighing anchor at 1030 hours on the 10th. morning, we safely passed through the English Narrows at 1130 hours. I noticed that on one small islet named Islet Clio, there was a statue of the Virgin Mary.

The rest of the passage northward passed without any trouble and at 1800 hours on the 10th. October 1993, we left the Inland waterways and entered the Pacific Ocean through the Golfo de Penas. The wind had decreased to a 30 knots North westerly and continued to abate as we shaped our course for Valparaiso.

All on board agreed that we had been very fortunate to have been able to view the beauties of the Magellan Strait and the Chilean Fjords. It is amusing to note that travel agents now advertise cruising liner trips through the same waterways. Only difference to our trip is that they charge over £2,000 for the privilege.

Bryan Boyer



For members who are not too familiar with the position here is a map showing the south tip of South America and the Strait of Magellan