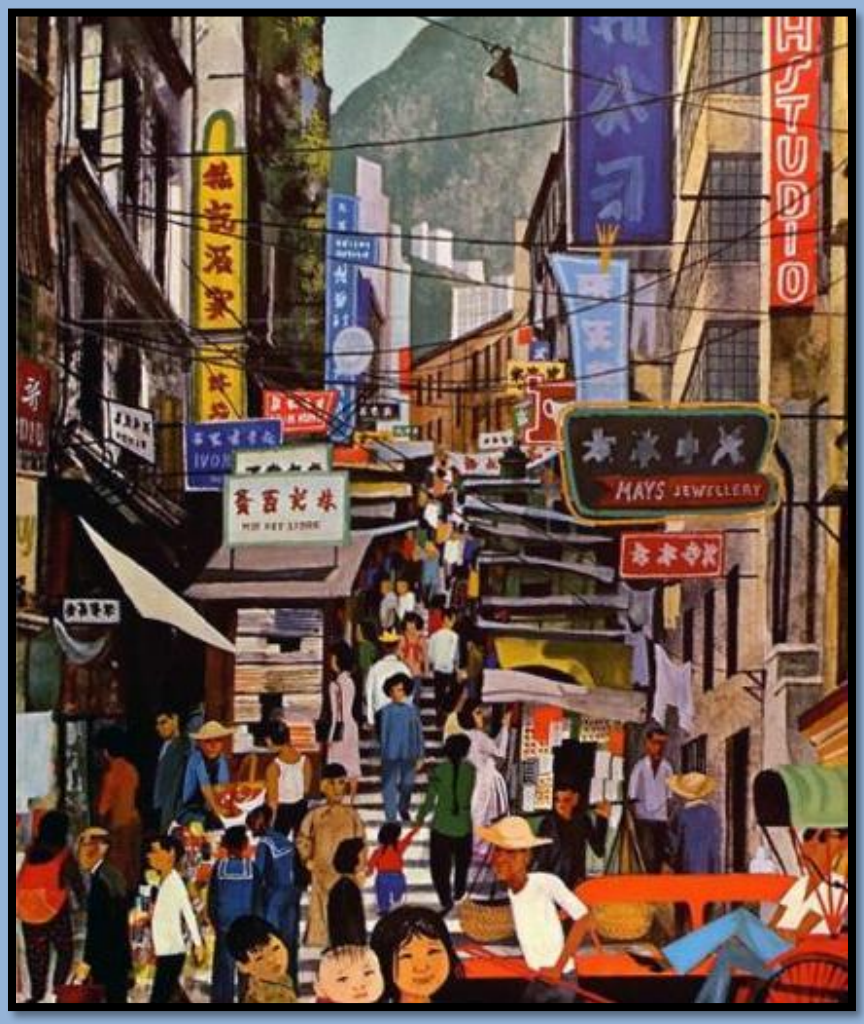
Tales from the Captain's Locker

By

Geoffrey Walker



The Sounds, Sights and Smells of Asia

A compendium of twelve Short Stories and Ditties about Ships and the Sea, from the Jade Triangle, Spice Islands and beyond.

An anthology of the Author's experiences gained in a lifetime spent residing in Asia, and his many voyages navigating the sea-routes east of Sumatra and around the mysterious Far East, and Paradise Islands.

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Quotes to Remember:

"He was a sailor, a dreamer, a thinker, a speculative philosopher…or, as his wife would have it, a romantic idiot" – Unknown Scribe

and

"Any man who would be fully employed should procure a ship or woman, for no two things on this earth produce more trouble if not handled properly" - Plautus: ca 254-184 BCE

Our scene is set

Introduction.

For the incurable romantic, traveler, or the seasoned mariner, nothing exceeds the pleasure and charm to be experienced in Asian and Pacific ports and islands. The sights and sounds, of life in the Orient and those far-a-way places act like a magnet. The cuisine, the colorful inhabitants, the sheer fragrance, and the vast range of beguiling destinations from neon lit cities, to tiny hidden villages and remote bays go to creating a maritime wonderland.

Here is a firsthand account of a charmed life trading throughout the Eastern and Pacific areas as Master of a variety of merchant ships. Work it may have been, but a full appreciation of the people, flavors, and sights, shine through the pages and make this a unique and highly enjoyable read.

By Alan Rawlinson

Master Mariner

The Captain's Lot

Head seas surge into the Bow

Pitching and Pounding as we plough

Swells on the Beam are often seen

Rolling endlessly just like in a dream

Crests and Troughs make up the deep

None of which helps getting to sleep

Pooping is to be avoided from the stern

A hard lesson all mariners must learn

Fog, Mist, Haze or Rain are often in play

The ship must sail and not delay

A distant lighthouse warns of imminent dangers, one may encounter

Whilst Beacons guide the right of way, to satisfy any doubter

Passages and channels are used a lot

So, proceed cautiously and reduce the knot

Red to Red and Green to Green

Move ahead safely, the way it's always been

Captains must always be ever alert and aware when at sea

For second chances may not there be

Trust the Captain when danger lurks

For he is the one that all exerts

Safety and eliminating risk for all, is his aim

That is why he is called Captain, by name

A Tow to Remember

11th January 1964 was a date for me to remember. I boarded a Walla Walla at Blake's Pier for the short ride out to join my new ship laying at one of the Typhoon Buoys, close to Stone Cutters Island, in the scenic Hong Kong harbor. I had recently completed a short leave at my home in Hong Kong upon the completion of my Indentures with Bank Line. As I was not yet 20 years of age, I was too young to sit for 2nd Mates examinations, so I had secured an interim job as uncertified 3rd Mate for a 4month trip on a Hong Kong registered cargo ship named **Asia Fir**. We were destined to load a cargo of Copra around various ports in the Philippines – a pleasurable voyage in the making for my first job as 3rd Mate, so I thought.

Left, **Asia Fir**, being of 5328 GRT and 9270 DWT, had acquired her own history of tramping the oceans over the years. She had been built by Charles Connell & Co at Scotstoun in 1949, as the **Carronpark** for the Denholm Group, before having been sold off in the early 1960s and finding her way to new owners in Hong Kong.

I joined her soon after she was placed under the management of John Manners & Co of Hong Kong. The ship was completing a one month's period of maintenance prior to resuming her trading life and her intended future name change to **"Asia Breeze"**. The Master, a Geordie I believe, was a gentleman of unfailing courtesy, modesty, fair-mindedness, who lived life with a good sense of fun, balanced with an ever-present concern for the welfare of those who served under him. The Chief Officer, a Hullensian, I recall had an extraordinary knowledge of horseracing. Our Chief Engineer was of Anglo-Indian and a decent fellow, whilst the remaining crew, apart from me, consisted exclusively of Hong Kong Chinese. The ship was nicely presented, both in and out, one memorable feature being the large fridge on the Captain's deck which was continuously replenished with bottled beer – withdrawals were based on an honor system which worked very well.

Unfortunately, after several days on board, whilst I was descending into one of the tweendecks to check on some work in progress, I slipped and lost my footing on the ladder, causing me to fall heavily on to the deck below. To cut a long story short, I injured my right leg which necessitated me being hospitalized. I spent about 10 days in the Canossa Hospital before flying to Cebu to rejoin the ship which had obviously sailed from Hong Kong without me.

Having rejoined the vessel, over ensuing weeks we transited various Philippine coastal Ports and working anchorages, with captivating names such as Jose Panganiban, Tacloban, Iligan, and Iloilo loading parcels of the dried coconut kernels as we progressed, before ending up in Cebu where we were scheduled to top off our load. Having completed loading we made our departure but soon afterwards were compelled to return to the anchorage with engine trouble. It took our engineers about one day to try and fathom out the cause. Apparently, it was something to do with the Thrust Pads seriously

overheating. Believing the engineers had rectified the defect we set off a second time but once again we were required to return to the anchorage because of a repetition of the same problem. A third attempt yielded a similar result. Over the next several days our engineers toiled endlessly in their efforts to resolve the issue. By this time, the Company's Marine Superintendent had arrived on scene from Hong Kong. He wasted no time or effort in endeavoring to investigate and rectify matters, but unfortunately it was not to be, despite a variety of spare parts being airfreighted from Hong Kong.

Following several more days swinging around the anchor with the engineering staff striving to overcome the inoperative main engine, followed by further engine trials; it soon became apparent it was proving to be an exercise in futility. Henceforth, remedial action was taken, and the Master informed us of the edict from our Head Office in Hong Kong which instructed that the ship would be towed by a local Tug from Cebu to Manila where we would discharge the entire cargo into another chartered vessel so that attempts could be carried out to repair the engine when the ship was in light ship condition. Furthermore, it was also reasoned more comprehensive engineering support was available in Manila, should it be required.

Suitable Tugs must have been scarce at the time because the following afternoon a dingy looking tug arrived from another Philippines Port, to tow us from Cebu to Manila Bay. I think the term "dingy" was an understatement because the tug looked very rundown and shabby indeed. However, as time was of the essence, we wasted no time in preparing for the tow and over the ensuing hours we disconnected one of our anchors and placed it on deck. We made a good connection with our anchor chain to the tugs towing wire under the watchful eye of a Warrantee Surveyor who had been appointed by the insurers and flown in from Hong Kong. In typical Board of Trade fashion, an emergency towing arrangement was also rigged and made available for quick and ready access should the main tow part unexpectedly.

Our departure from Cebu was hastened to avoid the predicted onset of adverse weather. Once the tug had assumed the full weight of our loaded vessel, reached unrestricted open water, and lengthened her tow line, we settled down to slow but safe progress along the planned tow route, which had been pre-approved by the Warrantee Surveyor. We had a peaceful trip; the only requirement was frequently checking the navigation whilst under tow to ensure we maintained track and keeping a watchful eye on the main towing arrangement for any signs of excessive wear which could lead to imminent failure.

Time passed slowly and it was unusually quiet on board without the "thump, thump" of the main engine with only the diesel generators being active. I remember additional lookouts were posted to minimize the risks of being boarded by Pirates, especially due to our slow speed through Pirate prone waters. Although our passage had been slow, but safe, we eventually anchored in Manila outer harbor. Once our local tug slipped the tow we reconnected and housed the anchor we had previously placed on deck.

We lay at anchor for what must have been a week before the vessel that had been chartered to accept the cargo we were to transfer, arrived. It was a Philippines President Lines ship and she expertly hipped alongside us ready to commence the transfer of our Copra cargo. As it was anticipated that cargo operations would be round the clock, and our hatches were fitted only with basic wooden hatch covers, canvas hatch tents were rigged for all hatches to facilitate quick access to hatches or to afford rapid protection of the cargo in the event of sudden rain squalls.

Cargo was transferred from ship to ship using ships gear rigged with one-ton clam grabs. In retrospect the operation was trouble free other than for the occasional snag with the cargo winches which was

only to be expected under such relentless working conditions. Once our cargo holds had been devoid of the Copra, the laden PPL vessel did not lose any time in departing and proceeding on her voyage. In retrospect the entire exercise of transferring the cargo lasted approximately 2 weeks.

Now in a light ship condition our engineers, in cooperation with the Engineering Superintendent enlisted their time and efforts in troubleshooting and trying to rectify the engine defect. Alas, despite the best of efforts by our shipboard engineers, several more engine trials proved unsuccessful even in light ship condition, resulting in us returning to the anchorage at the conclusion of each engine trial.

Eventually, the owners decided that the vessel would be towed back to Hong Kong for extensive engine repairs at Taikoo Shipyard. This was likely influenced by the fact that the **Asia Fir** was fitted with a Doxford Engine and Taikoo Dockyard were a licensee of Doxford. Henceforth, preparations were made for the pending tow. It did not come as any surprise, therefore, within a 2-3 days the Salvage Tug **"Taikoo"** arrived in Manila to tow us back to Hong Kong. She hipped up on our starboard side for ease of access because there was much planning to be done between both vessel's commanders and the Warrantee Surveyor (who would certify the tow) prior to commencement.

The Hong Kong registered **"Taikoo"** was a supreme tug for her day, having carried out numerous all weather salvage operations in the South China Seas under the command of her celebrated and highly regarded Captain and salvage master, who had served on her for numerous years and had established himself a fine reputation for being a superb seaman and one of the foremost salvage experts in the Far East, which eventuated in him becoming synonymous with the Tug.

Built by Taikoo Dockyard in 1950, and operated by the Swire Group, she soon carved out an exemplary history of salvage exploits, especially in the South China Sea, which became the basis of her iconic reputation. She had an oil - fired steam engine and at approximately 12.5 knots had a range of about 3500 nautical miles. When actively engaged in salvage, she carried a full crew of about 33. At other times she was kept usefully employed within the confines of Hong Kong waters or assisting in the berthing of ships at Taikoo Dockyard and other wharfs around the port.

The "Tai Koo" looked every bit the part of an ocean warrior – a true salvage tug; robust and impressive in her construction she immediately symbolized the type of work for which she had been designed. I understand she was the third such vessel to proudly bear the name within the Swire fleet and served the Taikoo Dockyard faithfully over a valuable working life of some 23 years, eventually meeting her demise in 1973 when she succumbed to the breakers torch.

By this time, it was approaching mid-March, so we were past the worst of the volatile North East Monsoon and Typhoon season in the South China Sea. Typically, the Northeast Monsoon sets in over the South China Sea in early November and lasts through to early March. As we were now in the inter-Monsoonal or transitional period which is usually characterized by light winds, overcast skies and occasional squalls, we were anticipating a relatively good ocean passage over the distance of approximately 630 nautical miles between Manila and Hong Kong. At an average towing speed of say 5.5 knots (bearing in mind we were in light ship trim) the passage should take us around 5 days.

Over the ensuing 2 days there were various meetings between both Masters, Warrantee Surveyor, and our Engineering Superintendent to agree and draw the passage plan so that courses could be laid off on the charts. The Towing Master (commander of the tug Taikoo) would be in overall charge of the tow.

Weather forecasts predicted reasonable conditions for the intended voyage, so we were all prepared to proceed.

The day arrived for our departure. Our crew, assisted and supervised by those from the “Taikoo”, required several hours to connect one of our anchor chains to the towing wires from the Tug. This was a classic Board of Trade arrangement – well proven rig over many years. An emergency towing arrangement was also rigged, similar to the one used for the voyage from Cebu to Manila. Once outward Port clearances had been received for the combo, we set off we cautiously moved from our anchorage in South Harbor out into Manila Bay, escorted by another Port Tug until we cleared the breakwater. As we entered more open water, our towing combo slowly increased speed and the Towing Master progressively lengthened the towing wire. By the onset of darkness, we were making a reasonable 5 knots with the tow wire set at about 500m until we were well clear of the coast, into open Ocean when it would likely be lengthened even more. The length of the towing wire was set by the Towing Master and depended on weather and sea conditions and how well the tow was performing. Twice daily the tow line was to be “refreshed” by a few meters either way to eliminate excessive wear and tear and chaffing of wires in critical points.

Our progress was a little slow but once we had cleared San Nicolas Shoal, we transited the South Channel between the Island of Corregidor to starboard, and Carabao Island to port. The south Channel was slightly deeper and wider, hence the decision made in preference to the Northern Channel. By the time we had cleared the South Channel we had been under tow for about 6 or 7 hours. Once having entered the South China Sea, our Tow Master set a more North Easterly course, the towline was lengthened to about 800m, and we continued making a steady 5+ knots. True to form, the skies were overcast and grey, but we were blessed with only light variable winds and low seas. Naturally, we were predominantly occupied in frequently checking the towing connections, maintaining good VHF radio contact with our Tug and continuing our navigation as if on a normal passage, taking Sun and Star sights, and comparing our calculated position with those determined by the Taikoo, which were generally in complete alignment with their own, but their confirmations were always reassuring.

Left, Tug “Taikoo” pictured steaming through Hong Kong waters

Ensuing days saw little change in the prevailing weather as we continued to make steady progress towards our destination of Hong Kong, always maintaining that magical speed of just over 5 knots. On our third day under tow, we started to sight the distinctive sails of Chinese fishing junks on the northerly horizon. These junks usually sailed in sizable fleets when engaged in fishing and it was a sure signal that we were now closing in towards the China coast. Sailing junks engaged in fishing seldom ventured more than 200 miles offshore; otherwise, it would take too long to get their catch back to port even though many were fitted with auxiliary engines. The increased shipping activity was also evident by the smudges of smoke observed on the distant horizons, all pointing skywards as if reaching for the heavens.

Our Tow Master was an expert on all matters concerning ocean salvage, towage and in particular the South China Sea, so it was like second nature for him guiding the tow, ensuring we maintained a safe distance from such notorious dangers like the Scarborough Shoal, Macclesfield Banks, and the Pratas Islands. So it was, during the afternoon of our 5th day under tow, Waglan Island emerged from the haze. Waglan Island is the easternmost Island of the Po Toi Group which mark the southeast approaches to Hong Kong and features a powerful light house, is extremely rocky and steep so makes for an excellent Radar target for vessels approaching, as in our case. Before our arrival off Waglan, our Tow Master had already commenced shortening the towing wire ready for us negotiating Lye Ye Mun passage and ultimate arrival at Taikoo Dockyard.

As we approached Lye Ye Mun we were accompanied by two other tugs belonging to the shipyard. Their function was to escort us through the relatively narrow harbor entrance and assist the **Asia Fir** whilst releasing the towing gear, as we were a completely dead ship. Once complete they would take us under tow and place us alongside a lay by jetty at Taikoo Shipyard to await repairs to commence. By 1700 Hrs we were safely secured alongside at the dockyard and our electrics plugged into shore power.

We lay alongside for about 2 days before the vessel was placed in the drydock. Our engineers still had not determined the exact cause of the engine problems, but we did glean that the stay in drydock would likely be for several weeks. Meanwhile, expert engineers from the engine manufacturers supervised the strip down of the main engine. Most officers and crew signed off and were transferred to other vessels within the fleet. I was lucky and stood by the vessel from 8am to 6pm during day, then went home every evening. Unverified rumors soon surfaced that the cause of the thrust pads seriously overheating was due (going by hearsay) to issues with the main engine bedplate. Deflections taken reportedly indicated some distortion which was put down to a grounding, which the vessel had sustained a year or so earlier whilst under the management of different owners. True or not it took about 4 weeks, for the shipyard working around the clock to rectify the defects.

A few days before the ship was due to be refloated and undertake sea and engine trials, my contract completed so I signed off and prepared to go to college for my ticket. As mentioned, soon after the vessel changed name to **Asia Breeze** and served the owners for many valuable years prior to being sold for continued trading.

END

Hong Kong Odyssey

Liverpool to Hong Kong was my trip, to the Orient I was bound

The graceful "Canton" was the ship, voyaging thirty days, did me astound

So young and innocent at that time, therefore what to expect I was unaware

Disembarked from the ship to strange shores on which to live, throngs of people everywhere

My dwelling was to be in Somerset Road, this fine address to be my new abode

Kowloon Tong was its name, a leafy suburb all the same, just at the top of Waterloo Road

Peaceful in its widest scope this new home I soon grew to love, with its flaming trees ablaze with color

Set in my memory forever, always there and Oh so dear, crystal clear like no other

Years of happiness did ensue, unique and exciting with daily adventures forever anew

My fledgling years I did embrace, life was fast, and with maturity I grew

Years later we did move to the Peak, a social elevation so to speak

Unable to express the true magnificence of the view, from that patio, I was to keep

Veiled in Asian traditions which never failed to impress, and Chinese culture always did endure

My Cathay venture was real and lasted forever more, so vivid, and so pure

A lifetime of golden years did follow, so deeply treasured, and locked for evermore

As old age approached, I must confess, I loved Hong Kong none the less

Time marched on and the years did pass, and alas, it seemed no sooner time but to go

I met this day with much regret, because of my many fond memories, that will forever glow

A lifestyle second to none with peace and harmony at its core, even Typhoons did not endure

Lifelong friendships did abundantly flourish to remain and allure, to enhance nostalgia for evermore

I arrived at Kai Tak full of remorse and sadness, for what wonderful years I had enjoyed

Down the runway the plane sped, with solitary tear in my eye, never again in Hong Kong to be employed

Bound for Melbourne to retire with grace, but what a difference in culture, lifestyle, and daily pace

A land of plenty I must admit, but it cannot compare with my old Hong Kong base

Master on the Fly

Papua New Guinea is without doubt, a true Paradise. Situated immediately to the north of Australia's Cape York peninsular, it borders the Torres Straits and Coral Sea and is one of Australia's closest geographical neighbors. The shortest distance between Australia and the Papua New Guinea official border is only about 95 miles, but in fact the northernmost Australian inhabited Island of "Boigu" (English name Talbot Island) with a population of only around 300, lies just 3 miles from the New Guinea coast. To the northeast of Papua New Guinea is situated the Solomon Sea, Bismark Sea and Pacific Ocean so the island group is roughly centered within tropical Oceania. A country of immense cultural and biological diversity, its known for its wildlife, beaches, sports fishing, and coral reefs. It features some of the most lush and pristine rain forests, active volcanic mountains, magnificent scenery, and some of the world's longest meandering navigable rivers – The Sepik and Fly Rivers. It is also prone to Tsunamis and earthquakes, which are known locally as Gurias.

Over the years I have had a close association with Papua New Guinea. This evolved when I became a Pilot at Bougainville Island; mainly handling Bulkers at the Port of Anewa Bay which was a major international export terminal at that time for bulk Copper Concentrates. Sadly, this export trade met its demise when the large copper mine operated at Panguna, by Bougainville Copper Ltd., was abandoned due to serious political unrest on the island which necessitated the repatriation of all expatriate and management staff. It was very unfortunate because Bougainville is without doubt one of the most beautiful and scenic locations in New Guinea and a delightful place to both live and work. However, some years later I was employed for several years with the P&O group as Master on their Mini-Bulkers plying the Fly River, mainly carrying Copper Concentrates, and which is the focus of this article.

The concentrate is mined in the mountainous highlands adjacent to mining township of Tabubil, close to the Indonesian Border, then piped as slurry about 97 miles South to Kiunga, located in the upper reaches of the Fly River, where the concentrate is dried, stored and blended ready for transshipment down river using a fleet of Mini-Bulkers to a large silo and storage vessel anchored in the Gulf of Papua or Port Moresby, (depending on seasonal Monsoon and Trade Winds). Overseas transshipment is affected directly from the storage vessel by means of ship, to ship transfer.

At the time of my tenure the bulk carriers were all on long term charter to Ok Tedi Mining and operated from the Fly River loading port of Kiunga, located some 522 river miles inland. These mini bulkers were splendid little ships, about 5000 DWT, twin screw, purpose built, beamy and shallow drafted. Built with the tropics in mind they were relatively comfortable with spacious accommodations and good air-conditioning, as such they were primarily intended to serve the Fly River copper concentrate export trade. The entire fleet was built in Singapore, several of which I was detailed to stand-by the latter stages of construction and fitting out, prior to delivering them to New Guinea and conducting crew training and shakedown voyages.

The overall terms the fleet was relatively modern, well maintained and built to the absolute maximum specification allowing for safe navigation in the Fly River, which restricted draft to about 4.5meters (perhaps 4.9m if the river was running high) but even then, it did not eliminate the risk of grounding, and ship's overall length limited to under 90 meters. Ships returned to Singapore after several years of service to be jumboized. During my time I was Master of the Western Enterprise, Western Endeavour,

Western Star, Western Flyer, Western Triumph and Western Zenith. I also did a couple of fill-in trips on the Western Trader which was a geared tween decker used for voyages to Pacific Island locations such as Palau and the Marshall Islands. She had seen better days and was particularly sensitive in terms of stability.

As mentioned, concentrate was the core trade for these ships but was occasionally supplemented by voyages to Port Moresby and Lae, in addition to Australian Ports, with containers and general cargo. The ships were also capable of carrying several thousand tons of bulk fuel Oil to support the mining township at Tabubil and the concentrator at Kiunga.

The Fly River has its source In the Victor Emanuel Ranges and at the Star Mountains in the interior and is the second longest river in Papua New Guinea. It flows some 650 miles before emptying out into the western sector of the Gulf of Papua in a large fan delta formation. The river is tidal upstream for 150 miles from the estuary and regularly experiences Bore tides. A small stretch of the river forms the border between Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, and it is navigable as far as the Port of Kiunga which is located some 522 river miles inland. The Fly River has 2 main tributaries, namely, the Strickland and Ok Tedi Rivers (the Ok Tedi sometimes referred to as the Alice River) and generally is fast flowing, except in periods of drought when the river tends to dry out in some reaches resulting in downstream flow and water depth being drastically reduced.

The ships employed an expatriate Master and Chief Engineer, all other officers and crew being PNG nationals. The New Guinea Mate and 2nd Mate were highly experienced in inland navigation and superb helmsman, handling the vessels expertly contributing to a safe passage as the ships dodged the various sand banks and areas of notoriety where groundings frequently occurred; they were invaluable for their local knowledge, and were regularly called upon regarding river conditions, which in many cases they could read like a book, through their years of experience. They were a considerable asset to the Master with their advice, particularly when the river was not running full and grounding became a reality and virtually imminent.

This type of work did not suite all expatriate seafarers as it required a good amount of hands-on application. Those who transitioned directly from large ocean trading vessels sometimes found it difficult to quickly adjust to the remote and solitary aspects of the job and become acquainted with the necessity to work at close quarters, and the restrictions which operating in such a river imposed, often contrary to what they had experienced in earlier seagoing life. Many discovered it became hard to adapt to mastering the strong river flow and river conditions. The observance of shipboard safety (many additional considerations when operating in the river) coupled with an aptitude of both self-calm and nerve were absolute requisites to beat the challenges, especially those associated with berthing the ship at Kiunga which called for above average skills when coming alongside light ship, due to the wharf situated on a river bend across the river flow. No bow thrusters were fitted to the ships and using of anchors when berthing was useless due to dragging on account of the fine silt of the riverbed and strong flow which was practically on the beam during this process. Many a good man decided the challenges were too demanding and it did not suit them, so they moved on. The constant monotony of river navigation on a 24 housr basis (using powerful search lights and having to relying more or less exclusively on Radar at night), repeatedly sniffing the riverbed coupled with a never ending effort to seek better water depth to avoid grounding, also weighed heavily at times and warned off many a good

man, not to mention the densest of fogs that often engulfed the river. Hence there was quite a turnover, especially amongst Masters.

To be fair and honest to all participants, it took a good 6 months to harness the river's unique attributes and challenges in getting the strong river flow to work in ones favor rather than against. Once mastered, life became so much easier. Another factor was, excepting for the occasional trips to Port Moresby, Lae or Australian ports there was little opportunity to escape from the ship, even for a few hours. The shipping port at Kiunga was remote in the extreme with nowhere to go. Kiunga was surrounded by dense jungle. The only shop was a dingy trade store which sold tinned bully beef to locals by the ton, and a single open-air market which attracted local rascals (pickpockets, petty thieves, etc). Other than that, there only remained the so called "Guest House" which was a small local motel operated by a couple of expats. For most, it must be said, attributed to an intense countdown until the day arrived when it became time for the short trip to Kiunga airstrip to board the charter flight to Port Moresby at the conclusion of a 3month tour of duty. Hence it was not everyone's cup of tea.

The Fly River was prone to long periods of reduced water and shallowness, which made transiting the full 522 miles somewhat difficult without nudging the bottom or running aground at some stage of the passage, especially when loaded and outbound from Kiunga. Grounding goes against the code of all good mariners, but it was common because the riverbed changed so frequently and where there may have been 10 meters of water one day, the next day it may only be 5 meters or indeed nothing at all. Mud banks shifted frequently and in the tidal reaches mud islands formed then quickly disappeared with regular monotony due to the amount of erosion caused by the fast- flowing stream. Sitting high and dry on a relatively level, soft mud riverbed did not however cause any damage to the vessels in general, and on numerous occasions became the norm for lengthy periods.

The main disadvantage of grounding, apart from the obvious loss of time and inconvenience, was that one never knew how long one would be stranded on the mud. One extreme case caused a vessel to remain grounded, high and dry on a flat mud bank for more than 3 months, during which time the crew played soccer on the dried-out surface mud, even painted a "Goal Post" on the ship's hull plating. The main difficulty was the supply of fresh food and provisions because not even the smallest of craft could get alongside to deliver. In several exceptional cases it became necessary to charter helicopters when numerous vessels became stranded, doing a delivery run to those unfortunate enough to be aground.

For those newer vessels with keel cooling, it was not so bad because circulating water could be maintained but for those not so fitted one was obliged to rig fire hoses to the nearest flowing river water in order to sustain the use of ship's generators, air conditioning plant and other facilities. Therefore, a considerable amount of bottled drinking water was always carried on board to cover such eventualities. Obviously, the river water was unsuited for human consumption and barely passed the "Pub Test" even for washing in cases of dire need.

It was very ghostly navigating the river at night, the powerful searchlights cast a very sinister shadow. It was even more uncanny when sitting aground at night on a mud bank in a river surrounded by dense jungle just meters away. Only the noise of animals broke the deafening silence and tranquility, added to the sense of haunting, and aided the onset the feeling of discomfort and potential alien danger, throughout the hours of darkness.

Depending upon which part of the river you were in determined the friendliness of the local tribesmen and natives that lived in the jungle villages that skirted the length of the riverbank. Most were friendly and waved as we sailed past but some others not so friendly, paddling out in cut out canoes attempting to hinder the ship's passage. One became immune to these veiled threats but never lost sight of the dangers of swamping the canoes and causing the occupants to fall overboard into crocodile infested waters. The best we could do was to make a lot of noise on the ship's siren and slow down best we could, thus trying to minimize our wash and wake.

There was one particularly interesting story that was going about at the time amongst the crews of the ships. Apparently, so the story goes, a local chieftain had a serious argument with one of his daughters over a marriage dowry – to cut a long story short (excuse the pun) – he murdered her and cut up her torso into pieces. The meat was taken to a bush market where it was sold as Pork but one of the purchasers complained strenuously about the meat being too tough and inedible, and so demanded a refund. The riotous argument attracted the attention of the local police unit who suspected something untoward, so had the meat forensically tested. The result was…human flesh. True or not I cannot vouch, but the yarn was told by ship's crew with great earnestness and belief.

When transiting the river, it was often required that the ship come very close to the riverbank, in order to seek the deepest water, so at night I had very strict orders that no one was permitted to go outside on deck. Apart from which, the mosquitoes would have a feast and Malaria was prevalent. This became mandatory in my night order book because we would regularly find arrows and spears on the deck and bridge wings, propelled in our direction by natives of the night. Occasionally, at night these projectiles could be heard striking the superstructure or landing on the ship's deck. It was not so much the projectile itself that was the principal concern, but rather what kind of poison may have been placed on the arrow or spear tips, to aide their native hunting.

The "FLY" had an abundance of wildlife such as colorful Cassowaries, Deer and exotic Birds, Hornbills, multi-colored Parrots, and the like but it also had its fair share of dangerous creatures, in particular Crocodiles and Snake, Spiders and Wild Pigs. Crocodiles were always conspicuous during daylight hours basking in the sun on exposed mud banks or at the water's edge and at night they were equally as visible because their eyes shone red when the beam of the searchlights was cast upon them. At night, the sweet odors off the rain forest became almost overpowering and the jungle came alive with sounds that were very unsettling to the uninitiated.

During my spell working on the "Fly, river traffic was controlled and monitored as best possible by Ok Tedi at Kiunga. Under the call sign "Ok Tedi Kiunga" they broadcast every morning at 9am by HF Radio mainly on 5960 Khz but sometimes we used other frequencies if the atmospherics were bad. All Ships were required to report their position and speed. This worked satisfactorily and allowed ships to roughly calculate where and when they may expect to meet passing traffic and permit VHF contact beforehand, once within range. The system worked well except for large barges under tow, laden with illegally harvested logs. Obviously, these perpetrators operated under the veil of secrecy and were most active during hours of darkness which made them even more of a menace, because they did not exhibit any steaming lights. High-definition Radar was the only way to detect them. It was common knowledge that this illegal practice was in full swing, but no one seemed to pay much attention to it from our perspective. The only known logging camp was at the river mouth, just off Umuda Island, where at any

given time there could be upward of a dozen logging vessels anchored, all engaged in loading dressed logs for Asian destinations.

There was an unofficial (cum official) river map which had been laboriously drawn by an ex Australian Master during the early days of the OK Tedi Mine development project. His river map was surprisingly accurate and indicated in the greatest detail the location of all the “RM” markers, conspicuous objects, and fixed hazards for the entire length of the river as far as Kiunga, it was a work of art. There were a few navigation markers in areas not subject to much change but mostly the Masters soon learned their own tricks and transit points from the national crew…such as for example, keeping a conspicuous tree, land mark, structure or natural beacon in such a position until it reached a certain bearing and radar distance, before altering to the next course, etc etc., buoyage was nonexistent. Determining the ship’s progress transiting the river was an easy exercise because of the highly conspicuous “RM’s” placed every 5 river miles. Hence when reporting to “Ok Tedi Kiunga” by radio (ie. position RM 225, upstream/downstream, speed 10 knots) it gave you a good handle on both speed and position. When entering or departing the river delta reporting was also mandatory by HF radio. A typical downstream passage from Kiunga to river estuary (barring groundings) was approximately 48 hours duration, whilst an unhindered upstream passage was about 72 hours duration.

The rule of navigation in the Fly River was of course traffic moving downstream had the right of way and those sailing upstream were required to pull over clear of the channel towards the riverbank and give way. Depending on which area of the river you were at time of meeting the conflicting traffic, dictated whether you just pull clear of the channel or go hard alongside the riverbank in the narrower reaches, thus giving way to the downstream vessel. The latter was not so pleasant, especially at night, because it was difficult to avoid trees, many of which seriously overhung the riverbank in places. In such cases snakes and other hazardous creatures become a reality so one needed to anticipate. A clean-up party was required every day at first light to clear away dead and broken tree branches together with any other hazards. The national crews were fearless and unperturbed by any nasties and creepy crawlies which had landed on deck during the night.

One of the major natural hazards when navigating the Fly River was large semi-submerged logs. If they struck a propeller blade that could mean curtains and easily snap off or seriously bend a complete propeller blade(s). These large logs were almost invisible as they floated just below the surface, even during the day but at night one had no chance of sighting and taking evasive action.

During periods when the river was low due to lack of rain at the river source it was not uncommon to anchor off Umuda Island in the river estuary, whilst waiting for the river to rise. These layovers could run into weeks until the rains broke. We nicknamed this the “Umuda Country Club” and daily the Master and Chief Engineer of each ship would visit other ships in turn for a lunch and a few beers. There was a great deal of competition between the ship’s Cooks to see who could lay down the most delicious of meals. Of course, there was a limit as to what could be produced for the table because of diminishing stores in some cases, but a meal always tasted better when prepared by someone else. There was nothing else to do except watch videos or read, so the daily gathering and interaction with other vessels was the only option to break the monotony and boredom which could become very fatiguing.

The Fly River was extremely wide at the river mouth, a typical fan delta but once passing Sturt Island – about RM 125, where there was a sawmill operated by a lone expatriate and his local extended family, the river started to twist remarkably. The Sawmill was very conspicuous with its ramshackle wooden

jetty and grass airstrip carved out of the bush on the slope of a hill. For the next 100 RM or so the river meandered through grass lands, with reeds as tall as the ship's masts in many places. At this point the river was somewhat featureless but still reasonably wide it must be said.

The next point of interest was Obo Station. Basically, a small missionary settlement consisting of only a few wooden shacks and a radio tower, supported by a jungle airstrip. Once past Obo Station and the confluence of the Strickland River, the topography changed yet again. The river became much narrower and started to twist and wind even more noticeably with some bends up to 180 degrees. Rafts of water lilies, often in full bloom, were magnificent and the sweet odors emitted from other flowers and plants were always present, mainly because of the Jungle closing in as the river narrowed and became more restricted.

Some stretches of the river formed the border with Indonesia and their military patrols were occasionally observed but they never bothered river traffic. Only the presence of the sporadic Indonesian flag defined their territory. In any event the Indonesians had the right of navigation downstream to the river estuary.

Approaching the junction of the Fly and Alice Rivers, in the region of RM 436, was always a nightmare as it was a notoriously bad area for shallows and grounding as well as hidden underwater snags and logs. The deepest water lay right close to the riverbank for about a 2 mile stretch so it was normal to collect remnants of overhanging trees as one swept past – particularly when proceeding downstream as ships speed was fast which made steering difficult, being so close to the riverbank but the PNG helmsmen were expert and had good experience handling the challenge. Successfully navigating RM 436 area signaled the last of the hazards, since the water depth increased upstream all the way to Kiunga (RM 522), save for the "Rock Bar".

Negotiating the "Rock Bar" which was a very narrow and sharp river bend of about 90 degrees was always difficult. Going upstream it was not too difficult stemming the river flow but when proceeding downstream, especially when the river was high and the river flowing even faster than normal, it could prove very hazardous. Approaching this point when transiting downstream, one was faced with a hard cliff like riverbank on the starboard side right at the critical point at which a very sharp turn to Port was required. Speed could not be reduced as it needed to be maintained in order ensure best steerage in the attempt to negotiate the sharp bend. The secret was, to keep the ship's bow as close as one dared to the port hand riverbank as one approached, with the helm hard over to port and with a little luck the ship would make the turn and miss the section of hard riverbank on the starboard side, but never more than by a few feet. Some ships in the fleet were not so lucky and suffered the consequences of colliding with the hard knoll, which very surprisingly did not cause serious structural damage. The notorious "Rock Bar" was I think another factor in causing many good men to leave the job.

From the "Rock Bar" it was plain sailing right up to Kiunga, even allowing for the increased narrowing of the River. Kiunga was situated at the top of a longish reach but the two jetties were positioned awkwardly on the river bend which created challenges when berthing. One berth was used for general cargo and containers (later to include a second wharf facility), whilst the other was exclusively for loading the concentrate. We always berthed port side alongside to facilitate the ship loading. Loading a full cargo could be achieved in approximately 6 hours and it was a very dusty and dirty affair. There were suitable anchoring locations slightly up and downstream from the main township, which often became crowded during periods of low river levels with numbers of ships waiting for a rise of water.

Western Zenith at Kiunga General Cargo Wharf – taken soon after I delivered her from the builders in Singapore

Note the Powerful Searchlights on Forecastle used for night navigation in the Fly River. There were 2 others atop of the bridge deck.

Once loaded and ready for departure it was a simple task of singling up to a solitary stern rope or back spring, depending on personal preference and allowing the river flow to swing the ships head away from the berth; swinging quite rapidly to starboard until the bow was almost facing downstream before casting off and engaging main engines to assist with completing the swing heading in the direction of downstream. The river at this point was too restricted for any kind of alternative maneuver.

When operating in the Fly River it always paid off to remain alert, open minded and anticipate, because the river frequently deceived those mariners who were not prepared for the unexpected or unpredicted. Hence, upon completion of a 3month spell one was ready for home leave and it was always good to take the small Dornier or Twin Otter commuter aircraft to Port Moresby. The discomfort of the cramped 2.5 hours flight was soon forgotten and easily overshadowed by the first of several iced beers at the Airways Hotel bar at Moresby, usually whilst awaiting onward international connections and a pending home leave.

Kiunga Port – Township and Airstrip in just visible in the top background of the picture. Note ship is alongside at the container berth. Likely handling containers bound for, or arriving from, Australia. The Copper loading berth is immediately astern of the captioned ship.

Upstream approach to Kiunga was from left of picture. We used to swing the vessels in the small basin at river bend using the downstream river flow to assist the maneuver as no bow thrusters were fitted to

the ships. In actual fact swinging room was not much, as most of the area ahead and astern of the wharfs was silted, as can be seen in the image.

The Kiunga Township was surrounded by the densest of jungle. Wildlife was abundant, some nice and some not so nice. Naturally, the Fly River was heavily infested with crocodiles. On one occasion I saw a large crocodile swimming 20 miles offshore. Large Sharks were also prevalent in the river estuary, and in the upper reaches Baramundi fishing was excellent.

Western Star – Likely on her way to Townsville in Australia with empty containers on deck. The ships ran regularly between Australia and Port Moresby/Kiunga with project cargo and containers. Taken before she was jumboized.

Western Endeavour – at Kiunga loading bulk concentrates. She was the first of the fleet of 6, 5000ton Mini-bulkers and 2 Tankers. The vessels were fitted with parabolic bows to assist in reducing wash, thus reducing erosion on the banks of the river.

END

The Demise of a Ship

Twenty plus years is the usual term

From launch till breaker's torch doth burn

She trades the world with glory and pride

Giving cargoes and passengers a good safe ride

From time to time, she suffers breakdowns and ridicule

But in general, reliable service has been the rule

Her global voyages ranged far and wide, the oceans she did maunder

From the ice of the North to the distant down under

Smooth and rough sea alike, with the occasional storm

Her weathering them all, is just the norm

As the years pass, passengers and cargo come and go from time to time

Each, in their own way, contributing to her progressive decline.

The day arrives when she is too old, and therefore must be sold

Her future lies with a decision most bold

Scrapyards vie for her steel plates to plunder

To cut and melt at an alarming rate to cast asunder

Sadly, a pending demolition does therefore loom

For which continued trading has no room

Her final days approach with remorse and gloom

For she will go to the breakers now very soon

Her faults and flaws no longer matter

Now all is forgiven, amongst the scrapyard clatter

Her demise is near, so sadly the case

The breakers torch works at a rapid pace, mournfully without any deserving grace.

My Reminiscences of Old Klong Toei

Klong Toei (sometimes referred to as Klong Toey) is the name of the Port district of Bangkok, located some 34 or so kilometers upstream along the Chao Phraya River. Between the years spanning 1940-80s, it served as the main maritime gateway, strategically situated on The Chao Phraya River, to service Thailand's capital city. The port has draft limitation but was capable of handling average sized, deep sea ships, of the era.

During the Vietnam War the Port of Sattahip was constructed by the Americans, together with the adjacent airport of Utopao, mainly as a military facility in support of their operations in Vietnam. They also built a two-lane highway connecting these developments with Bangkok. The other main Port in Thailand at that time was that of Songkhla, which was situated on the western side of the Gulf of Thailand and serviced southern areas of the country. In later years, the newer and more modern Container Port of Laem Chabang superseded Bangkok as the principal commercial port for Thailand, although Klong Toei still retains a smaller portion of the shipping traffic to this day.

My first recollection of Klong Toei stretches back to 1961 when I was a deck apprentice with Bank Line but over the ensuing years, I have always maintained a close relationship with Bangkok, both professionally and personally, having worked in Thailand for some years, and having a residence there.

My initial visit was before the onset of the Vietnam War, and was therefore devoid of noisy military personnel on leave and therefore remained relatively unspoiled. The worst we had to contend with during the early 1960s was the odd sailor having one over the eight or the occasional bar room scuffle. Even after the commencement of the hostilities in Vietnam, Klong Toei still managed to retain some level of order, because it remained outside the focus and off the Radar of the American forces, as they tended to favor Pattaya since it was closer to their bases, and the red light district, of "Pat Pong" in Bangkok. From Sattahip to Bangkok, in those days, would take a good 3 hours by road and if they did go to Bangkok, they usually congregated in the bars located in the vicinity of "Pat Pong", which was the main hot spot at that time, and remains so for tourists seeking "active" night entertainment, to this day.

Klong Toei was the main night entertainment area in Bangkok for mariners, and whilst not completely unknown to local residents it sourced the majority of its commercial activity from crews of visiting foreign ships, and to a lesser extent from the European expat community. During the Vietnam conflict, even with the influx of American GIs to Bangkok on R&R it seemed they did not really know of its existence, since very few ever ventured to patronize the numerous night Clubs, Bars, Massage Parlors, and other entertainment venues. So, we sailors established "squatters rights" so to speak. Hence it maintained its hidden secrets, being exclusively directed toward the seagoing types who visited the port.

Klong Toei nightlife did not come alive until after 9pm when it erupted, going non-stop until around 5am, by which time most sailors had consumed too much alcohol and wandered back to the ship with empty pockets, to get their head down, or having spent the night in the company of Bar girls or ladies of the night.

We were fortunate inasmuch as our ship usually berthed very close to the Klong Toei dock gate, a stone's throw away from either, the Mariner's Club – if you were skint, then that was your venue. The

alternative being the local night life if you were more financial. Both options were within a short walking distance of each other.

At the heart of the night entertainment area was the notorious Mosquito Bar, and the next door Venus Room. Both were notorious and the “headquarters of insanity” when it came to exotic and erotic night life.

The Mosquito Bar was just across the road from Klong Toei dock gate, situated on the corner. It was so ideally located and was the first thing to catch the eye having walked out the gate from the wharf area, into the street. Downstairs there was an open bar with tables and chairs outside under the building’s canopy and awning. The actual Mosquito Bar was upstairs on the second floor. At the entrance you had to wait to be seated at one of the tables but first it was necessary to adjust your night vision as inside was in virtual darkness.

Soon one of the Bar girls would escort you inside and take you to a vacant table – you needed to follow closely for fear of bumping into other tables. Then the available girls would jostle for your attention. Their next modus operandi was to get you to buy them drinks. Even after a period inside, it remained so dark it was difficult to really see much. The atmosphere was thick with cigarette smoke and fumes. The air-conditioning and ventilation, being minimal and of no use whatsoever.

The darkness was twofold in purpose, firstly to mask the identity of many local patrons and secondly so the freelance females were not so visible helping to conceal the wrinkles of those more elderly amongst them. The girls ranged from young, about 18-20 years of age, right through to the near geriatric. The ladies seemed to be shipped in as most originated from outside Bangkok. The upstairs bar was void of any internal decoration from what one could determine, anyway, if there was it could not be easily seen.

The venue was nearly always, full to capacity, as well as noisy. There were the most daring of striptease-artists, some bordering on sickening, amongst the cast of regulars was “Midget Rooter” and “Skinny Minnie”, to name but a couple (no idea how these names derived). In short it was a meat market, with a polluted atmosphere laced with the smell of cheap perfume and the females asking, “you like me”, “you take me hotel”? Business boomed and was always popular, despite the occasional brawl – generally over a female, or alcohol related.

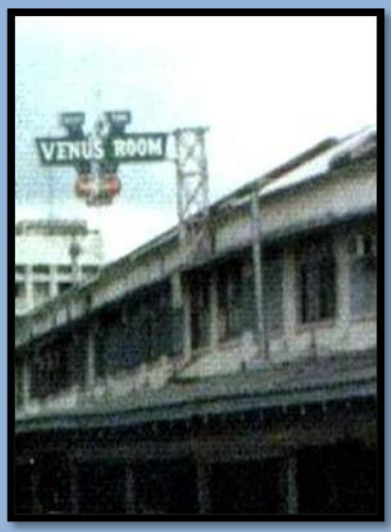
On one of my calls at Bangkok our ship’s electrician got into a “Mekong Whiskey” drinking session and subsequently got himself into a fight over one of the females. Mekong Whiskey was brewed locally and was dynamite if consumed in quantity. He was missing for 4 days before the Thai Police managed to find him, spread-eagled over some close by disused railway lines (see map below), still very drunk and bleeding from the ear after having been clubbed with a baseball bat. He ended up in hospital with alcoholic poisoning and perforated ear drum. He missed the ship and rejoined at our next port which was Hong Kong. Hence the Mosquito Bar truly earned its international reputation for notoriety.

It remained as such until the 1970s when the proprietors decided to upgrade and renovate the premises with new internal decoration. This included wall papering, pink lighting, cubicles, and proper seating to replace the previous cheap and flimsy folding ones. It always remained absolutely full every night despite the renovations, which caused it to lose much of its legendary atmosphere. And I believe there were a new intake of girls, and striptease-artists. This all ended abruptly, during the early 1980s when

finally, the local Port Authority bulldozed the premises to make way for new construction to take place (so they claimed).

The Mosquito Bar, in its heyday, between 1960 –1970s - Handouts and cards distributed usually by the Bar staff.

Below, the infamous sign, hanging innocently on the wall of the twostory building, not revealing any of its inner secrets.



The nearby “Venus Room”. The sign hanging ajar, which was no surprise as the building was ramshackle and in a state of disrepair, having long past seen better days.

With somewhat less notoriety, but still packed most nights, the next door, Venus Room, was in the same ramshackle building as the Mosquito Bar and was also on the second floor. It appeared bigger than the Mosquito Bar (MB) and seemed to be favored more by local Falangs, (male expat residents). It still got its fair share of sailors, but it was never quite as popular as the MB. It had its girls who I recall, used to take it in turns to sit at an outside table, trying to entice you inside, rather like modern day Thai Bars, but without their conspicuous flashing fairy lights and decorations designed to catch one’s eye. During that time, most Bars or nightclubs employed Spivs or shady looking types to act as pimps to get you inside their disreputable dens of iniquity.

It was still as rowdy with its share of brawls but not quite in the same league as the MB. I believe the girls were more local and freelance than those that frequented the MB since they all seemed to know each other and were friendlier amongst themselves. That is how it appeared to me anyway. Today, all that remains of the site where these notorious Bars were located; is a few small buildings and trees. There is no evidence whatsoever of its previous history since the site is substantially derelict. The Mission to Seafarers was still going, at the time of my last visit, just down the small "Soi" (lane) as shown in the image to left.

Both these establishments form a substantial part of the history of Klong Toei, despite the fact, that there were numerous other bars close by of much less infamy. The good seafood eateries were close to hand and always popular, but the motto was "eat first and play later".

For those with more sober entertainment in mind there was always the Mission to Seaman which was located only a few strides away down a small Soi (small lane) adjacent to the Mosquito Bar, across a wooden footbridge spanning a swampy area that occasionally was ablaze with water lily flowers, despite the smell. The "Mission" featured a swimming pool and the other usual facilities offered by similar establishments world-wide, including the rather featureless bar, but cost of beer was cheap. It was open during the day and closed about 10pm. One unusual attribute was it did have its share of freelance ladies during the day, who were always willing to keep you company and to chat, whilst they scrounged a drink or some snack food. There were those who still attempted to peddle their extra curricula services somewhat discreetly, as it must be said that the ladies at the mission were slightly less pushy as they were under the watchful eye of the management. Unless you were short of funds the only reason to go to the Mission was for a swim, post your mail, or to support the expat Chaplain who always visited the ships when in Bangkok port.

The Mission to Seaman was later renovated and is now known as the Mission to Seafarers. Although, it remains, in the heart of the once infamous red-light district, of Klong Toei. Nowadays there are still, one or two, night venues that come to life after 10pm but nothing of the caliber of the Mosquito or Venus Room bars. Today, they are mainly surrounded by Massage Parlors and Karaoke Bars, and restaurants, mostly catering for Thai patrons. The area is constantly changing. Seldom are tourists seen in the area nowadays since Bangkok City, which provides its own huge array of nightlife is within quick and easy reach, by using the Mass Transit Railway from Klong Toei, a convenient conveyance for visiting sailors, seeking an exciting and adventurous night of entertainment in Bangkok's "Dark Side", known as "Pat Pong". As mentioned, only memories remain of these infamous bars. What a sad end to an exciting era for the foreign sailor. Alas, a port call at Bangkok is no longer the same and only nostalgia remains. Map of Klong Toei, the Dark Side, after Midnight.

Anyone remember these "T" shirt motifs from the Klong Toei Bars?

END

Australia Fair

Australia, a land of milk and honey, where hard work can earn big money, instead of working for naught

Prone to extremes in heat and drought, it is the World's driest land, without a second thought

Huge in size it professes to be, but with few people spread sparingly, only 5 major cities to absorb the lot

Aussies often call others Mate, and frequent the pub to partake, of a thirst quenching pot

No matter what their cultural trait, a friend in need is a good Aussie Mate, sincere and true to demise

Equality here is the game, from whence you came does not even arise, freedom for all, is the prize

A true blue Ausse will always be, a fair dinkum player and referee, for he or she will claim that goal

Through thick and thin we will be, your best buddy always, for that lies at the core of our soul

Aussies are an innovative mob, always sharing new ideas small and big, distributed for all to enhance

Cutting-edge in so many cases the world does clinch, for it gives peoples far and wide, a better chance

In music we do abound with the aborigine chanting sound, but also new rhythms we should include

Artists ranked amongst the best, combining dots and scenes for all to enjoy, no matter what your mood

Gums and Wattles of yellow and green are in every State and easily seen, giving rise to Aussie pride

So, our national colors are proudly adorned to symbolize, our intent for fair play no matter what side

The flag bears the Southern Cross clearly seen, high aloft in fluttering motion, creating only true emotion

Proud are we of our values boldly etched in our native fabric, which symbolize our national notion

Distances between us can be great, but does that matter when going to meet your true Aussie Mates

Oceans are deep and pollution free, with coral reefs that fringe the coastline in the northern States

Hot and arid in the main save for a small part on the coastal plain, but blue skies always, is the domain

In Australia the land is clean and pristine, unlike other places I have seen, hope forever it will so remain

Strange creatures here can be found, nowhere else to be seen, because out land is so unique

Our original peoples we do respect for keeping their lands sacred, and full of rituals and mystique

As one nation Aussies unite in harmony and peace, the chanting tones of a didgeridoo, do so embrace

Glory to the creator for our gift, the land of Australia will thrive forever, never to become a rat-race

Dragons and Lanterns

Born in England towards the end of WW2, growing up and life thereafter has been one continuous adventure for me. Although having achieved no major accolades in life, I do, nevertheless believe I have been fortunate enough to have seen more than most in my lifetime thus far, for which I am eternally grateful.

At

an early age, I along with my family left Liverpool and relocated to Hong Kong – my father being a Telecommunications Engineer and my mother an English teacher.

My recollection of all my adventures stem from one cold, rainy January morning when a taxi rolled up at our home in Liverpool, to take us to the city bus depot and the comfort of a quite luxurious motor coach which would take us on the long ride to Southampton. There we were to join the P and O liner “Canton” that would be our home during our passage to Hong Kong.

Most of the trip by road is vague but once having arrived at Southampton I am blessed with absolute clarity. My young eyes feasted upon the majestic gleaming white steamer sporting a creamy yellow funnel and masts, which would be my playground for the next 30 days.

My father, being a senior executive, was privileged to first class travel so we all boarded the “Canton” and settled into our accommodations. My parents occupied an impressive suite on one of the upper decks, complete with large seaward facing window, quality fittings and facilities and of course en-suite. The décor was very tasteful and on a par with at least any Five Star hotel. My younger brother and I occupied an adjoining double cabin, also very luxurious, well-appointed, and complete with two tier bunk beds. Being the elder I insisted on the upper bunk, naturally.

The interiors of the First-Class decks were very plush. Teak veneered bulkheads, highly buffed linoleum tiles on the decks, numerous brass fittings all polished to perfection and everywhere lingered that sweet odor reminiscent of a mix of disinfectant and furniture polish. The public rooms and dining areas were equally impressive. Spotless white linen tablecloths spread upon round tables, silver service and stewards immaculately turned out to cater for ones every wish. Food was endless with enormous choices which included a never-ending buffet in addition to a la carte menus. Everything down to the last detail was very well presented.

Outside, the wooden decks were holystoned white, paintwork in the passenger areas was kept like new and the wooden and brass hand-railings, varnished and gleaming.

The entire ship was an absolute picture and although not new by any means was obviously well maintained.

Eventually we cast off amid crowds of well-wishers, and as the passenger liner gained headway I recall watching the other ships tied up at the various wharves slip past, as we headed serenely down Southampton water towards the Solent (waterway between the Isle of Wight and UK mainland). The weather was very cold, overcast with drizzle and I remember wondering to myself when I would return. I must admit at that impressionable young age it was all a bit bewildering for me and at the time, I didn’t

realize the significance this departure from English shores would play in my future life. Nevertheless, we soon settled in on board.

For the first few days at sea life was miserable, until we cleared the Bay of Biscay. Continuous seasickness affected most passengers and was very unpleasant but lifted as soon as we approached the coast of Portugal at which point the sea lost most of its vengeance resulting in the ship's motion becoming more stable. The sky turned from overcast to blue and the sun shone brilliantly. Life on board quickly took a turn for the better. The only one of us that had been unaffected by seasickness was my father, being ex-RN with exploits on the "Kelly", "Dido", "Zest", "Cowslip", etc., during the fateful war years. I hold vivid memories of Mom and Dad dressing formally for dinner every evening, long hours in the swimming pool, movies, deck games and most importantly endless ice creams, served on the boat deck, morning, and afternoon, which soon became supplemented with our unlimited selection of cream cakes. It was just like a huge holiday camp with ship's staff doing all they could to make life as pleasurable as possible. For the adults and those with an inclination towards gambling there was even a ship's tote, whereby the passenger who came closest to selecting the exact distance the vessel had steamed during the previous 24 hours period, received a cash prize. My parents won it once.

One of my most interesting memories early in the voyage goes back to when we had just passed Gibraltar, by this time I guess we had been on board about a week. One evening, I was asleep in my upper bunk, whilst my mother and father were at dinner. Suddenly, something startled me, and I awoke abruptly. The cabin adjoining ours was a single and occupied by an attractive young lady schoolteacher bound for Singapore. Being in the upper bunk I could hear faint voices and giggles coming from a ventilator outlet close to the deck head. By standing on the bunk, I could just reach it with my ear. Naturally, I did so, being an inquisitive youngster. I immediately recognized the voice of the lady passenger and that of "Danny" our cabin steward. Danny must have been in his early twenties and an amiable young man. Having satisfied my curiosity, I thought no more of this and just went back to sleep.

The next morning, I innocently said to Danny "What were you doing in that lady's cabin last night". His face went a paler shade of pink and I earned a stern glare, but I did receive his immediate response – "if you and your brother don't mention this to anyone, you can come to the pantry every afternoon at 3 pm and have as many cakes and as much ice cream as you like"! This was the proverbial carrot and so my brother and I exploited this invitation to the maximum for the duration of the voyage, despite my mother's objections. It was not until years later that I realized Danny's motives for such generosity!

We transited the Mediterranean Sea heading eastward. Our first stop was at Port Said in Egypt, and transit through the Suez Canal. It was a one-day adventure because this was my first experience of being in a foreign country. Hitherto, my only exposure to foreigners had been the occasional Asian salesman who came to our front door peddling household items from a suitcase – whenever they came, I would run and hide under the kitchen table, absolutely petrified.

We tied up to a jetty somewhere, I guess for replenishment of bunkers and stores, and to wait the designated time for the southbound convoy to transit the canal. We stayed there most of the day and of course there were the usual 'Bum Boats', alongside with their occupants peddling their wares. Bartering with hawkers who were hoping to sell their terrible stuffed camels, leather stools and turquoise trinkets of various assortments, made time pass quickly. One excitement for me was the young urchins that dived to recover coins thrown overboard into the water by passengers. The kids would dive then break surface with the coin firmly gripped between their teeth. For a youngster like me, never having been

further than the Mersey Docks, this was marvelous entertainment, as was the “Gili Gili” man with his tricks. However, I was still cautious of the natives and it took me some time to really feel at ease even though I stuck to my parents like wool on a sheep’s back.

I saw my first camel during the canal transit, several of them in fact, all gaping aimlessly at our ship as we passed by. Even at that young age they struck me as being rather dumb looking creatures.

Our passage through to the Gulf of Aqaba was otherwise uneventful except I recall, everyone by now had changed into tropical rig, namely, tropical evening dress for passengers and crispy white uniforms for the officers and crew. By this point in time the voyage had taken on a different perspective. People had forged friendships and life was much more informal, with most being on first name terms at least. Drinking sessions at the Verandah Café or Lido Bar, cards, deck games and competitions were commonplace within the various groups.

Not to be outdone, I met my first girlfriend, puppy love, I guess. Her name was Alison, and she was on her way to India with her family. She had a terrible younger brother named Simon who delighted in teasing us! We went everywhere together, and I was sad when she eventually left the ship. I missed her pig tails.

Obviously, by this time the vessel had its fair share of somewhat more serious romances and affairs. There were the usual twosomes who never separated or parted company until disembarkation. They were very conspicuous, morning, noon and night. One evening, my brother and I were wandering the boat deck under the watchful guidance of the folks. I received a serious reprimand from my father for annoying a young romancing couple who were really quite oblivious to happenings around them, they, being so very preoccupied. I do not recall seeing this couple thereafter; I think we frightened them off and they may have sought a more private venue. I believe they disembarked at Bombay. However, other couples were like beacons, being in the same old fixed position, night after night. This activity and presence seemed to dwindle as the voyage progressed, perhaps because flourishing romances had taken a more serious turn which demanded more discrete surroundings.

The climate was, by this juncture starting to change quite dramatically. Long hot and quite humid days, passing squalls and the odd rough patch – seasick again! The passage between Suez and Bombay was the longest stretch of the voyage. The days did not drag because there was always enough to keep one occupied, however it did start to wear a bit thin. The same cannot be said for the ongoing supply of ice cream and chocolate cakes, éclairs and other delights we received from the pantry with daily regularity, even my mother was starting to become suspicious of the amounts being consumed and went to pay a visit to Danny the cabin steward, to investigate from where we were getting all the goodies. She must have received adequate assurances because it did not have any impact on our daily consumption.

At long last Bombay and the gateway to India. First impression was dusty, dirty and smelly with a sort of heat haze that was so thick it lingered above like an umbrella, most of the day. The crowding was immediately imprinted on my brain and was only rivaled by what I encountered in China, years later. The ship was alongside the wharf at some dock complex, still there were hundreds of urchins milling about and begging. Security guards clad in khaki uniforms each with a long cane had little success in keeping them at bay and the wharf had its share of mangy “Pani Dogs” all scavenging about in packs, yelping and annoying passersby. The air one breathed seemed heavy, rather like taking a gulp of steam

from a steam engine as it passes by when standing on a station platform as one is momentarily engulfed in steam or funnel fumes!

My father had been in India during his seagoing years and did venture to alert us two boys as to what we may expect, prior to our arrival. Nevertheless, being so young we were not prepared for our encounters. At that age I was shocked to see the level of 'undress" by many of the local workers called "coolies", milling about wharf side. Just clad in a simple loin cloth in most cases. Needless, to say, we did not take the opportunity to go ashore whilst in Bombay but instead spent most of the day looking at the hawkers and their wares, who had been allowed on to one of the promenade decks, to set up small stalls, obviously under the closest scrutiny of the ship's staff. We bought and bartered and bargained, well at least my parents did. I can't remember what they purchased, but figure it was more a case of buying for the sake of it, mainly to pass the time and belay the boredom.

I have to say, at a young age my parents always tried to educate we brothers as to the "outside" world and how it ticked! For this I am eternally grateful as it prepared me for later life, especially when I embarked on a seagoing career myself.

We sailed from Bombay early evening with cheering crowds and a large brass band which could not resist playing "Rule Britannia" and other classic marching tunes – all very nostalgic and so much for my first snapshot of India, still coming to grips with nationhood following its recently acquired independence from Great Britain. During my subsequent sea going ventures in later life, I had occasion to visit India on numerous occasions and discovered what a wonderful country India really is once past the crowds and squalled exterior. What diverse cultures the Indian people enjoy within their democracy.

The ship headed on a southerly course skirting the west coast of India, but the pungent aromas and odors of the sub-continent still drifted seaward – even though we were miles offshore. These heady airs remained with us for several days at least, until we approached what was then called Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka). Our Port call at Colombo was very brief, only about 6 or 8 hours, I assume for fuel and other consumables. Having departed Colombo, it was back to the usual shipboard routine until arrival at our next destination, Penang.

The sector from Bombay to Penang interrupted only by our short call of only a few hours at Colombo was particularly depressing for me, since I no longer had my "friend" Alison on board as she had disembarked at Bombay. She had been my constant companion. I did not even establish her family name, but I sure missed her company. In retrospect I do feel she was of perhaps mixed blood as she was a little dusky in appearance, very pretty, eyes like chocolate drops and spoke with a definite "plumb" reminiscent of most colonials of that era. In addition to which, she was very sophisticated for her age and always ultra- polite to my parents

Penang is a small island laying a short distance off the Malayan peninsular in the Andaman Sea. It is in sharp contrast to the sub-continent, so different indeed – far more lush, tranquil and extremely beautiful and picturesque, a true tropical delight. Our family went ashore for sightseeing and a long walk through its bustling and historic township, which took up most of the day during which I discovered he delight of drinking chilled coconut milk straight from the coconut husk, ideal for quenching one's thirst in the heat of the tropical day. My father let my brother and I try some local dishes, amongst which were Satays on wooden skewers which was very novel to us, but enjoying them immensely nevertheless, along with a mild curry served delicately on Banana leaves. This was a new experience to us both.

I was struck by the island's outstanding scenic beauty, very friendly people and I clearly recall seeing many wonderful colonial style villas set in exquisitely landscaped and manicured gardens (still my envy of today), palm groves, Kampongs (small villages), and the odd Monkey, mostly kept as pets on long chains. Our stay was all too short and soon after our return on board ship it quickly became time for our departure. We sailed early evening and as we all stood on deck the sun was dipping over the horizon, making for one of those wonderful sunsets for which the Andaman Sea is so renowned. We were southbound for Singapore.

The passage from Penang to Singapore through the Malacca Straits was relatively short and I believe we arrived in Singapore sometime late the following day.

Singapore, what a marvel – initial impression of arriving there was so exciting for a young kid. This was my first real inkling of the Orient. The hustle and bustle of Singapore Island instantly aroused my interest, even being so young at the time. Looking back, I now realize what a lasting impression my first trip to Asia on the majestic "Canton" was registering upon me. It endorses the significance of how much one's overall education is gained from outside the classroom.

My dear parents had some distant friends who resided in Singapore so next day we joined them for lunch at the Raffles Hotel, even then a splendid Singapore icon. Following luncheon, we took a conducted tour of the island (approximately the same size of the Isle of Wight). How different it was then compared to the Singapore of today. Most local residents usually lived in two-story, shop houses, above their place of work and I clearly recall all the wide storm water drains and Nullahs that paralleled the streets. At that time, I could not envisage living and working in the Far East as was to be my case later in life.

The place itself has expanded rapidly and is in fact remains one of the jewels of the Orient. Under the inspired leadership and guidance of modern Singapore's late founding father and mentor, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the people of Singapore have managed to maintain their own style of culture and sophistication, having achieved a level of development which is the envy of many regional countries. At the time of my first visit however, Singapore was still part of the fledgling Malayan Federation. It was a wonderful place and a real eye opener. The town and surrounds consisting of multi-story shop houses, narrow streets (save for the main roads) and was mostly one big China Town with a lesser number of Kampongs. It had its share of beautiful colonial residences discreetly nestled amongst the most beautiful and scenic surrounds. The few high-rise buildings were concentrated on the waterfront and central business areas. There remained a significant British military presence at this time and soldiers and sailors seemed to be everywhere. Orchard Road at that time consisted chiefly of Bars catering mainly for the military, nothing like the Orchard Road of nowadays with its high-end shops and Malls.

Canton cast off from Keppel Harbor jetty and headed eastbound into the Singapore Strait. The outer anchorages as well as inside the stone breakwater were crowded with a variety of ships, large and small. Amongst all this mingled the odd sailing junk with sails flapping grasping for what they could get from the light airs. Everything was so placid and what struck me most was that the sea was literally like glass – flat calm, not even a ripple. The now familiar sweet scents of Asia were everywhere but nevertheless much sweeter and pleasant on the nose than those of India. We now sped on our way towards the Horsburgh Lighthouse which marks the eastern end of the famous Singapore Strait, which eventually opens out into the South China Sea.

The following morning, we passed the mountainous Anambas Islands (distant to port), as we continued north easterly towards our ultimate destination–Hong Kong. The trip from Singapore to Hong Kong only lasted some 4 days or so but nothing could prepare my young mind for what I was about to encounter and the significant role it would play on me for the rest of my life.

Hong Kong, sometimes dubbed “The Pearl of the Orient” was first settled by the Portuguese in 1513, which they used as a staging post for their trade with China. Hong Kong is an enclave surrounded by Communist China.

The Hong Kong of today originated from its colonization by the British towards the end of the Opium Wars which ended in about 1841 and Hong Kong became a fully-fledged Colony, in 1842. Hong Kong was founded and developed by several iconic British shipping and trading merchants who became known as the “Hongs” (defined as warehouse or commercial establishment) with their respective bosses bearing the esteemed title of “Taipan” – meaning boss or big shot.

The Island of Hong Kong, together with Lantau and Stonecutters Islands was ceded to the British in perpetuity. However, in 1898 the colonizers realized they needed to expand their territory in order to make their acquisition more viable, so they negotiated an agreement with the Chinese to lease part of the Kowloon Peninsula (subsequently known as the New Territories) together with numerous other outlying Islands, for a set period of 99 years. All was encompassed within the Colony of Hong Kong, which remained intact until 1997 when sovereignty of the Colony was relinquished to China under the treaty.

Arrival in Hong Kong had been during the night. I awoke early, enjoyed breakfast then went out on deck, full of excitement. The ship was secured alongside Kowloon Wharves, just next to the Star Ferry terminal at Tsim Tsa Tsui on the Kowloon peninsula. It is an understatement to say that I was awed by the panoramic surrounds. Most of all the busy port, consisting every conceivable size and type of vessel, dominated by Victoria Peak on the other side of the harbor, shrouded in mist with its majestic presence complete with impressive array of buildings which encroached up the mountain’s lower slopes.

The Hong Kong of the 1950s bears little resemblance to the modern Hong Kong. At that time, I believe the tallest building was the original “Bank of China” closely followed by the “Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank” located in what is commonly referred to today as the “Central District” of Hong Kong Island, quite close to the Supreme Court and Hong Kong Club building. Nevertheless, this was still an outstanding spectacle for that point in the Colony’s development. The main mode of transport between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula was either the strictly passenger “Star Ferry” or “HYF” - Hong Kong Yamatai Ferry which carried both passengers and vehicles across the harbor, in addition to the inhabited outlying islands.

Nothing I had seen this far during our voyage could even come close to the excitement I now experienced. I do believe, even as a youngster, seeing Hong Kong for the first time stimulated something inside of me and triggering the onset of my everlasting love affair with Asia.

In so many ways, I was sad to disembark from the ”Canton” last glimpsed lying serenely at Kowloon Wharf, making ready for her return voyage to England. She had been our home for over a month. However, we were to maintain our relationship with the famous white Peninsula and Orient liners that plied the oceans between the UK and Hong Kong. Over the ensuing years we did one further round trip

on another of their superb passenger ships, when along with my family, we returned to Britain for home leave. Airlines offering services from Hong Kong to Europe did not become common place until a good number of years later, about 1958 onwards. Even when available the early air passage was almost 2 days from Hong Kong to London, courtesy of four prop piston types and later turboprops such as the comfortable Bristol Britannia or “Whispering Giant” as it was to become affectionately known.

We eventually said our goodbyes and disembarked from the great white liner and headed straight for another well-known Hong Kong icon, the Peninsula Hotel where we were fortunate enough to be allocated rooms with a superb and unimpaired harbor view with Hong Kong Island as a backdrop. These magnificent vistas have remained with me since childhood, in particular the “Junks” wallowing in the harbor, seeking a breeze, numerous cargo ships secured to the typhoon mooring buoys and at night the awesome display of lights on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula.

There are so many memories of my early years spent in Hong Kong, far too numerous to record in this short narrative. Nevertheless, most were pleasant by virtue of their nature, remembering that this was the era of the Cheungsam, Cashmere beaded Cardigans, afternoon Tea Dances, Transistor Radios, Street Letter Writers, Rickshaws, Pigtails, elderly Chinese ladies with bound feet and European males being widely referred to as “Gweilos” (original meaning – Foreign White Devils). Not to mention Dai Pai Dongs (street cafes) on every street corner. The 1950’s ushered in the start of the defining period of Hong Kong’s development and identity which spanned through to the late 1970’s. This era shaped Hong Kong into the international icon it is today.

It was a cultural shock to me, but it all had an electrifying kind of addiction and I always had a real sense of belonging in Hong Kong during all my many years living there. I think Hong Kong was then, and still is a unique environment in which to live, work and play. One is spellbound, excited by something new every day. There exists a great sense of adventure about the place. Hong Kong has a certain something that other major cities within the Orient lack and try to rival but are unsuccessful in their attempts to equal Hong Kong’s unique qualities.

At that time, in the backstreets of Hong Kong lined with dingy shop houses with their pillars festooned all over with shop signs and ornate Chinese characters, one could still see the odd Mandarin in traditional Chinese robes complete with skull cap, pigtail, stringy beard and excessively long finger nails. Females in the main wore their drab pants suits, (mostly black or grey) straw hats and wooden clogs. Teenage Chinese girls carried their younger siblings in a hammock like arrangement on their back. Even the Amahs were adorned with their signatory hair buns or pigtails, white apron tops and black pants. The better to do Chinese ladies wore their delightful Cheungsam dresses with high collars and splits up the side. It was said, the higher the neck and longer the splits, the more affluent the wearer – true or not?

It was not uncommon to see coolies with long bamboo poles slung across their shoulders carrying over loaded baskets of goods, or indeed to catch a momentary whiff of Nga Pin (Opium) as one passed by an illegal den hidden in some narrow dark side street or back alley. Crowding was prevalent, especially in the squatter areas or Kowloon Walled City but for expats they could escape to the classier residential areas. Street markets and hawker stalls were abundant selling everything imaginable. In short, the influence of mainland China imposed very significantly despite British Colonial Administration. Nonetheless, the Colony fostered a unique quality in so many ways and grasped most of whom visited Hong Kong with a magnetism influencing their desire or wish to stay or soon return. Sailing junks of all

sizes frequented the harbor, many of which at that time were still active in the China coastal trades, as well as remaining the main stay of the local Hong Kong fishing fleets well into the late 1960's until replaced by purpose built wooden trawlers.

The 50s and 60s was a period for the making of popular Hollywood movies that prominently featured Hong Kong as their main theme. Soldier of Fortune, Ferry to Hong Kong, World of Suzie Wong, and Love is a Many Splendored Thing, to name but a few. My brother was engaged as an "Extra" in one of them, but I can't remember which one.

Lifestyle for expats living in Hong Kong was comfortable, sociable and one of privilege by any standard. Of course, there was the downside, the crowding, great squatter hut fire at Shek Kip Mei on Christmas Day 1953, which cleaned out the homes of 50 thousand Mainland Chinese refugees literally overnight, which in turn triggered a massive Government Resettlement Housing scheme for small low cost apartments – a huge effort. Other noteworthy occurrences during those years were several bad Typhoons which caused significant damage including the grounding and wrecking of many ships, and the serious water shortages and rationing during 1963 caused by periods of prolonged drought. This required the Hong Kong Government to charter tanker ships to import fresh water purchased from mainland China.

Riots during 1956 between Pro Communist and Chinese Nationalist supporters at time of double "10" celebrations marred Hong Kong, whilst in 1966 and 1967 rioting was again repeated – increasing dissatisfaction amongst the working population over low wages coupled with Police corruption and substandard Policing were the main causes. However, in 1966 the reported collusion by the Hong Kong Government with the Star Ferry and HYF concerning applications for substantial increases in ferry fares was the final straw which triggered the unrest. These events got somewhat out of hand over ensuing days Communist Chinese agitators took advantage to try to cause escalation and destabilize Colonial Rule. The Red Guards and so called, Cultural Revolution prevalent in Communist China during the late 60s caused overspill into Hong Kong and Macau. These riots were eventually quelled by the Royal Hong Kong Police supported by the British Military and life quickly returned to normal. in the main however, life was good for the foreign resident the majority of whom respected the local Chinese with great admiration, affection, and reverence.

After about a week in the Peninsula Hotel, complete with its ornate lobby ceiling, magnificent central staircase and…. the first tiny sales kiosk for Cathay Pacific Airways situated in the main lobby, we were relocated to larger accommodations at the Miramar Hotel on the corner of Nathan Road and Kimberley Road, adjacent to the Princess Theatre. Legend has it that The Miramar is said to have been built on the site of the initial staging post for Catholic Missionaries traveling between Europe and China in a bygone era around the time of the opium wars, and very early years of the Colony, it being established by the Vatican for this sole purpose. Similarly, Macau (Portuguese enclave about 40 miles to west of Hong Kong) is steeped in history also claiming Vatican connections for pilgrim Catholic Monks and Priests en-route to the Inner Kingdom during the dynasties of imperial rule.

During our ensuing years in Hong Kong the family would occasionally take a trip to Macau, either for the annual Grand Prix (very amateurish affair in those early years) or so my folks could visit the Casinos. During these visits I recall seeing herds of goats and buffalo in the main streets of Macau and when we were allowed into the Gambling Hotels with my parents, I remember standing on an upper balcony watching the gambling tables below. Unlike modern day Casinos, at that time bets were placed in wicker

baskets and lowered to the staff attending the gaming tables situated on the floor below in a sort of inside courtyard. Primitive security I suppose! Fan Tan seemed to be the most popular mode of betting which was a long-established form of gambling in China. The Ferry that took us to and from Macau was something almost straight out of “Ferry to Hong Kong”, save it was a propeller driven vessel rather than by paddle wheels and of course missing Orson Wells as the Captain. The one-way trip in those days took about 4 hours, on a good day!

About a month after we arrived in Hong Kong we shifted to a wonderful colonial villa, in Kowloon Tong, located in Somerset Road at the top end of Waterloo Road (with its central water drainage Nullah running the entire length of the road). In the shadow of “Lion Rock” the foothills of which still housed thousands of squatters in their sprawling shanties. Waterloo Army camp was just across the road. The house was huge with wonderfully large shady verandahs, tall French style windows and manicured gardens, with graceful “Flame Trees” which bloomed profusely with their crimson flowers during the summer months. Kowloon Tong was a lovely quiet leafy suburb in which to reside. It was all together delightful and holds very fond memories.

We spent several memorable years in that house, and soon after we took up residence our two new family members joined us, “Ah Kwan” and “Ah Wong”. The former was the cook Amah and the latter was the wash Amah and cleaner. They were to remain with our household for 15 years, until their retirement, and were both to become most revered and respected extended family members. It was a sad day when we all said goodbye and they returned to their original homes in Canton for a well-earned retirement. In fact, my brother and I owe much to them for our upbringing and guidance during those former years in Hong Kong. They taught us to speak Cantonese amongst other things and rescued me from numerous indiscretions that would have undoubtedly rattled my father’s saber and wrath if discovered.

At dinner parties they were very gifted and excelled by turning out the most wonderful spreads with ornate decorative carvings made from carrots, turnips, and the like. My parents were always busy with their work and social calendars, so my brother and I spent much time with the two “A’s”. Sadly, the wonderful old house was later demolished sometime in the 1970s to make way for a short time hotel, what sacrilege. I returned to visit it in later years expecting to see the elegant building, but I was frankly shocked at the replacement.

After two happy summers, we moved to a comfortable and modern ground floor apartment in Oxford Road, where we remained for a further two years. This was in the same residential area, known as Kowloon Tong in the Waterloo Road area. Actuality, leading off Lancashire Road, and just up the street from Christ Church. This area, together with Kadoorie Avenue and close by Ho Man Tin, was a favored residential area for Cathay Pacific and Pan American expatriate Pilots who were stationed in Hong Kong, (due to its ease of access to Kai Tak airport). Many friendships were forged with the aircrew and their families. I guess this was the beginning of my becoming enamored with flying. I was often taken on visits to Kai Tak Airport by the Pilots to see the planes and occasionally hitch a ride on a test flight or some such event. I enjoyed every minute of it and naturally never had to be asked twice.

In those days, the Hong Kong Airport’s runway did not extend to seaward but was purely a land bound affair. One of the runways crossed the Clearwater Bay Road, which required stopping traffic when the runway was active. I recall this happening when I was returning to London for holidays with the family, on a BOAC Bristol Britannia “Whispering Giant” via all points west – Bangkok, Rangoon, Karachi, Tehran,

Beirut, Zurich, Frankfurt, and London. A journey of almost 2 days but with an aircraft configured to all one class, relaxed and comfortable without the stress of airline security, and with cabin crew who actually smiled occasionally, a far cry from today's air travel chaos and misery. In those times the airport terminal at Kai Tak consisted of a small building which was little more than a "Dairy Farm" soda fountain and when embarking or disembarking aircraft one strolled casually across the tarmac, airport security as it is today was unknown (and unnecessary to a large part) in those days. The presence of a few Royal Hong Kong Police in the area was an adequate deterrent to those of ill intent.

There were two approaches to Kai Tak, it being operational only during daylight hours, one hugging the hills under Lion Rock and the other skimming the rooftops, over Boundary Road. Both were every much as nerve racking as the notorious "Checkerboard" approach over Kowloon City into Kai Tak's single seaward runway used from about 1960 until the mid-90's. I remember well the original Kai Tak as I spent much time there with my binoculars, Brownie camera and notebook. Equally, vivid images remain of the construction and opening of the seaward runway, the first ever night flight being made by a DC3 and if memory serves me, under the command of one of our Pilot neighbors. I believe the aircraft was operated by CPA. Night flights into Hong Kong only officially commenced in July 1959. This was a much talked about event in the colony and really kickstarted tourism to Hong Kong in a big way.

Whilst living in Kowloon we spent a lot of our leisure time at the USRC (United Services Recreation Club) located in Gascoigne Road, just across the road from Club de Recreo, relatively close to the Jordan area. Needless to say I spent a lot of time at the USRC. Mostly lounging around the beautiful swimming pool or eating the best lemon sponge cakes.

Our longest place of abode in Hong Kong was to be on the Peak, in fact Mount Kellet, within a stone's throw of the British Military Hospital. This remained our residence for my remaining years in Hong Kong until the late 1970s when I purchased an apartment at Taikoo Sing and later at Academic Terrace in Pok Fu Lam Road. The views from "Kellet Grove" were superlative, overlooking the Pok Fu Lam reservoir, across towards Repulse Bay and East Lamma Channel (southern approaches to Hong Kong to and from the South China Sea, passing Ap Lei Chau and Aberdeen). Access was either by car up the winding Peak Road that originated from Garden Road in the vicinity of the Botanic Gardens, close to Government House, or via Stubbs Road from the Happy Valley area via Wong Nai Chung Gap. Of course, for the tourist there is always the Peak Tramway. The Peak Tram was then, and still is, one of Hong Kong's icons and is an absolute marvel of engineering. I think the views offered from the tram are without doubt some of the most spectacular in the world. Similarly, the Peak Café was a charming spot to sit and have a beer whilst looking over the Island landscapes towards Mount Kellet.

During this period in Hong Kong my brother and I sought our entertainment mainly from the "Rediffusion" radio with ears keenly tuned to daily and weekly episodes of "Riders of the Range" and "Journey into Space". TV was in its infancy at this time in Hong Kong, only a few hours vision per day until fulltime programming was introduced in 1956, so the term Couch Potato had yet to evolve. We also regularly visited "Diamond Music Store" to buy gramophone discs – mostly 45s, which we swopped with our friends.

We made plastic airplanes and ships bought from Eastern Model Supplies in Nathan Road or the Radar Company Model Shop situated in Austin Avenue. Both were interesting establishments with lots to see, so many memorable hours were spent in these premises. On the other hand, our worst nightmare was

long shopping outings with my Mother, which we did our best to avoid, wandering around Lane Crawford, Whiteaway, Evergreen or Wing On department stores.

Our weekends were mainly family affairs with trips to the beach or launch picnics, extravagant boring Sunday lunches with friends of my parents, going to the cinema or a car ride around Hong Kong Island followed by a slap- up afternoon tea at the Repulse Bay Hotel. My favorite was a Sunday morning visit to the Luk Kwok hotel for "Yum Cha" where the food was excellent. It was situated next to the "China Fleet Club" building on Gloucester Road. Around that time the Luk Kwok Hotel had the reputation of being the best place on Hong Kong Island for "Yum Cha" – hence it was always totally crowded, on Sundays in particular.

Now and then perhaps we would be taken on a day trip to Rocky Bay or Silver Strand Beach or occasionally we would be entertained by a drive to the New Territories (crossing the harbor from Hong Kong Central to Jordan Road area in Yau Ma Tei via the HYF vehicular ferry). We sometimes ventured close to the border at Lo Wu and peered across into communist China. Or went to Castle Peak, visiting the Dragon Inn at the 19.5 mile-stone marker in the New Territories.

The New Territories were a step backwards in time from the rest of crowded Hong Kong and Kowloon. The traditional Chinese way of life was still evident, old Chinese ladies with their black outfits and straw hats, sometimes smoking long pipes. These elderly Chinese people could still be seen quite regularly throughout the 1960s, especially about the old walled villages and hamlets, working in the paddy fields or tending their water buffalo. Their faces looked so kind and were like weatherworn road maps, full of wrinkles, depicting a life of hardship and poverty. Many of these folks had come across the border from Communist China when the United Kingdom leased the New Territories. These rural activities were in sharp contrast to the sophisticated lifestyles of Kowloon Peninsula or Hong Kong Island. On the way home we generally stopped off at the Sha Tin Heights Hotel for refreshments or so my Mom and Dad could attend the afternoon tea dance.

My parents became members of various clubs which offered tennis, swimming and a variety of other sporting and social activities, so my brother and I spent much time at these venues as junior members. The LRC (Ladies Recreation Club) in mid-levels Hong Kong Island being our most frequented. We both learned to swim at the LRC under the tutorage of the iconic, Mr. Billy Tingle. The late Mr. Billy Tingle was both a legend and celebrity in Hong Kong and he used to conduct swimming classes on a Saturday morning at the LRC. He was popular with the parents and adored by the kids. Tingle was an Australian and started his career as a Boxer but was interned in Shanghai during WW2. He relocated to Hong Kong in the late 1940s where he soon became renowned for his Physical Fitness and Swimming classes. I seem to recall he also used the Hong Kong Cricket Club as a venue for his other classes, but I never attended.

Soon after we arrived in Hong Kong, I was enrolled in Kowloon Junior School, close to Boundary Road and co-incidentally conveniently situated right on the flight path for aircraft on approach to one of the Kai Tak runways. I enjoyed superlative views of the landing aircraft right from the classroom desk! It was a major but enjoyable distraction from class activities.

There was not much choice in those days in respect of schooling, there basically being only a few "International" elementary and senior schools and a couple of others reserved for the military kids as there was still substantial garrison in Hong Kong. It later changed in the mid to late 1960s but in those early days of Hong Kong's development education options were, it must be said, somewhat limited.

Junior school was a breeze for me, I did exceedingly well in most subjects and always ranked in the top places at exam time during those early years. By the time I had progressed to 11 plus exams I was losing my edge as school was taking a very secondary place to my other interests and activities – planes, ships, and sports. I managed to scrape through the exams to grammar school and went up to King George V School at Ho Man Tin in Kowloon, where I admit to becoming a very average and unproductive student but rather an enthusiastic sportsman.

KGV was a good school with excellent facilities for its time, the only real alternative to KGV was to attending Boarding School overseas, but like most schools it is only as good as the willingness of its pupils to learn. The majority of students were the offspring of British or European expats, with a few American and a handful of overseas Chinese. Oh and a few offspring of military types (mostly Admiralty or Royal Fleet Auxiliary based in Hong Kong). The teaching staff was all expatriate and of a high standard. I struggled academically, mainly because of my lack of application, not through lack of personal ability. I excelled at sports and at the age of 14 became Captain of 1st X1 Cricket. I believe my name is still to this day on the role of honor in the lobby of the school's main entrance. Many former pupils went on to establish distinguished careers in business, literature, and the sciences. The School motto was - "Honestas Ante Honures" (honesty before glory). KGV is now a truly international school and is still going strong.

My mother being a School Teacher, seemed to have little if any influence over my studies. Between the years of 11 and 14, I was never out of trouble with my father over my poor scholastic results. Typically, school reports used to feature comments such as "It's impossible to help this student as he is seldom here" or "This pupil knows more about the rigging of a Four Mast Sailing Ship than he does about French verbs". The sort of personal comment a teacher would not even contemplate making today. Nevertheless it was all absolutely true, I would regularly skip school and instead sit the day out at Kai Tak plane spotting or indeed by HMS Tamar Naval Dockyard, right on the Hong Kong waterfront, watching the ships sailing in and out of the harbor.

I well remember my favorite ship; she was a classical small vintage tramp that had certainly seen better days. Her cigar like funnel (usually casting out volumes of dense black smoke from her coal fired furnaces), rigid lines and counter stern with propeller blades often awash as she slowly steamed through the Harbor, captured my imagination. She was named "Juno". From later research I learned that she was lost with all hands during 1964 in the South China Sea whilst on passage from Hong Kong to Brunei. 1964 was a notoriously bad year for devastating Typhoons. Sadly, she just disappeared without trace after radioing she was engulfed in a severe Typhoon. The "Juno" was an ex Australian vessel originally named "Cardross" built in 1927, before being sold to Madrigal Shipping Company of the Philippines in 1955. She was not a large ship, only about 1385 gross tons with a length of about 70 meters. I guess she would have been classified as a low powered steamship, even in those days, and at best I suspect producing a speed of only about 9 or 10 knots in favorable conditions. Obviously, for a small ship of those characteristics it was fraught with danger to be caught in open Ocean amid raging Typhoon conditions with little prospect of taking remedial action or outrunning the storm, such a situation could quickly become catastrophic.

Around this era of unrest in China, during the lead up to Mao's so called Cultural Revolution, it was not uncommon to see ships arriving at Hong Kong from Chinese Ports with graffiti painted on the side of the ship by Red Guards. It was politically unwise to try and remove the slogans whilst the ships remained in

China. Far better to wait until arrival at the next port of call then employ ship's crew or a side party to over paint it. It did not take much provocation, especially by foreigners to trigger conflict with the groups of Red Guards. These groups varied in size from 10 or 20 agitators up to thousands. They were very intimidating and made one feel very unsafe since it appeared there was no Law and Order amongst their ranks.

Mau's Little Red Book, this was a "gift" for all visiting the Peoples Republic of China during the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. It was not unknown to have some shabby looking official Chinese Commissar, rant and rave in hotel lobbies or other gathering places, with quotes from the booklet. These sessions frequently lasted more than an hour and were designed to inconvenience and annoy foreigners rather than indoctrinate because few really understood, or was remotely interested, in what was being said.

I became an expert on planes and ships, being able to quote yards of information, "off the cuff", but when it came to schoolbooks, well there was always tomorrow. Hence in later years, I had to spend many hours of hard study to catch up just to qualify for professional examinations. Nevertheless, this was a vital part of my worldly education and unlike many other teenagers of the era in Hong Kong, I knew early exactly in which direction I was to go in terms of career path.

Up until the age of 14 or so I had always intended to be an airline pilot (I later did learn to fly and have gone on to log a noteworthy number of flying hours over the years) but a close friend had just been accepted into one of the principal nautical colleges in the UK. His stories, letters, and photos of what it was like and the exciting career opportunities offered in the Merchant Navy stimulated a profound influence in my thinking at that point in my life and consequently it started to fire up and stoke my imagination. Hence in later life – flying became my passion, but seafaring, my bread and butter!

It is also true to say that whilst at grammar school a few pals had close family connections with the sea which also impacted hugely on my nautical aspirations. One close chum, his father was Master of the "Canada Fir", a tramp ship that was Hong Kong owned and based; another pal's father was Master of a ship belonging to one of the principal Hong Kong shipping conglomerates; whilst yet another was Danish who I accompanied when visiting a very smart cargo ship, the "Michael Jebsen", engaged in Asian regional trades; his father was Captain. Finally, there was my closest friend whose old man was Engineer Superintendent for a large Dutch shipping company that had many vessels frequently calling Hong Kong – needless to say, at weekends I was often found in mid harbor aboard one of their ships, by invitation of course. This was not to mention various other school friends whose parents had nautical connections, such as Shipyards or through large trading firms.

It was not unexpected therefore, that my career preference started to progressively deviate away from aviation and begin to focus more towards one in the Merchant Navy.

I approached my father about this change of heart; he hit the roof and did his best to talk me out of it. The more he tried, the more determined I became. Eventually after some 4 or 5 months he finally agreed to send me to the same nautical college as my pal in the UK (if I could pass the entrance examination that is…and was accepted). My course had now been set and from that juncture onwards I studied much more diligently and eventually passed the entrance examinations into the nautical establishment, although I still made time for my other social activities.

My father was happy because he had put pay to my notions to sign on some Panamanian Tramp Steamer as a Cadet, but rather, had reached a compromise, as he put it, sending me to sea well prepared and in the correct way. I respected my father for his change of heart and foresight. So, without delay I went off to the Hong Kong Marine Department at Kennedy Town Praya for my mandatory Sight Test and Lantern Test (vision requirements needed to be verified as color blindness ruled out Merchant Navy entrants for Deck Officer Cadets). The accompanying Medical Examination was also very comprehensive.

Eventually that magical day came for me to depart Hong Kong and to fly to the UK to receive my nautical training. I boarded the shining BOAC Comet 4 airliner (yes progress had been made by this time from turboprop to pure jet). We took off on the newly constructed seaward protruding runway and I was in London only 24 hours later. Little did I realize for the next few years it was the end of my comfortable and privileged lifestyle? Future life at nautical college became something of a shock to my system and sometimes difficult to endure.

So, I had cast my future path in life. I joined the Merchant Navy and progressively rose through the ranks until finally becoming Master. I enjoyed the way of life, the adventure and excitement experienced; especially because in keeping with my ambitions I spent most of my seagoing career in the Asia region. I continued to reside in Hong Kong until the mid-1990s when I sold up and relocated to Australia. The only reason for making this decision was the political unrest and uncertainty that still hungover Hong Kong, resulting from the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989.

In retrospect, I do not regret any of my decisions in life. The only disappointment I experience is that I am no longer a resident in Hong Kong. My continued passion for Hong Kong is never-ending. I miss the daily excitement of living there and the unique working environment, but now I have to do with regular visits. Needless, to say, Hong Kong continues in its passage of change and is a far cry from the Hong Kong I once knew as a former resident.

Hong Kong's Colonial Emblem prior to 1997

END

Yau Ma Tei

Yau Ma Tei is an anchorage, west of Kowloon where it be

Ships galore of every type, swinging on their hooks to wind and sea

Some work cargo to a barge, but most lay idle by enlarge

Crowding is often the case, so some must wait to discharge

Launches and ferries run here and there, like clockwork, always on time

Some are small and some are large, but all run well, just as if in their prime

A busy place is Yau Ma Tei, and close to the shore it surely be

A run ashore to a Bar or Club, makes for a great liberty

A short or long stay it does not matter, sailors always make time for that prized visit ashore

Where girls and booze often the main draw, and which so many of them do openly adore

But fun apart work must continue, not withstanding, this convenient location

For our ship did not this Port call, only for the crew to have a vacation

The Master warns against woman and getting drunk, but it's the only alternative to a lonely bunk

A night of lust is craved by most, it can be costly if partook, leaving money all dwindled and shrunk

We awake hung over feeling wretched and forlorn, broke again, but need to start another working day

But soon shake it off and start to graft, for fear if we do not, we will be docked our hard-earned pay

Yau Ma Tei is a playground for all, the meekest and the bold, it does not matter if you be young or old

Be aware of the dangers that lurk ashore, for ladies of the night are apt to dupe, thinking they sit on gold

Time to sail through Lye Ye Mun Pass, longing for the next Port call, but more money first I must earn

Four weeks at sea lay ahead, giving time to amass my hard-gained cash, ready for my next sojourn

A Glimpse of my Asian Feeder, the "Kris Madura".

I was sitting alone in my cabin with my coffee mug, pondering how the demise of the multi-purpose general cargo ship had come about so quickly because of the unprecedented pace the shipping industry changed in favor of containerization during the 1970s.

Change within the shipping sector had hitherto been somewhat slower and more measured, so perhaps a degree of empathy was due to those unfortunate owners that were unable to remain competitive due to their existing tonnage becoming uneconomical and unviable due to their conventional life expectancy being optimistically over estimated. Of course, this was not helped by the Fuel Crisis of the 1970s.

Hence was born the "Container Feeder" designed specifically to carry up to about 500 TEUs between the major container hubs and secondary ports. Many secondary ports did not possess the infrastructure suitable for handling the mammoth container ships used in the world's main trade routes. In most cases it was not a case of the feeder ports not being container savvy, but rather a simple matter of economies of scale needed to make enlarged port developments financially worthwhile. So there became a "niche" for what we now call a "Container Feeder".

Although my residential origins were in Asia, I had been recalled from semi-seagoing retirement for a 2 years contract, as the owners were in need of an experienced Master and to which I had agreed, provided the vessel remained trading within Asia. I did not wish to go further afield because my wife, being Asian, was reluctant that I return to sea. Anyway, this was a workable compromise. She could sail with me from time to time, and never really be more than 4 hours flying time away from home.

I had been seconded as Master of this relatively modern container ship servicing a regular regional container feeder service. Japanese built, meant the ship was somewhat basic in terms of crew comfort but she never let me down and performed very well during my tenure on board. The vessel was operated by Singapore interests and she was like a yacht, Gross Tonnage: 6100, Deadweight: 8530, LOA: 114m, BHP: 6000, powerful Bow Thruster, 16.5 knots but when I was on her we maintained an economic service speed of about 14 knots. We carried a crew of 18 plus a Radio Officer even though we had an early version of GMDSS. This was because of the quick succession of ports and associated high workload of radio traffic and administrative duties, much of which was handled by the R/O on behalf of the Captain.

She had been retrofitted to a fully cellular platform with a TEU capacity of 480 units. Containers could be stacked 4 high on deck, depending on their weights. An ideal ship for working the Far East feeder trades, especially due to her 2 x 36 tons SWL container cranes which made her fully self - sustaining at secondary Ports. In fact, ship's cranes were used at most of the ports of call in the Far East feeder service in which we were engaged.

We had been laying idle at Singapore Eastern Anchorage for several days before we commencing to load containers from the Container Terminal, due to the ship earlier experiencing main engine Turbo Charger problems, the owners did not wish to resume our liner service until they were certain the engine defect was well and truly resolved. So, with a delayed introduction, we set off.

This ship was considered quite a large container feeder for that period, during which many regional ports were still engaged in developing fully fledged Container facilities. At this time many, so called, container terminals were limited to open wharfs with good sealed lay down areas at which loaded and empty containers were stacked. Much of the consolidation and deconsolidation was done in adjoining warehouses. Very few had weighbridges whereby, accurate container weights could be ascertained, so at many of the secondary ports TEU's were categorized as "Heavy", "Medium", "Light" purely calculated

or as a best guess, on weights of what was loaded within. As a rule of thumb, Heavy meant 12-18 tones, Medium 6-12 tones, and light under 6 tones.

The liner service, incorporating Port Klang, Singapore, Pasir Gudang, Maura, Labuan, Kota Kinabalu (KK), Sandakan and Tawau (with occasional calls at ports further afield subject to cargo inducement) and was idyllic as far as I was concerned. However, it was hard work at times with long hours because port stays were limited to just hours in some ports. The Master was up and about constantly and experienced long periods on the bridge, especially when transiting the Singapore Straits and similar areas which called for precise navigation in regions of dense traffic. Raw GPS was not sufficiently accurate for use transiting the traffic lanes of the Singapore Straits, unless differentials we available for the ship's GPS system. This was mainly due to the extremely narrow separation lanes in certain sections of the VTSS, and precise reporting requirements.

Nevertheless, we soon discovered we spent little time in Port except at Tawau, Sandakan, Kota Kinabalu and occasionally Labuan which of course stemmed mainly from wharf congestion and lacking Port infrastructure during that period. Other Ports was generally limited to one day (or often less).

We generally timed our arrival for daylight and first Pilot in Ports where Pilots were compulsory for foreign flag ships. Of course, many ships tried to do the same thing, so the anchorages of the Pilot Boarding Grounds were frequently inflicted with widespread congestion. To overcome the congestion at the Port Klang outer anchorage (always congested early morning), following 4 consecutive trips, I underwent examination for Pilot exemption

The exam for a Pilot Exemption at Port Klang was conducted by the Port Manager and was relatively thorough, mostly focusing on Tides, Buoyage and Port Regulations. Once obtained it meant I was permitted to proceed upstream without a Pilot and go to enter the inner anchorage, which was only a short boat ride to the main wharf. This arrangement turned out to be good because rather than wait overnight outside the Port limits we could go in and the crew would enjoy the benefit of a bit extra shore leave or rest. However, no matter what the circumstances, a Pilot remained compulsory from inner anchorage to wharf. When sailing, there was no benefit to the ship, so I engaged a Pilot from wharf side the full distance to outer Boarding Ground. This kept the local Pilots contented because they were not losing all their bread and butter to an outsider, only a tad. It was also customary to undertake my own pilotage at Labuan, Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau. Pilots were available but unnecessary in my opinion.

When the Port of Singapore was busy or suffering Pilot shortages, as it frequently was, permission would be granted to Masters' to depart from the working anchorages without using a Pilot.

Of all our Ports of call the best organized was Singapore, Pasir Gudang and to a slightly lesser extent, Port Klang (which used to be named Port Swettenham). These three were making the fastest transition to complete containerization, hence they evolved as the main regional hubs for container traffic, transshipment usually to Europe, Americas, or largest Asian Seaports, via one or a combination of these Ports. It stood to reason therefore that these destinations became our principal ports of call. Singapore Port became so well organized the inward Pilot would often tell us what time the outward Pilot had been booked before we had even fully arrived. This timing was always accurate and seldom differed by more than 15-20 minutes.

The Malaysian Port of Pasir Gudang (PG) in the Johor Straits was also undergoing a more measured degree of expansion. Seldom did we spend more than 12 hours alongside. PG was not one of my favorite Ports because it necessitated crossing very dense conflicting traffic in the Singapore Straits, which could be quite chaotic and even hazardous because some ships still failed to obey International rules of navigation. The Traffic Separation Scheme (VTSS) for East and Westbound traffic in the

Singapore Straits (first established in 1981) became progressively more regulated, resulting in today's VTSS (Vessel Traffic Separation Scheme) in the Singapore Straits, where there are now crossing zones. Once established, this did much to enhance vessel control and safety of navigation and has since been extended into the Malacca Straits. This contributed considerably to the earlier disorganized rabble of traffic and eliminated the "Cowboy" element that unfortunately prevailed at times.

"Rogue" ships could be a problem, which came about due to the significant growth in global shipping, rapid expansion in numbers of vessels under Flags of Convenience and the serious shortage of experienced and qualified seafarers. This was enhanced by the low standards of training and certification accepted by some maritime administrations, fledgling ship-owners (who generally engaged the cheapest of the cheap crews), not to mention corruption and reported availability of "dubious Certificates" being issued in return for payment. This was rampant amongst some Third World administrations in the Asian area. All this reflected on the quality, safety, and reliability of crews. Consequently, this situation in turn lead to the introduction in the mid-1970s by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) of the STCW (Standards for Certification and Watch keeping) regulations, which, has developed into the mainstay of worldwide Maritime code of practice for qualification and certification. The introduction of the STCW, ensured much improvement was made regarding crew standards.

It was long hours and hard work on board – not so much in terms of manual labor but rather in the constant need for officers and crew to maintain sea watches. With Port time being so limited one never got a break from the daily routine, day in – day out. If anyone went down sick it placed a definite burden on others and everyone became affected having to share the extra workload. Rapid port transits also caused engineering staff concern with routine shipboard maintenance. Time for this essential work became of the essence in different ways.

It could also be stressful on the Master in attempting to maintain the shipping schedule. If the ship missed a specific berth allocation time at a Port for whatever reason, the ramifications could cause costly delays. Obviously, many delays were entirely beyond the control of the ships, for example, adverse weather, fog, and the like. Nevertheless, delays frequently amalgamated and compounded creating and provoking ongoing hold-ups through the entire schedule cycle. One of the biggest features of containerization was the speeding up and rapid handling of the cargo transit process –naturally, any delays encountered ran counter to the scheme of things.

The feeder service soon became second nature to us, and we accepted that to a degree we were becoming somewhat robotic in various ways. It was like running on "Tram Tracks". Over many consecutive trips we became quite familiar with the Ports of call, their quirks and benefits alike. Our crew achieved "squatter's rights" in many of the Pubs, our arrival being anticipated to the day from the shipping List in local newspapers or from shipping agents.

Kota Kinabalu and Labuan were the only two Ports where we could always expect at least one night in Port (sometimes longer). This was entirely due to lacking Port infrastructure at the time and the need (in many cases) to deconsolidate and then consolidate the same containers ready for back loading aboard. The congestion was not helped due to the severe lack of container vehicles to cart the containers down the finger wharfs being utilized at the time.

When bound for Sandakan or Tawau I would calculate my arrival for first light at the entrance to the narrow navigable passage, which separated the South China and Sulu Seas, just at the northern most tip of Sabah. This was a restricted navigable channel that could only be safely transited during daylight hours with good visibility. The water depth was good, but it was demanding and required accurate coastal navigation, because many of the important beacons and leading markers were hard to detect by

radar. It took about 6 hours to transit this passage and it was a tropical delight weaving between the various tropical islands, atolls, and reefs.

Tawau and Sandakan were notorious Pirate prone areas, and it was always wise to limit time spent at the respective anchorages, to an absolute minimum. Between 1960 - 2000s the entire region of what was previously British North Borneo Island including Kuching (Sarawak), Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu), Miri, Bintulu, Tawau, Sandakan, down as far as the Indonesian Port of Samarinda, was a haven for Pirates, especially on the East coast where Filipino Pirates based in Jolo Island (Tawi Tawi Group) which was very close to hand, joined ranks and roved about plundering the coastal waters more or less at will and unhindered. One always needed to be on guard when navigating in these waters. During the migratory season, the East coast of North Borneo (Kalimantan), close to the Sibutu Passage and Reef in the Celebes Sea is a great place for Whale watching. This is also a world class Scuba Diving venue but fraught with danger, with participants running a high risk of kidnapping by Pirates, always cruising around the Tawi Tawi Group of Islands seeking easy prey.

I remained as Master on the "Kris Madura", engaged in the same service for another two years. Life was becoming somewhat boring to say the least, only disrupted on one occasion when we were hit by a huge freak wave in the South China Sea. The wave damaged about 5 containers on the starboard side which were stowed on deck. Fortunately, they remained secure and we were able to reach our next port and have them discharged safely. No damage was sustained to the ship, but the containers were badly stove in and dented. Still, I considered us as being fortunate since this was the only incident during my tenure on board. Constantly working in waters with high density traffic, pressure to maintain schedule and with very restricted port time it was not uncommon for statistics to be higher in terms of mishaps, near misses or incidents.

An image of the "**Kris Madura",** under new flag and Ownership. Gone is her smart silver-grey hull and buff painted cranes.

The conclusion of my contract, coincided with the vessel transferring to other Asian interests, and although I was invited to stay on, I declined being happy to leave and try returning to retirement once again. However, it did not pan out as planned, and I soon became involved yet again, in the "Maritime Pie".

Image taken by the Author, at Port Klang.

Image taken by the Author in Pasir Gudang (Malaysia), situated in the Johore Strait, with Singapore on the other side, visible in the background.

Taken from the Captain's Cabin, approaching Port Klang Fairway.

END

Strike Eight Bells for Morning Watch

So deep in slumber but startled by a knock on my cabin door, my eyes do open but so drowsy

Good Morning mister Mate, it's a quarter to four, says he, bearing a large mug of tea

I force myself out of my bunk, wash and prepare for another sea watch and the day ahead

Eight Bells quietly strike as I arrive on the Bridge to take the con, still sleepy from my warm bed

Soon the sea air and hot tea makes its mark, and I am fully awake just like the morning Lark

I check the chart and scan the horizon, only lightening skies where the Sun will appear in a minute of arc

Soon thereafter the heavens start to glow, as the Sun creeps aloft very slow, its rays start to abound

The sea is blue and calm, the light does glint on the mini wavelets that surround, without any sound

Movement on deck as the Chippy sounds around, the Bosun arrives for daily jobs, eager and wide awake

The stars and horizon are still visible all about, so a morning sight I do take, for a navigator must partake

Position plotted and log I diligently write, then move to the bridge wing to enjoy the morning breeze

By now the bell strikes four, only two hours more, time passes quickly whilst lost in thought and at ease

The wafting smells of breakfast do emerge from the galley below, hunger pains starting to grow

The ship comes alive like a floating city, one day less, until payoff, the calendar is marked thus to show

Our Captain arrives on the Bridge with coffee in hand, to check our progress and for a morning smoke

He mutters a few words about the ship, comments on the weather then leaves whilst cracking a funny joke

Eight Bells sound loud and clear, my relief must by now be very near, young and sprightly he does appear

I chat a while then go below for breakfast and prepare the day's work ahead, to which routine I must adhere

End

Upstream to Kopi

One afternoon, just after returning from lunch, I was sitting in my office in Singapore when the phone rang. It was an old friend from my seagoing days, who now resided and worked in Australia as a Marine Advisor for a large conglomerate engaged in the development of LNG Pipeline project in remote Papua New Guinea. Since I was General Manager of an offshore company operating a wide range of vessels and equipment the crux of his enquiry was to seek my views as to the viability of towing a 300man accommodation barge up the Kikori River to a small township called Kopi. The logistics Base at Kopi was situated almost 40 river miles upstream from the mouth of the Kikori River, about 10 miles further upstream from the main regional township of Kikori. My clients had established a significant development and distribution facility at Kopi in support of their LNG project. Entry to the Kikori River delta was at the head of the relatively wide Pai Inlet, which was mainly used by log ships. The river was extremely fast flowing and had its source at Lake Kutubu, which flows into the Kikori River.

The telephone call was indeed fortuitous, because my shipping company had recently acquired a new building of almost identical specifications on a long-term Bareboat Charter. I later discovered that the phone call was not entirely coincidental.

A feasibility study conducted by my operations staff gave an initial indication that the Kikori River did not have the water depth to allow for the safe navigation of such a vessel 40 river miles upstream. However, I knew the inland rivers of PNG from previous experience and considered we were in with a reasonable chance, reasoning that there would be more water depth once past Paia Inlet and into the narrows of the Kikori River. The river was also influenced by tides in the lower reaches where the shallowest water would likely be encountered. With this rational in mind, I decided to explore options more thoroughly.

My first reaction was to arrange with the potential charterer to have a trip upstream on one of their small coastal craft. This little boat was operated by a couple of Australians who kept the 2.5m water depth theory on the boil. True enough, at low water there was only about 2.8m water depth in certain places of Paia Inlet but in other areas it ranged between 5-7m and of course it was tidal towards the estuary. I worked on the premise that if 5000 DWT log ships could cross the shallows and reach deeper water close to Gouri logging camp at the head of Paia Inlet, then so could our Barge with a minimum draft (even Keel) of around of 3.2m. If we could cross the shallows with minimum fuel and fresh water on board at the iop of the tide and safely reach the entrance to the Kikori River where the water was deeper, albeit in very narrow channels, then there was an excellent chance we could reach Kopi where we could replenish our consumables.

Having completed the trip up to Kopi, and parts of the Ivy River which I thought may be an alternative route, I became more convinced that the venture was viable, so I set about talking with local River Pilots who endorsed my reasoning. I took the Twin Otter charter flight from Gobe to Port Moresby, where I planned to meet with the potential charterers at their offices to discuss the pros and cons of the intended project. The worst-case scenario was that the barge would ground on soft mud or sand, and sustain no damage as it was flat bottomed, to refloat again, on the next rising tide. After much discussion, the charterers confirmed they wished to proceed so I returned to Singapore on the first available flight with the view to securing the approval of our Managing Director and Board of Directors.

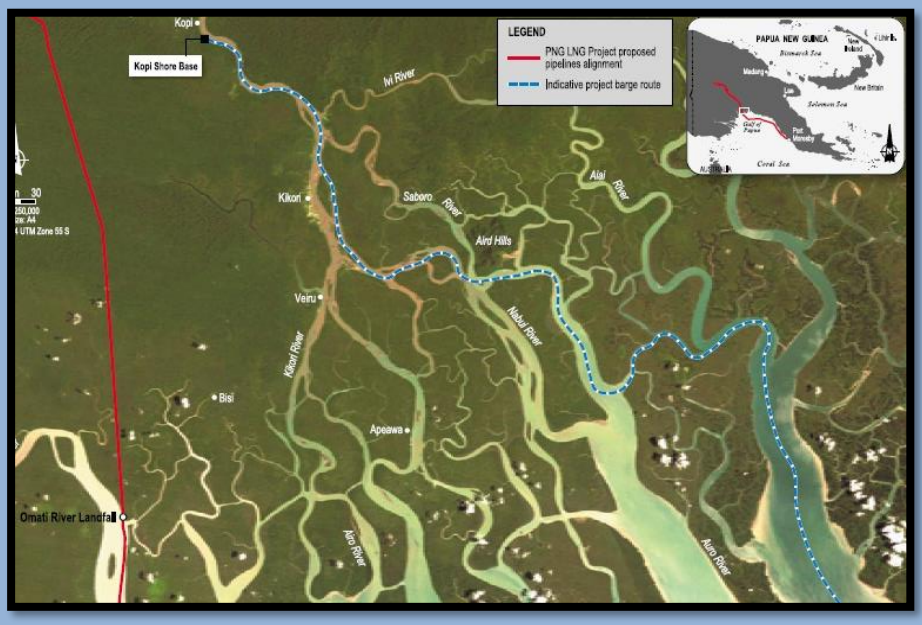
The 12month (extendable) charter at a very lucrative daily hire rate certainly aided their decision making, but I was at lengths to point out the strictest safety procedures must be observed, I would conduct a very in-depth Risk Assessment, and at the first hint of anything untoward I would pull the barge out and proceed to Port Moresby, whilst we reassessed the situation. They fully agreed, so I started the ball rolling by tracking down two of the very best river helmsmen that had served with me when I worked on the Fly River, some years earlier. The national shipping community in PNG is quite small so they were not difficult to trace. When offered the job they both accepted immediately. Obviously, the high pay and good conditions (by local standards) which I offered, played significantly in their decision making. They needed to be at ease with their working conditions so they could focus exclusively on the tasks ahead, besides in reality it was their local river knowledge that would make or break our enterprise, since they would be on the tug designated for the river tow. They knew all the deep-water channels and shallow patches and I had no hesitation concerning taking their advice seriously, since we had worked together previously with good results. I wanted to hire their "River Savvy", the technicalities I could handle.

The Barge was located at Batam, in Indonesia, just across the Singapore Straits, so once the Charter Party had been executed, ensuing weeks comprised of preparing the barge and selecting the most suitable crew. I was fortunate to be able to secure the services of a very experienced Barge Master from Australia, who had worked in Papua New Guinea for years. The venture was all slowly starting to come to fruition as our plans were converted into realities. In the meantime, I had become engrossed in numerous scenarios and calculations that would provide optimal stability at minimum draft – I finally came up with a solution that provided an even keel minimum draft of 3.2m. There was no scope for error so I checked and rechecked until I was fully satisfied.

Included in the charter was two of our Ocean-going Tugs, one of the 6000 BHP Class, ideally suited for the tow from Batam to Paia Inlet, located at the head of the Gulf of Papua and which was the point of entry to the Kikori River. Our intention was that our tug would tow the barge as far as Paia Inlet then transfer the tow to one of the charterer's smaller inland tugs (small but powerful little ships) which they used for towing barges up to Kopi, to complete the upstream part of our tow. In the meantime, our tug would proceed to Port Moresby to stand-by until the Accommodation Barge had safely arrived in Kopi and was situated alongside the main wharf, before returning to our base in Singapore. Our two PNG "River Pilots" who would be-in-charge of the river transit, would be onboard the towing tug from Paia Inlet to Kopi

We were fortunate inasmuch the intended tow to Papua New Guinea would be during the inter-seasonal Monsoon period, so under normal circumstances we could expect relatively benign conditions for the ocean passage. Nevertheless, it was decided that the Accommodation Barge would be crewed with essential personnel during the passage for security and safety purposes. This would also give the crew who would be remaining with the Barge at Kopi an opportunity for some degree of familiarization and to redistribute ballast water as stipulated in my calculations to ensure arrival at Paia Inlet on an even keel of 3.2m, after her ballasted ocean passage trim.

The identical sister to the 300 passenger, Accommodation Barge towed to Kopi - pictured at anchor off Batam



The tow route of the Accommodation Barge to Kopi – Approximately 40 miles inland, up the Kikori River.

Once all was in order with our Ocean-going Tug and Accommodation Barge we set off. I arranged departure for 0700 Hours so that the tow would be well clear of the Singapore Straits by the onset of

darkness. This was important because only weeks before one of our towing combos almost came to grief when rundown by a rogue vessel (which turned out to be Iranian manned). The tow was cut but fortunately there were no casualties. All because the vessel did not observe the Anti-Collision Regulations or the officer of the watch on the offending vessel did not know of their existence. The rogue vessel did not stop but just continued, on her way, as if nothing had happened, which we later found out to be Hong Kong. However, the incident was reported to both Singapore and Hong Kong Marine Authorities.

The sea distance between Batam and Paia Inlet was about 2700 Nautical miles, so at an average speed of 5.5 knots it was estimated to take just over 20 days. So, the towing combo departed from Batam on its voyage to Paia Inlet. We also sent along another Tug to act as an escort and safety vessel in case of any emergency.

The voyage was uneventful, and the Accommodation Barge arrived at Paia Inlet on schedule. I had travelled to Papua New Guinea a day or so earlier, took a small charter flight to Gobi Airfield which serviced Kopi. The one hours drive to Kopi was hell, potholes in the rough jungle road the size of dustbins. Once I had arrived at Kopi and recovered from the hellish drive I embarked on the same fast workboat on which I had undertaken the initial river survey for the trip downstream to Paia Inlet. The two Aussie crewmen were still on board, just as skeptical as ever. Our intention was to send this workboat upstream about a mile ahead of the main tow to warn us of any rogue illegal log barges coming downstream and to check water depths. In fact, upon my arrival at Paia Inlet I found it to be quite crowded with several medium size log ships busy loading their timber cargoes. Amongst them was our Accommodation Barge at anchor, with the towing arrangement already connected up to the tug that was to perform the tow upriver to Kopi. The Barge was nicely trimmed exactly as prearranged. Our other two vessels were there obviously, awaiting my instructions.

A review of the tide prediction charts indicated that they were rising over the next 3-4 day period, which was advantageous to us, so we decided to remain at anchor overnight and commence our tow at first light the following morning. A good survey of the Accommodation Barge's draft confirmed it was exactly as predicted, 3.2m even keel. At my request our charters had provided an additional, small shallow drafted tug, which we intended to secure to the stern of the Accommodation Barge by means of a short wire, to act as an "Emergency Stop", a safeguard in case our towing tug grounded ahead, to prevent the Barge colliding with the grounded tug.

There was no difficulty navigating Paia Inlet and we reached the delta of the Kikori River incident free. The river was quite high and consequently flowing fast. As we slowly progressed upstream some of the river bends became quite acute, causing the barge to drift sideways as we rounded the bends, gently brushing the riverbank. It should be remembered that the Accommodation Barge was 100m long, add to which was the length of towing wire from tug to barge (which was maintained as short as possible due to the narrows and extreme bends encountered in the river) so some lateral movement or drift, was only to be expected when rounding the sharp bends. In any event the riverbanks comprised only of the softest of mud, so no damage was sustained to the Barge when it brushed the riverbank; the worst was a few tree branches on deck which was easily remedied.

The surrounding jungle started to crowd in on us as the river continued to narrow. Our small picket boat that was running ahead reported that the river broadened about 1 mile further upstream and that slightly less water was detected. As the tide was on the ebb there was every possibility we could ground,

but at least we were ready and prepared for the eventuality. True to prediction we grounded about 15 minutes later, right on the river bend that had been reported by the picket boat. The riverbed was even and flat, so we sat comfortably. At this point we had transited about 15 miles upstream, it was about 3pm and the next high tide was estimated to be about midnight at our river location. We would be monitoring the rise in water and ready to move once we refloated. Meantime the picket boat was on station about one mile upstream acting as our sentinel.

By 9pm the water had risen sufficiently, and we floated free, once again we progressed slowly upstream. Our guard ship reported that there was a long reach a little further upstream – this is where I intended to run an anchor fore and aft and hold up until daylight. This was a safety measure because of two reasons; from this point upstream the river bends became far more acute and navigation at night was not recommended in addition to which, our worst nightmare was illegal log barges moving down stream under the cover of darkness. The illicit logging barges were usually more active at night. Navigating upstream during darkness is quite common in Papua New Guinea, using powerful searchlights is amazing how well the riverbanks are illuminated. Additionally, the many deck lights on the Accommodation Barge set the surrounding jungle alight and created a loom that could be seen for miles, hopefully as a warning to any rogue loggers. We had tried to keep to one side of the channel, leaving sufficient room for any downstream river traffic to pass.

At about 1 am we were alerted by our picket vessel to a motorized barge loaded with logs detected moving downstream in our direction. The crew on the safety vessel had attempted to warn the log barge of our presence. No acknowledgement was received from the river barge. Some 15 minutes later we heard the engines of the approaching craft. The noise of her engines was very distinct in the still quietness of the jungle which engulfed us on every side. Sure enough, she soon emerged and having sighted us thankfully moved to pass down our Port side, clearing us by about 10 meters. Even then there was not a sign of any movement on board of her, no lights, nothing. Fortunately, that was the only vessel we encountered, but it clearly indicated the dangers involved and posed by such illegal ships of the night and the absolute necessity for a picket boat.

By 9am we had recovered our anchors back to the “Cowcatchers” and were once again underway towards Kopi. Slow but steady progress was made. As the river looked quite full, I anticipated a clear run all the way to Kopi. We negotiated the sharp river bends without much difficulty due to the skill of our 2 local river pilots and by lunchtime we were passing the township of Kikori (really, little more than a large village of ramshackle wooden buildings). Our towing combo attracted many onlookers who came out in their canoes – perhaps many had never seen a vessel of our size previously so far upstream. Kopi, was only about 10 miles further upstream, so all going well we should arrive and be anchored by 4-5 pm.

The remainder of the tow was uneventful and by 4.30pm we had laid a spread of 4 anchors, in mid-stream. Each anchor being marked by a yellow buoy. Naturally, we were soon visited by various managers and section heads from the Logistics Base, all eager to see their new “floating hotel”. The plan was that we would remain mid-stream for several days whilst preparations were made to secure permanently, for the duration of the charter, alongside the main wharf. Then we would take on freshwater and diesel ready for the catering contractors to join, followed the next day by the “residents”.

Once I was satisfied all was under control it became necessary for me to negotiate that terrible jungle track in a four - wheel drive vehicle to Gobe Airfield, to get the charter flight back to Port Moresby. The

treacherous road was littered with potholes the size of which cannot be imagined and if you fell into one, perhaps you would never be seen again!

I considered the Barge Master aided by our two river pilots was more than capable to place the Accommodation Barge alongside the jetty. I had instructed the barge be swung and berthed starboard side alongside, bow heading downstream, so to make matters easier when departing or casting off in case of emergency.

I was quietly pleased we had satisfied our charterers and clients; my team had achieved the objective of a safe arrival at Kopi, despite all the earlier noise made by various skeptics who had now become conspicuous by their silence. Having arrived back in Moresby I went to our client's office to present my report. After a rather heavy night at the Airport Hotel Bar with the charterers, I boarded the flight the following afternoon back to Singapore.

The Accommodation Barge performed very well and was popular by all who stayed on her during her stay at Kopi, remaining on site for about 11 months when she did depart and return to Singapore, the Kikori River was running very high (and fast) but she had an incident free trip down stream to Paia Inlet where she once again rendezvoused and connected to her towing tug for her passage back to Singapore.

End

The Tropics

To the North lies Cancer, and to the South Capricorn

In between is the Tropics Zone, very moist and very warm

Beauty and tranquility are its traits, each giving rise to paradise

Golden Beaches and lazy Palms swaying in the breezes, so concise

Rain Forests thick and lush, enhanced by a climate that is so calm

Bearing witness to that fragrant tropical charm

Dangers lurk within the zone, snakes, and sharks to name a few

In seas that are warm and deep, and so startlingly blue

Sweat and heat are the norm, each causing frequent plight

Caused by Mosquitos swarming in their flight, especially during night

Still holiday destinations amongst this beauty, many to be found

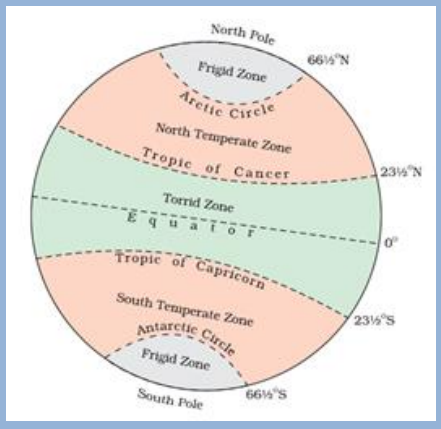
Resorts, retreats, and hideaways do abound

Constant sunshine and clear blue skies create a yearn

But alas do beware, sunstroke and sunburn, both lessons one must learn

Balmy nights and sweet odors do drift, and placid conditions enhance the dawn

All best experienced with a full glass or jar, to spirit on a relaxing yawn



The Green Zone of the Tropics

The Last "Samboat" under the Red Ensign

"SS. Sandsend" (ex "Samandoro") 1944 – 1967

I had not long completed my apprenticeship with Bank Line and I had not yet turned 20 years of age, so I did a trip as uncertified 3rd Mate with a Hong Kong shipping concern, but trading around Asia was not conducive to saving money, especially as a young man. Hence, I required top-up to my finances so that I could go to college in London, being a long-term Hong Kong resident going to college in the UK for a few months would prove quite expensive for me.

My time of arrival in the UK was unfortunate because the effects of the recent "Seaman's Strike" was still evident, so jobs were not that plentiful. Nevertheless, I went to the London Shipping Pool and was offered a short 3month voyage as 3rd Mate. Little did I know what I was getting myself into at that time.

The ship was supposed to do a single voyage to Argentina for a cargo of grain back to the UK. She was owned by a company called "Headlams" whose headquarters were in Whitby, a long established, shipowner. This suited me well, and fitted in with my plans, however things were not to be.

I was provided with a ferry ticket to Rotterdam where I was supposed to locate and join a ship called the **"Sandsend"**. Having arrived in Holland, with no Agent to meet me, I jumped in a Taxi and headed off in search of the ship. The Pool officials in London had informed me that it was a relatively new ship, so I had a notion of what to look for, but after an hour touring the docks and having almost exhausted my Dutch Guilders, I was no closer, and on the verge of telling the Taxi driver to take me back to the Ferry Terminal. Suddenly, the stern of a rust bucket appeared from behind a dockside warehouse. I could just make out a faded "END" and below "BY" painted on her stern. I had found the elusive ship – "**Sandsend"**, Port of Registry, **Whitby.**

As my taxi drew alongside the gangway my heart sank and I immediately knew I had been sold a "pup". The ship was an old WW!! "Samboat", dirty and very rundown in appearance compared to the type of ships I had been used to sailing on previously. There was little I could do so I paid off the Taxi, collected my gear and strode up the gangway. By this time, it was about 9pm and try as I may, I could not locate anyone on board. Eventually, I found an empty Pilot's cabin with an unlocked door so decided to park myself there for the night. With no bedding and cold conditions my first night aboard is best forgotten!

Early next morning, I woke with the sun and set about finding the Master or Chief Mate. I started at the top and firstly knocked on the Masters' cabin door. The Master appeared, half asleep, a big man and dressed in his Pajamas. He seemed not to be expecting me but was not the least bothered when I explained I had joined the previous evening and was unable to find anyone on board. I later discovered he had been Master of the ship since her building in 1944 as **"Samandora".**

From the outset the ship was a disaster. The accommodation was of typical WW!! Standard, bare steel bulkheads and deck heads, all in need of a good soogee, washdown and paint. My cabin was like a box, quite large but empty except for a small bunk, desk, and chair. There was also a locker, but the hinges needed replacing so the doors could close properly. I stood in the middle of the room, my heart somewhere down by my feet and feeling like a "Shag on a Rock". I was very depressed to say the least, and hungry to boot.

There was no wash basin, or toilet facilities. The Deck Officer's ablutions were a communal affair just down the passageway from my cabin. The toilets were in a row with half height swinging doors rather like a saloon of the old west days. One looked under the door to find a cubicle with no feet in view. There were a few wash basins with cracked mirrors and 2 Showers, both of which produced little if any water pressure. The pale blue paint scheme added to the triggering of a headache.

Having signed the ship's articles, which incidentally I was very hesitant to do right up until the last moment. This was mainly due to them being of the two-year variety. However, because of the Captain's sincere assurances of a single voyage to the River Plate, and because of the prevailing Seaman's Strike in the UK, I reluctantly agreed to sign.

The Master had been quick to get the sign on completed (probably in case I changed my mind) and inform me what a solid ship the **"Sandsend"** was, and that he had been Master of her for the past 22 years (from which you can estimate his age) and that the Owners were a very fine traditional shipping company. I was later to learn that not only was he a big man, but he was also a man of great integrity with a big heart, as well as being a fine seaman.

My first stop was the dining saloon. After much questioning by the Chief Steward as to whom I was, I eventually got something to eat. The eggs floated in oil and the bacon was all fat, not the least appetizing. I gave it a miss and stayed with the toast and marmalade. This was another good start and an indication of things to come, I pondered to myself.

The Mate turned up for breakfast, smelling of last night's alcohol and still partly under the influence. He was from somewhere in Scotland and in his late fifties. The 2nd Mate was a nice guy from London, seventy-two years of age, and an ex-King Line man so he said. Our Chief engineer wore glasses with lenses like beer bottles and was well into his seventies. The second and third engineers were Geordies and in mid-forties, seemingly quite decent types. I was instantly on my guard with the 4th Engineer, also a Gordy, but right out of the RN. He gave the impression of being very self-opinionated and what he didn't know wasn't worth knowing anyway. He sported longish sideburns and a quaffed hair style, rather like a "Teddy Boy", in my opinion.

Left, an image of the **"Sandsend"**circa 1965.

The entire deck and engine crew were from West Africa, but all residents of Cardiff. Since in the past I had always sailed with Asian crew this was a completely new learning curve for me.

The crew was very argumentative, often over the most minor of issues, as I discovered during the voyage. They always appeared to be threatening and on the brink of a "punch-up", even though no such events took place. Nevertheless, I was always on my guard, especially during my night watches and never really felt comfortable when they were around.

I was informed by the Captain our first leg of the voyage would be to Safi, in Morocco, to load a cargo of Phosphate for Capetown. This would be via a bunkering stop at Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. I therefore immediately knew it would be very unlikely that the voyage would be of 3 months duration, despite various assurances I had received. It was becoming clear that I had been "Shanghaied".

We departed Rotterdam and headed off down the English Channel. The weather was rough. My first sea watch was an education. The ship's original wheelhouse was next to the Masters' cabin but was not used. Instead, it was used as a laundry for the Master (clothes lines strung everywhere) and storage for a large collection of Junk that the Master had collected during his many years of tenure on board. Such items as reels of Fencing wire, bundles of Tomato Plant Bamboo stakes, and the like. The Magnetic compass and Radar had been removed as had the steering pedestal.

Instead, a timber "Chicken Coop" had been constructed on the Monkey Island at some previous time, by the ship's carpenter. I was told by the 2nd Mate the Master had supervised the construction. The "shed" was quite rough and every time the ship rolled, so the structure moved about 6 inches port and starboard. Frequently, one of the windows would drop out and make a huge clatter and the deckhead leaked like a sieve during rain showers. The 2nd Mate went on to say that the windows were taken from derelict WW11 Italian Lorries, the Master having obtained them years earlier when transiting or anchored in the Suez Canal or the like.

The **"Sandsend"** at anchor, pictured loaded with Army Lories on deck. Perhaps, taken when requisitioned by the MOT during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. Reportedly, she did play an active role in the emergency.

The Radar had been connected professionally as had the manual steering arrangement, ship's telegraph and Magnetic compass. There was no Gyro or automatic steering of any description; steering was therefore continuously by hand. There were no intercom or phone connections to the Masters' cabin, only to the Engine Room. In the event it was necessary to call the Master one used one of the small cowl ventilators, situated either side of the wheelhouse, and called in a loud voice.

The “Chicken Coop” was a nightmare, as it was so cramped it only allowed for a small folding chart table, but also because it was so hot. Being a steamship, the funnel was immediately behind the structure causing much heat to be generated. Also, if our illustrious engineers failed to inform the bridge when about to blow tubes, (so the duty Mate could take the ship out of wind), one would instantly be choked by the smoke and soot which penetrated everywhere. There was no room to swing a cat, when a duty mate and helmsman were on watch together. It was reported in earlier days, there had been cabs on each wing of the Monkey Island, but these had been partially removed by the time I joined the vessel.

Loading a full cargo of Phosphate at Safi was uneventful but dusty and completed in a few days. We then headed off southwards towards Las Palmas for bunkers. By the time we reached the latitudes of Las Palmas the weather had become very tranquil and pleasant. Although my disappointment in the vessel remained, a routine was established, the best average speed the ship achieved was 9.5 knots for the passage to the Canary Islands.

The night after following our departure from Las Palmas, I was woken by the quartermaster about 6.30am asking that I quickly go to the bridge. I arrived out of breather to find a large Russian ship crossing our bows from port to starboard. Our unsupervised helmsman had started to turn our ship to Port, entirely the wrong thing to do. I still had enough sea room to counter this and alter course to starboard to go full circle and pass the stern of the other vessel. It was a close encounter because had the Russian ship obeyed the Anti-Collision Regulations by correctly decided to make a late alteration of course to starboard to give way to us, a very, serious situation may have arisen.

I asked the helmsman as to the whereabouts of the Mate and was informed he had left the bridge about 15 minutes after having taken over the watch from the 2nd Mate and never returned. I went looking for him, fearing he may have met with some form of accident. Upon entering his cabin, I found he was heavily intoxicated, slumped in a chair, so I let him be and returned to the bridge to keep the remaining hours of his watch.

I discussed the problem privately with the 2nd Mate and we reached the decision that we should report the matter to the Master since it involved ship’s safety. As it turned out we did not need to because about 9am the Master went to visit the Mate about something and found him in his cabin, in the same state as when I had last seen him. The Mate remained in his intoxicated condition for the duration of the passage to Capetown.

The Master requested I accompany him to search the Mate’s cabin for hidden booze, but it was fruitless as there was no additional alcohol to be found. A couple of months later, we were informed by one of the quarter masters; whilst in Las Palmas the Mate had purchased a significant amount of duty free “Dry Sack Sherry”, which he had given the crew for safe keeping and could be supplied to him as he requested. He did attempt to shower, shave and sort himself out for our arrival at Capetown, but unfortunately for him he tripped over a deck “Ring Bolt” in the vicinity of number 2 hatch, causing him to fall and badly injure his face. He was badly concussed and out of action again for more than a week.

Upon completing discharge of the Phosphate in South Africa, we thoroughly washed down our cargo holds before departure in preparation for our next destination, which we discovered was to be the River Plate, to load a cargo of bulk grain in Argentine ports for Europe. For my part I hoped “Europe” would mean the UK. However, first we were required to cross the South Atlantic during the late southern winter, light ship, which was a daunting prospect. Our ocean route would take us well South, passing close to the remote and mountainous Island of Tristan Di Cunha, located in the mid-South Atlantic Ocean.

The old “Sandsend” labored continuously throughout the endurance of the passage. We encountered rough weather most of the way coupled with strong westerly winds. The best the old lady could average was about 7-8 knots for the most part. Despite maximum seawater ballast the ship remained like cork on the sea and therefore was susceptible to making constant leeway, requiring constant course adjustments. We followed a “Great Circle” route, so our track took us well South, passing the remote and volcanic Island of Tristan Da Cunha, by some 60 miles distant. Also, the continuous overcast weather made taking sights more challenging. Our passage across the South Atlantic Ocean spanned some 22 days.

Our landfall off “Isla de la Lobos” in the estuary of the Rio de la Plata was one made in dense fog, and an occasion not to be forgotten. This dictated our speed and progress was slow, although our Master knew these waters very well. We were almost deafened by the continuous fog signals from our steam whistle located on the funnel so close to our “Chicken Coop”.

Nevertheless, we were almost run down by an errant Panamanian Tanker steaming at full speed. It was only because of the Master stopping our engines in good time, that we narrowly avoided disaster. The rogue Tanker crossed our bows from Port to Starboard at high speed, and at close quarters. This implanted firmly in my brain, for the remainder of my seagoing years, the absolute importance of observing the anti-collision regulations, especially those applicable to navigating in restricted visibility.

Following a three weeks passage across the South Atlantic, and prior to our arrival time in the River Plate, our Chief Mate started his alcoholic indiscretions once again. This was despite receiving a serious dressing down from our Captain. Under the guidance of the Master the 2nd Mate and I loaded the ship to grain capacity, firstly at Buenos Aires then upstream at Rosario. Our passage to and from Rosario had been a real eye opener for me, especially as to the unreliability of some of the River Pilots. I was warned of this tendency by the Master, from whom I learned much during these times.

Once loaded, the time arrived to depart from Argentina. My heart sank again when I learned our orders were to proceed in the direction of the “Straits of Gibraltar” for orders. Our destination could yet be the UK for discharge, so I could sign off, but if the UK were intended, why not stipulate “Landsend” for orders?

We had been experiencing problems with our Magnetic Compass when crossing the South Atlantic, not helped by the fact that the taking of “Azimuths” was very restricted due to the heavily overcast conditions we experienced most of the way, so before departing the coast, the Master swung the ship and drew up a completely new Deviation Card. He had obviously conducted this exercise many times because he completed the task so quickly and expertly.

Contrary to our passage across the South Atlantic from South Africa, we experienced very good sailing conditions from the River Plate as we slowly progressed northward towards the Canary Islands and Las Palmas, were we would once again replenish Bunkers. Our Chief Mate had been warned off any repetition of his previous drunkenness; otherwise, he faced the risk of being replaced.

We were only about 4 or 5 days steaming from the Gibraltar Straits, when the Master received a cable instructing that the ship proceed to Civitavecchia then Livorno, in Italy, for a two ports discharge. I was overcome with disappointment since my worst fears had materialized. Despite my personal grievances our stay in Italy was like a holiday with beautiful sunny days and surrounded by charming people. Unfortunately, I met with an accident whilst working on deck which necessitated me being hospitalized for a while. During my absence, the good ship “Sandsend” sailed without me.

In retrospect, I can say although the “Sandsend” had long since seen better days and at the time of my departure from her, she only had a few months remaining before meeting her demise at a Taiwan ship breakers. I found her Master to be a superb seaman and a man of very high character and integrity. I also had no complaint about the owners whom I concluded were very decent employers.

End

Good Joss

In the Orient, good luck, fate, or fortune, is often referred to just as joss
Whether it is good or bad, many just say, who really gives a toss
But it's important, because in Asia good joss means no loss
Without good fortune, many are unable to soar high, like an Albatross
Good luck arrives not just by chance, but rather because of good joss
Destinies created by the stars, land on one's head, there to emboss
Life's fortunes are infrequent, so be patient, to receive a share of joss
Persons who can say, I have good joss, will always avoid life's crisscross

When good luck comes to bear, one can say, good joss I have my share
For to go through life without good joss, is nothing less than a dare
Be sure take good care when it comes your way, hold it close to claim
Kharma or joss they are the same, they differ only but by a name
Immortal as joss may be, it always comes at a price and is not for free
From whence it arrives, it's something you only feel and cannot see
Joss can come and go as life does flow, but you need to fully realize
At that special time, when your good joss, decides to materialize

Good Luck – Good Joss

Hong Kong Dustbins of the South China Sea, and Typhoon Strandings of 1960-70

The term "Hong Kong Dustbin" evolved due to many of the early Hong Kong shipowners just painting their vessel's funnels all black – somewhat resembling an old black, upturned dust bin

By the mid 1950's the world's shipping fleets were recovering after the high losses during WW 2. Europe was building new and more modern tonnage at quite a rapid pace, and the Europe to Asia shipping trade was also entering a period of renewed expansion. This gave opportunities to Asian corporations that were inclined towards ship owning, to enter the market and develop their business. This was made easier for them because of the abundance of older tonnage that was becoming available on the market at cheap prices. In most cases the ships were old and well worn, but still with a few year's life remaining.

Consequently, the 1950-1960s saw a significant number of these older vessels finding their way into the hands of Far Eastern owners. Hong Kong was an attractive location for many of these fledgling ship owners to establish their business Head Quarters and develop their fleets. Hong Kong offered stability of government, a competitive commercial environment, and a vibrant shipping register that provided an air of respectability due to it being closely fashioned on that of the United Kingdom. There were those however, who registered their ships in Panama and operated their ships from Hong Kong, under the notion that Panama may be a more flexible register for the ageing ships, and there was less transparency for companies when registered in Panama. Some of the more, dodgy operators, looked upon this as a convenient means of avoiding liability in the eventuality of financial delinquency or mishap linked to their vessels. All said and done, realistically, a Panamanian Company was nothing more than a brass plate on the door of an attorney's office in Panama.

Hence, there was a "Boom" in the number of shipping enterprises and vessels being registered in Hong Kong during this period. Many of the shipping companies traded their vessels within Asia, particularly those countries that were within relatively close proximity to the South China Sea, such as Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan (aka Formosa), Philippines, Borneo, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore and Malaya as it was then known. These old vessels were very dominant in the waters around these areas. The term "Hong Kong Dustbin" evolved due to many of the early owners just painting their vessel's funnels all black – somewhat resembling and upturned dust bin. Henceforth, the name stuck. It would also be true to say that there was a fair share of shady ship operators around in those early days of development that may not have been so enthusiastic in openly advertising their company insignia or identity, for reasons best known to themselves.

The only real way of identifying these "Hong Kong Dustbins" was by the Union Flag prominently painted on each side of the vessels hull, with the ship's name in Chinese Characters, likewise displayed. It would be true to say that this was primarily to facilitate ease of recognition as there were several open conflict zones about the China Seas around that era, such as China and Formosa, North Korea and North Vietnam. Restrictions of trade applied between some countries, a good example of which was between Formosa (Taiwan) and China with most commodities being transshipped via Hong Kong on what were loosely defined, but not strictly correct, neutral tonnage. In the mid- to late 1950s the Formosa Straits was notorious as a conflict zone between China and Formosa (now known as Taiwan). Similarly, North Vietnam became a "War Zone" in the mid-1960s, during which numerous vessels were mined or bombed.

It was only around the mid-1960's that many of the allegedly dodgy shipping companies, threw off their shady veils, and started to take a pride in vessel ownership and display company Motifs and Logos on vessel funnels. This period was also a golden age for numerous ship management concerns that managed the various vessels on behalf of beneficial owners, another way of masking true ownership in many cases.

Sometimes, these old ladies would anchor for weeks either at Yau Ma Tei or Western Anchorages, to await the opportunity of suitable cargoes. In the event of an approaching Typhoon, they often shifted to a more sheltered area in Hong Kong waters, known as **"Tolo Harbor",** which was often the scene of numerous groundings following a Typhoon.

During the first half of 1960s there were lucrative cargoes available for ships willing to trade to North Vietnam, namely Haiphong and Port Campha, situated at the head of the Gulf of Tonkin. Port Campha was a port known for its coal exports. This was a temptation for some owners of "old ladies" of the sea. By paying ship's crews so called "Danger Money" they were attracted to this trading area which resulted in a significant number of vessels becoming casualties, due to bombing or mining.

One of the dangers associated with remaining in Hong Kong Harbor during a typhoon was, the serious consequences of dragging anchors in Typhoon conditions. This seriously increased the danger of collisions between vessels, also the high risk of dragging anchors across the telephone cable reserves and snagging the various marine cables that linked Hong Kong with Kowloon, as well as internationally. The Hong Kong Marine Department was therefore, very actively engaged in implementing the "Typhoon Regulations" applicable to ships and raised the alert at an early stage once a pending Typhoon became imminent.

Of course, Hong Kong had its share of long established and more traditional ship owners. This included, amongst others, China Navigation Company, Indo-China SS Company (Jardines), John Manners Group and its various shipping subsidiaries, Williamsons and their Douglas SS Company, Harley Mullion and Company,

Moller Shipping, Wallem and Company, to name but several. These entities were the backbone of Hong Kong shipping during the early and mid-1960s, prior to the advent of many newcomers which are household names in Hong Kong shipping circles nowadays.

Hong Kong was also an attractive management base for Euro-continental ship owners who had traditionally operated regionally around the Far East, such as Thoresen, Wrangell, and Bruusgaard of Norway, Jebsen of Denmark

Gallary of typical “Hong Kong Dustbins” during the 1950-60s

An American “Jeep Class” built in 1944 the **“Taifookloy”** at anchor in Hong Kong during the period.

This type was used quite extensively for the various coastal trades of the Far East - easy and cheap to operate. Its basic construction made it easy to maintain. The Union Flag and ship’s name illustrated on ship’s sides. The ship was wrecked on Lantau Island in 1962, due to grounding during a Typhoon. She had earlier been the “Inchkilda” of Williamsons some years earlier.

“MV. Wishford” – Owned by a Mainland China front company based in Hong Kong. Note the Union Flag painted on ship’s side.

The old steamer **“Landspride”** operated by Wheelock Marsden and Co. of Hong Kong

Another old steam ship **“Inchstuart”** operated by the well know Williamsons and Co. of Hong Kong

MV East Wales sold to Hong Kong owners and renamed **“Universal Skipper”**

An ex Australian “Dustbin” acquired by Hong Kong interests and renamed **“Pacific King** captioned at the end of her working life on her way for demolition at Junk Bay, in1969.

The old steam ship **“Lady Isobel”**. Purchased by John Manners – Hong Kong and renamed **“Manly Breeze”** and later changed to **“San Carlos”** by the same owners.

Sold to John Manners – Hong Kong in 1957 and renamed **“Wear Breeze”**

One of the smarter looking “Dustbins” – “**MV Inchdouglas”** of Williamsons - Hong Kong (formerly Douglas Steam Ship Company)

“Incharran” of Williamsons (formerly Douglas Steamship Company), – departing Hong

Kong in 1955, renamed **“Ho Sang”** after her sale to **Jardines,** and used mainly in the Far East Logging Trade

Jardine’s **“Hop Sang”** sister ship to the **“Ho Sang”** used extensively in the Far East logging trade**.** The Borneo river ports were the main source of their cargoes and they operated in this trade, very successfully, for a good number of years

The handsome looking, and very trim, **“Lok Sang”** belonging to Indo-China SS Co. – referred to as Jardines.

The original old **“Bradford City”**, eventually sold to Jebshun-Hong Kong in 1968, becoming **“Shun Wah”**

The **“Peebles”** an old Geordie Tramp, sold to John Manners – Hong Kong in 1957 which became their **“San Fernando”** being placed under the Panamanian registry.

Perhaps the painting of the **Manners Navigation’s “San Fernando”** by the renowned Maritime Artist-Tony Westmore, illustrates a more interesting venue. Depicted loading bagged rice mid-stream in the Chao Phraya River – Bangkok, during the late 1950s

The Hong Kong owned **"Sinkiang"** of the extensive **China Navigation Company** Hong Kong shipping empire. Their tonnage always looked well maintained and nicely presented.

Other Hong Kong icons of the 1960s (Right) China Navigation's **"Anking"** and (below) their **"Soochow"**

"Soochow" the photograph looks like **"Jesselton's"** main quay, (now known as Kota Kinabalu)

The ex **“Choy Sang”** became the **“Milford”** under Hong Kong British flag and operated on behalf of Mainland Chinese shipping interests. Note the Union flag painted on the bridge wing

Another Mainland Chinese vessel under Hong Kong registry and management **“Fairford”** steaming eastwards through Hong Kong Harbor in 1959

An ex - Booth Line vessel renamed **“MV Hai Win”** and placed under the Honduras Registry. A far distant cry from the beautifully maintained vessel she was when under the management of her previous owners. This image was taken circa mid-1970s.

The run down looking **“MV An Hing”** was another ex - Booth Line vessel purchased by Hong Kong operators during the 1970s, also placed under the Honduras Registry. A sad sight to behold.

Various Losses and Typhoon Strandings of the 1960s

The Typhoon Season in Hong Kong usually spans the months of May to October, with July, August and September being the most prolific months for Typhoons. During the 1960s one of the most serious to hit Hong Kong was Typhoon Wanda in September 1962. Not only was substantial damage sustained to the colony's infrastructure but some 36 ocean going vessels were either driven aground or wrecked in the devastation.

The deep, landlocked indentation of Tolo Harbor and Plover Cove, flanked by high hills that protect the snug anchorage from Typhoons, remains a favored haven for ships in Hong Kong. Located in the N.E sector of Hong Kong's New Territories, which is usually available for vessels drawing up to 8m draft. Unfortunately, the topography of the area did not always offer the protection sought from the weather, resulting in numerous Typhoon casualties.

The Hong Kong shipyards obtained much business over many years from ships becoming stranded by Typhoons, as well as other vessels salvaged in the South China Sea by the iconic Hong Kong Tug "Taikoo" operated by the China Navigation Company on behalf of the Group's Taikoo Shipyard.

A busy Taikoo Shipyard, showing vessels of prominent Hong Kong based owners, namely, Wallem, Williamsons, and Bruusgaard

The small steamer **"Juno"** (ex Bidelia, ex Cardross). Although owned by an associate company of the Madrigal SS – Manila, she was regularly seen in Hong Kong at Yau Ma Tei anchorage. Sadly, she was lost in the South China Sea with all hands, in a Typhoon when on passage from Hong Kong to Brunei, during 1964 with a cargo of Cement, Bricks and General. Last heard of when she radioed being in the middle of a severe Typhoon.

An interesting study of the Dutch freighter **"Tjibanjet"** well and truly wrecked in Hong Kong resulting from **Typhoon Gloria** during 1957.

Another Typhoon Casualty during the 1960s. Pictured, the Wallem managed **“Vincon**” high and dry in Tolo Harbor

The Wallem’s managed, but Panama registered, **“Ocean Venture”** wrecked at Tolo Harbor during **Typhoon Wanda** which struck Hong Kong in 1962

Despite considered to be a safe all-weather anchorage, Tolo Harbor not so safe for **“Fortune Lory”.** Pictured well and truly wrecked, again due to **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962

The old Panamanian registered Liberty type steam ship **“Crescent”** wrecked in Hong Kong at Tolo Harbor during **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962

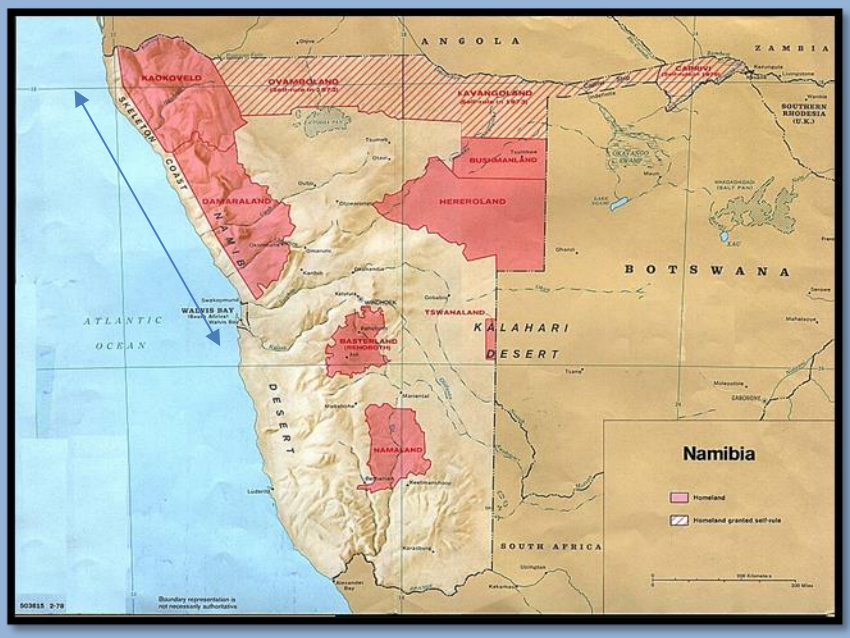
Although a poor-quality image, it depicts the **"Carronpark"** (later procured by John Manners – Hong Kong) and subsequently renamed **"Asia Breeze"** with **"Taifookloy"** in the background. Both vessels are aground on the northern coast of **Lantau Island** resulting from **Typhoon Wanda** in September 1962.

A typical Hong Kong **"Dustbin"**, one of many casualties resulting from **Typhoon Wanda** in 1962

During 1950-60's the term "Hong Kong Dustbin" evolved due to many of the early owners just painting their vessel's funnels all black – somewhat resembling an old black upturned dust bin. This trait became less predominant with the arrival of the 1970's

The Notorious Skeleton Coast

Navigators may well remember the infamous stretch of coast just round the corner from Cape Town heading North, with grim warnings, on the Admiralty charts about shifting sands and dangerous ground, the so called, and notorious, Skeleton Coast. This is the coastal region bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the west and Kaokoveld and Damaraland to the east, and south of Angola from the Kunene River, as far south to the Swakop River. Although, the name is sometimes incorrectly used to describe the entire Namibian Desert coast. It commences just to the north of Walvis Bay. Namibia's capital and largest city is Windhoek and Walvis Bay is the second overall in terms of size and population, and largest coastal city. The Republic of Namibia gained Independence from South Africa in 1990.



Map of the Skeleton Coast, running north from Walvis Bay in Namibia

Portuguese sailors used to refer to the coastline as "The Gates of Hell" mainly because it was known to be totally inhospitable. This coastal region is subjected to, the strong and cold Benguela current, which gives rise to frequent and dense ocean fogs (called Cassimbo). Prevailing winds blow from land to sea, rainfall rarely exceeds 10 mm annually, and a constant heavy surf on the beaches. The climate is highly unwelcoming and hostile. In the age of sail, before engine-powered ships and boats, it was possible to get ashore through the surf but impossible to launch from the shore. The only way out was by going through a marsh hundreds of miles long and only accessible via a hot and arid desert.

The area's name is derived because of the high numbers of whale and seal bones that once littered the shore from the whaling industry, although in modern times the coast harbors the skeletal remains and is a graveyard for numerous shipwrecks caught by offshore rocks and fog. The coastline is mostly soft sand occasionally interrupted by rocky outcrops. The harsh climate and lack of water can make it difficult to survive on the Skeleton Coast, which is why death is found everywhere. There are many, many shipwrecks along this notorious coastline, this narrative highlights only a few.

The Skeleton Coast is associated with shipwrecks, and stories of sailors walking through the desert in search of food and water and meeting their demise.

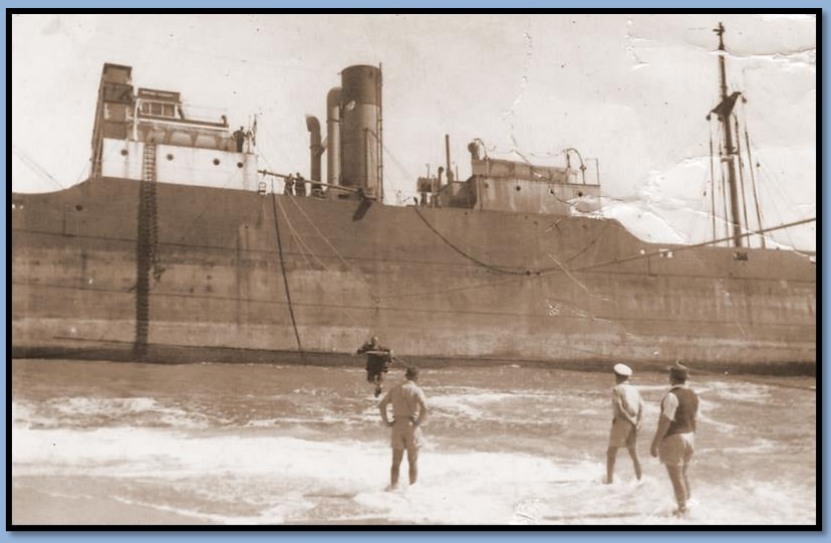
A notable shipwreck of more recent times is that of the Cargo passenger liner, "Dunedin Star" which stranded on 29 November 1942, about 50k south of the Kunene River mouth and Portuguese Angola. She was carrying 106 passengers and crew members on board at the time of the incident. The motor lifeboats managed to get 42 people to the shore while the rest were rescued from the ship by crew from the Norwegian cargo ship Temeraire.

The "Dunedin Star" had allegedly struck an underwater obstacle, presumed by the subsequent South African Court of Inquiry to be the poorly charted "Clan Alpine" Shoal. The wireless operator sent a distress signal, which was received ashore at Walvis Bay. The "Dunedin Star" began to rapidly take on water and its pumps were unable to cope with the ingress. The vessel's Master, opted to beach the ship in the interest of safety of its passengers, crew, and valuable cargo. In a heavy sea it grounded and came to rest 500 m offshore.

The "Dunedin Star" pictured during happier times

The "Dunedin Star" well and truly stranded. Various attempts were made to rescue all the passengers and crew, who eventually made it ashore. Supplies and water being dropped by aircraft to enable them to survive. Eventually, all the survivors were rescued by a land convoy. It took a period of one month from the date of stranding, until the date of their arrival in Cape Town.

The cargo ship “Natal Coast” a WWI C-class standard cargo ship of over 3000 GRT, stranded in thick fog on 30 April 1955 approximately 18-20 miles north of Swakopmund, whilst on a voyage from Matadi to Cape Town. She had a large consignment of coconuts on board, I assume Copra, which was a valuable commodity, because of the palm oil pressings extracted from it.

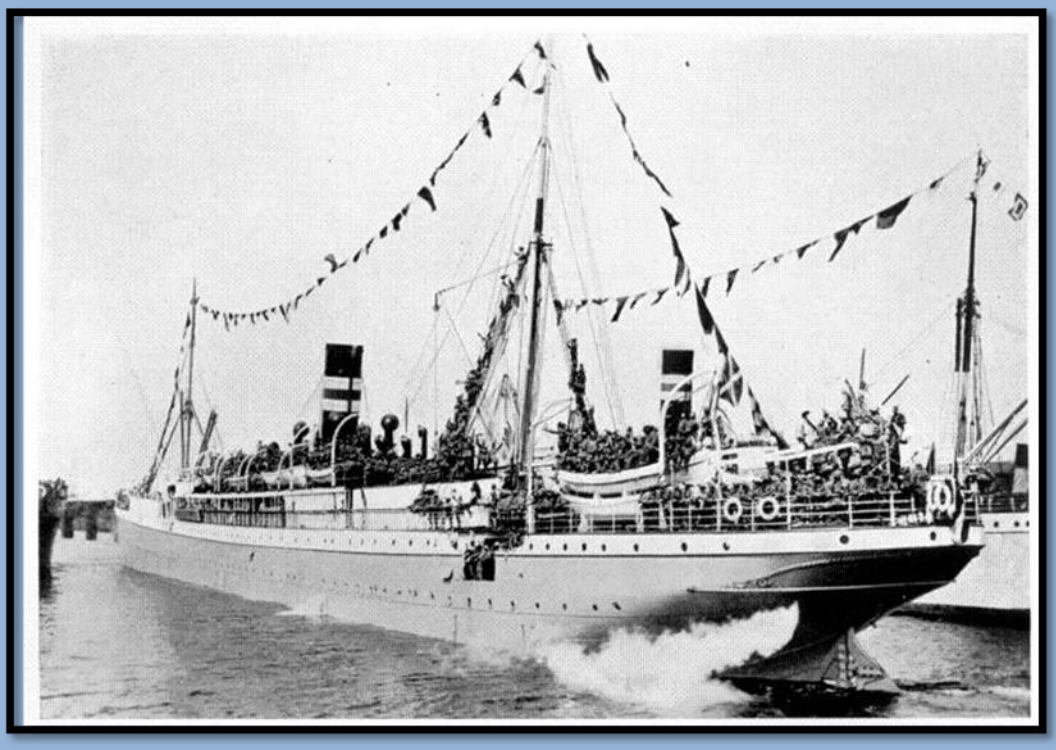


The image above shows how far up the beach the ship had been driven by murderous surf, and how shallow the water is, making it easy to wade out to the stranded ship from the beach. A scrap dealer eventually dismantled her in situ and today all that remains visible is part of her engine room and boilers which can be seen only at low tide.

The fishing trawler “Zeila” stranded on 25 August 2008 in the early morning hours near "Die Walle", a popular fishing ground about 10 miles south of Henties Bay. The fishing trawler had been sold for demolition to an Indian company by Hangana Fishing of Walvis Bay, and was under tow to her intended place of demise. Unfortunate, fate had other ideas in store, and the vessel became stranded after its tow line parted, while on its way to Bombay, shortly after it had left Walvis Bay.

Above and below, the trawler “Zeila” at the mercy of the ferocious, pounding surf conditions.

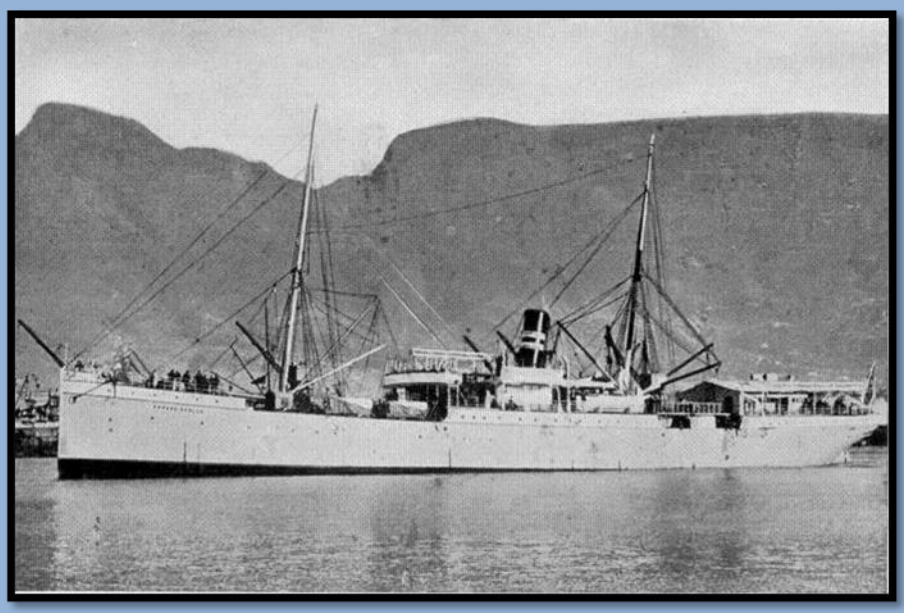
The “Zeila” from above. The continuous thunderous surf made any change of towing her off, impossible



Gertrud Woermann II seen leaving Hamburg with troops to quell the Herero War of 1904

The Gertrud Woermann II, a passenger cargo ship belonging to the Woerman Line, ran aground in thick fog on a reef about 20 miles north of Swakopmund on 20 November 1904. She was 4603 GRT and built by Wigham Richardson at Newcastle un the UK. She carried 400 soldiers, horses, war material, mails, and general cargo. The gunboat Vineta, at that time on a visit at Swakopmund, assisted with the salvage operations. Fortunately, no lives were lost.

The wreck remained visible until 1912, when it disappeared under the water during a heavy storm. Today a beacon, the so-called Gertrud beacon, marks the position where she sunk.



The "Eduard Bohlen", a 2272 GRT German passenger cargo ship owned by the Woerman Line pictured whilst at Cape Town. The ship was on a passage from Swakopmund to Table Bay. On 5 September 1909, the ship became engulfed in dense fog. The 95 m ship made an error in navigation and ran aground at Conception Bay.

All that remains of the ill- fated "Eduard Bohlen". This is perhaps one of the most photographs on the Skeleton Coast since it is 800 m inland and partially buried under the desert sand.

The old steamer “Octavi” with a cargo of Guano, ran aground in Spencer Bay, Namibia, during 1945.

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Another view of the rusting remains of the steamship “Octavi”, depicting skeletons of both kinds.

After almost two years of diving and searching, history was made by a team of international archaeologists and conservators, who succeeded in locating and salvaging bullion from a wreck believed to be of a 16th century Portuguese ship, that lay undisturbed for 500 years off Namibia's Atlantic Coast, near Oranjemund.

The sunken ship's fantastic treasures include a total of 2,266 gold and silver coins that were found underneath its bottom deck planks. They largely consist of Portuguese and Spanish gold coins and are presently in the Bank of Namibia, for safe keeping.

The Skeleton Coast is therefore, so aptly named for this treacherous stretch of South West African coastline.

End

References: Various public archives, wreck reports, South African Court Enquiries into various marine casualties, Wiki archives.

My Ultra-Light

Soaring above like as if a kite, so serene and elegant, does highlight my Ultra-Light

Its engine keeps running like a charm, always to maintain sufficient height

Easy to fly, it's a definite sprite, once aloft in my Ultra-Light

A sporting plane I must confess, it roams anywhere, often lost out of sight

Small and agile in its plight, I'm so happy when flying my Ultra-Light

Light and easy to the touch, flying it is a cinch and simply a delight

Diving and climbing at my will, total freedom, when piloting my Ultra-Light

An aviator's delight, excitement and venture it does top, so book a flight

To get your adrenaline pumping to its limit, I invite you to experience flying my Ultra-Light

A thing of beauty to possess, seeing is believing and does ignite, a spirit of freedom like a satellite

Pride in my aircraft makes me feel overjoyed when I catch a glimpse of my Ultra-Light

I lavishly care for my shining knight, so it's always safe and sound when in flight

Place to place I can fly, like its big brothers in the sky, no limits bound my Ultra-Light

People look at me in awe when I fly high above them in clear skies, keeping within their sight

For joy and pleasure cannot be matched, when flying freely in an Ultra-Light

So, take a step to stimulate and inspire, by booking your first flight, so sure to excite

An Okpo Cascade

Out of the blue, a telephone call, from a recruitment agency, inquiring if I would be interested in a one year assignment, in Korea. Having long experience working and living in Asia, this stimulated my interest. I had been to Korea many times over the years, so, I more or less knew what to expect.

The position offered was for a Marine Advisor/Technical Writer to be based at one of the world's Major Shipyard, located at Okpo on Geoje Island. This was about a one hour drive, from the large southern city of Busan. The project was related to the construction of a very large and sophisticated FPSO which was under construction for one of the globe's leading Oil and Gas majors. I would be on an 8 weeks / 2 weeks roster, which include flights to/from Melbourne and which I found to be very reasonable.

Having agreed the terms and conditions, signed a contract and undergone the mandatory medical examination, I soon received a letter of appointment together with a business class e-ticket for my journey to Korea.

I departed Melbourne on a Friday, booked on a Thai International flight to Bangkok, where I would layover for a few hours prior to connecting with another Thai flight, direct to Busan. As it transpired, the flight was not tedious and was in fact quite comfortable.

My arrival in Korea was at 7am on Saturday morning. It was still winter in Korea, so it was a chilly day in Busan. I was met at the airport and driven to my Geoje destination, which took a shade under one hour. It was an interesting drive, through mostly mountainous terrain. Having crossed the bridge to Geoje Island it did not take long to reach my charming little hotel, called Island View Hotel, located in downtown Okpo.

Okpo is a medium sized township, the centre of which are the two main shipyards of SHI (Samsung Heavy Industries) and DSME (Dae Woo Shipbuilding and Engineering), most expatriate residents being either directly or indirectly engaged by the shipyards or their associated service industries.

Okpo itself was a clean, thriving, shipyard town. The town is quite modern to a degree, whilst still retaining its share of traditional Korean charm. It boasted an abundance of hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, and drinking establishments as well as a large and well stocked Lotte Supermarket. Few towns I have visited of similar size, offered such a huge selection of restaurants in such concentration, as did Okpo. One was spoiled with the selection.

Night life was plentiful with night clubs and darkened bars with wooden furnishings and chalkboard menus, situated on almost every corner. Going by the number of Filipino hostesses that frequented all the pubs the town's economy must have been fairly buoyant. Most of the pubs, restaurants and night clubs favored by the expatriates are located within a few central blocks. First impressions of Okpo is it feels like a foreigner's enclave because most of the voices heard are Brits or Europeans.

My accommodation was an excellent 3bedroom apartment, fitted with all mod-cons, located on the 17th Floor of Mijin Tower Palace, at the top end of a steep hill, with a panoramic view of the town. The residential complex was only about 10minutes walk from the center of downtown Okpo,

My Apartment block at Minjin Tower Palace – on the steep road

Most importantly, it was close to the best bakery in town – the **"Paris Baguette"**, and **"Spoons"** a quaint little restaurant that specialized in all day English and American breakfasts. There were a number of expatriate families living in the same tower block, but they were seldom encountered except on the occasional Sunday morning at **"Spoons"** café, or when buying bread at **"Paris Baguette"**.

My Sunday morning destination – "Spoons"

Initially I used the **"Chef on the Fish"** as my main eating place for evening meals, but it always seemed to be empty and soon closed for renovation. Perhaps the lack of clientele was due to the limited and pricy menu, so I changed my venue.

Just across the street there was a friendly little eatery called **"Amigos"** where I regularly took my evening meal. The prices were reasonable and the food quite good; mostly European cuisine and lots of traditional English dishes. On Sundays they produced an excellent roast lunch which was always popular, attracting Brits from all over town. Amigo's became my second home in Okpo because it was

conveniently located so close to my apartment and the owner was a very helpful and hospitable lady, who would often go out of her way to cook special meals I may request.

My second home – "Amigos" Foreigners Restaurant

My most favored pub was the **"The Three Monkeys"** literally yards from my abode. Despite the name one could enjoy a peaceful beer without being hassled by ladies. The **"Garage"** was also a popular den which I visited only occasionally, once again only a few minutes' walk from home if I exited via the rear car park. Using this route I avoided all the steep roadways which could be grueling to walk in hot weather.

One of the popular Korean Beers was **"Hite"**. I found the **"Three Monkeys"** offered the lowest price for a pint but more than anything it was the small cozy atmosphere and charming ambience of the pub which was the main attraction to the place. Despite its size it was not overcrowded by noisy and in many cases ill-mannered "would be if could be" expats on an after work "swill". It was the sort of rendezvous that married couples could visit or one could go for a few glasses of wine, in peace and quiet. It was not the place to go if you were looking for a casual female acquaintance of the "Take Away" persuasion; there were enough of those joints elsewhere, mostly offering Filipino hostesses, all there on short term visitor visas. Definitely, the Three Monkeys was the wrong place if you were looking for that sort of thing.

Below: "The Three Moneys" – my favorite Bar

My workplace was located at main office of DSME, an impresive administrative block of offices within the sprawling bounds of the shipyard. It must be the only shipyard where the office is set amidst the most beautiful and manicured, landscaped gardens. Working hours were 7am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Conveyance to and from the office could not have been easier. A company bus was provided. The bus stop was only a couple of minutes away from Minjin Tower Palace. A 15minute bus service was provided by DSME which meant I was always back in Okpo by 5.40pm daily. There was no work at the weekend so my time was free. The only complaint about working in the office was the pungent smell of Kimchi which lingered everywhere. The Korean staff was very conscious of the smell on their breath because they cleaned their teeth every couple of hours. In particular, immediately following the lunch break when the washrooms were packed with people cleaning their gnashers. Otherwise, it was an excellent working environment despite all office staff looking like "clones" each dressed identically in DSME uniform and attending compulsory morning and afternoon exercise sessions. It did, it must be said, look a little like a "Robot City".

The huge DSME Shipyard complex

The weekends could be a lonely time, being of single status I found it hard to fill the time. I would always go to the **"Three Monkeys"** after work on Friday for a few beers then wander down to "Amigos" for my evening meal and sometimes perhaps followed by a night cap at the **"Garage"**. The "Garage" was very popular with shipyard employees and could become noisy and crowded so my visitations were relatively scarce.

Occasionally on a Saturday evening I would go to a great German Restaurant named **"Zum Spatz"**. The establishment was very small, only having 6-8 tables, but they served genuine German cuisine and German beer. Service was slow because it was operated solely by the German proprietor but the genuine food menu and comfortable surroundings more than made up for its lack of space. **"Zum Spatz"** was a very welcoming establishment I must admit.

An alternative for good food was a small French style restaurant called **“La Cuisine Noel”,** ideally situated only a few paces down the road from the Three Monkeys. Noel’s was pretty basic in layout but with a menu that was exclusively French in style, with an upmarket tag when it came to price. Nevertheless, the food was very good and there was a wide ranging selection of good French wines, available upon request. Noel’s was one of the few places in Okpo where it was wise to make a booking, opening only in the evening at 6pm, it was very popular and frequently full of expatriate shipyard personnel with their wives or lady partners, particularly at the weekends.

If I really fancied a different menu I would go Italian and partake of a genuine Spaghetti or Lasagna at Vivace’s which like all other eating places was close to hand and reputed to serve the best Italian in town.

Vivace Italian Restaurant - always an excellent Lasagna or Spaghetti with a glass or two of Chianti.

My Sundays always started with a visit to "Spoons" for a slap-up breakfast and endless cups of coffee. Then back home to do my laundry and ironing before going to my usual haunt "Amigos" where I had a permanent reservation for the Sunday roast. Sunday afternoon varied, perhaps a visit to the Lotte Supermarket for groceries and the close **"Admiral Hotel"** coffee shop where they served an excellent selection of pastries and cakes, then home by early evening with some Asian take away (the edible kind) and to watch a movie on cable TV.

Generally speaking, the working environment was intense, so at the completion of 8 weeks one was ready for 2 weeks RnR in Australia.

During my stay in Okpo I was fortunate to meet a charming Korean lady who just so happened to be visiting "Amigos", she was a friend of the owner. She was attractive, refined, well educated and above all else spoke immaculate English without a phony American accent so prevalent in Korea. We got along very well and thereafter we sometimes met up in Busan, where she lived or she would drive down to Okpo. We would go on shopping sprees, trolling the Malls together, enjoy good meals and visit interesting places. We became good friends and her companionship was highly valued, we laughed a lot when in each other's company.

My time I spent in Okpo sped by, and soon my contract had been completed and it was time to return to Melbourne. Even though Okpo was something of a foreign enclave in some ways it was nevertheless a pleasant place to live and work. The expatriate community, although quite substantial considering the size of the town, was not overpowering, inasmuch as everyone knew everyone else's movements or a source of gossip. This was not the case and it was possible to get about without bumping into someone you knew.

I must confess I miss Okpo very much and would not hesitate to return if the opportunity ever arose. The Korean people are friendly and respectful towards foreigners, although I was told that a few clubs and bars did not permit foreigners to enter. This is hearsay because I never experienced this issue myself anywhere in Korea, especially not in Okpo. If this does take place then I suspect is due to a matter of language and communication and not blatant racism.

All in all, I have visited Korea many times and have personally always found it to be a very welcoming destination, with educated and sophisticated people. My quick recap of Okpo only scratches the surface of the variety and diversity of this quaint Korean town.

End

Feeding the Demolition Yards of Asia

During the 1960-70s Hong Kong became the world leader for demolition and breaking of ships, with major shipbreaking facilities located at Junk Bay and later at Gin Drinkers Bay (where the container Terminals are now situated). Of course, Japan, Korea and Taiwan also had a share of the market, but they came nowhere close to the dominance of Hong Kong at that time. China was a bit slower off the mark, mainly due to the political unrest that prevailed and backlash of their "Cultural Revolution". The reality was, not until the beginning of the 1980s did China fully open its door to the commercial world and really start to expand and become a major player in the field of ship demolition.

By the late 1970s Hong Kong had lost its prime position and the pendulum had swung in the direction of Taiwan and Mainland China. This was due in part for the never-ending need in Hong Kong for building and land reclamation. Shipbreaking had previously become an important industry in Hong Kong because the market for scrap was directly related to the building industry, which was very buoyant in Hong Kong during these years, where the demand for mild steel bars was already well upward of 20,000 tons per month. To meet this demand for Steele it can easily be calculated the tonnage of vessels required to be in the process of demolition at any one time. In addition, there was an increasing demand in south-east Asian countries for mild steel rods and bars, which could only be met in part by Hong Kong at that time. The high value placed on waterside land suitable for development and reclamation in Hong Kong soon outstripped Hong Kong's capacity, so demolition of ships became less practical and moved elsewhere.

Hence Taiwan became the kingpin. In particular, the southern port of Kaohsiung quickly developed into a major base for the industry where vessels could be brought alongside makeshift berths, double and triple banked, then cut down using relatively cheap semi-skilled labor. This was very environmentally unfriendly and dangerous work. Kaohsiung soon became the World's # 1 graveyard for ships. However, with the increase in environmental awareness and the land supporting these makeshift waterfront enterprises becoming too valuable for demolition, by the late 1980s the mudflats of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh rose to prominence by offering even cheaper labor as well as less stringent environmental regulations and lower taxes. Therefore, Hong Kong as the original destination of choice for ships reaching the end of their economic life and destined for demolition soon faded out in favor of alternative locations within Asia. Eventually Kaohsiung eliminated its involvement as a major player in ship demolition, leaving the Asian market almost entirely to the PRC.

Nevertheless, through the 1980s, Hong Kong was still an active participant in the demolition market, particularly the areas of short-term ship financing in support of Sales and Purchase brokerage, both of which were vital elements for successful deals to be cut.

By the time mid-1980s came around my company which was based in Hong Kong, managed a number of ships, as a consequence we were very actively engaged in all elements of technical and commercial ship management, including such things as insurance, agency, cargo and chartering brokerage, Sales and Purchase, ship financing, crewing and marine operations. The result was that we were suitably connected within the maritime industry which paved the way to become more involved in the

shipbreaking sector. It was also a period of major changes within the shipping world, when ship owners were selling off or in some cases defaulting on ship mortgage commitments, mainly due to high fuel costs and rapid movement towards containerization. Many traditional Owners of longstanding suddenly found their tonnage was no longer economic or competitive and sold their ships rapidly at the behest of accountants. The result was that many fledgling shipowners who acquired these ships did not foresee the rapid changes and quickly became burdened with uneconomic tonnage, causing many financial institutions to repossess vessels over which they held security. This development in the shipping industry triggered contact from various major financial institutions seeking consultation on what could be done with vessels on which they were required to foreclose.

We learned details from financiers who had several foreclosed vessels anchored in Hong Kong and Singapore because of delinquency by owners in meeting various financial obligations. The financial institutions sought a “One Stop Shop” solution in terms of technical and commercial management to assist them to overcome the dilemma. They ideally wanted a full package at a fixed monthly fee for Technical and Commercial ship management with such things as insurance, survey, repairs, crew recruitment and wages, brokerages, port dues and taxes, fuel, and lubricants, stores etc., being additional but invoiced to them at cost.

Under the proposed arrangement the institutions received an attractive fixed monthly management fee with the headache of becoming reluctant shipowners in which they had no technical or commercial expertise, was eliminated. As owners they retained responsibility for standard operating costs of the ship whilst the ship manager had exclusivity over the vessel until such time as a buyer was arranged, or indeed the vessel went for demolition. This scenario assured a regular monthly income to the ship manager who was also able to claim legitimate brokerage fees on all cargo, sale or demolition of the vessel, recognized as standard within the shipping industry. The nub was, it became a win/win situation.

This type of “One Stop Solution” worked very satisfactorily, with the word getting about amongst the financial houses which lead to further enquiries by others seeking a similar arrangement, and which, over ensuing years became a source of ongoing business.

During this time, it became obvious there was potential for us, as a smaller player, to become involved in the demolition market which was starting to really become established in Taiwan and the PRC (People’s Republic of China). It stood to reason, if, now having built a reasonable working relationship with various Banks through our “One Stop Shop” management solutions, we could acquire tonnage built with good LDT and quality steel (usually European built) with the support of short-term financing, there was every chance of decent profits to be made all round. This could be developed into a worthwhile side business to supplement our core ship management activities.

Left, a nice profile image of the ex CMB “Breughal”, ex “Treasury Alpha” which we took over in Singapore on behalf of one of the financial institutions. We renamed her “Tamaki” and traded around Asia for about one year before we arranged for her demolition in Taiwan. A successful project for all parties concerned.

Seen here one of the “Cap San” Class operated by Hamburg-Sud on the N. Europe – South America service. They became known as the “White Swans of the South Atlantic”, due to their sleek design and high speed.

We purchased 3 vessels of this class direct from the owners, taking delivery in Europe and worked them towards Asia. Eventually we sold them for demolition.

The vessels purchased were “Cap San Marco” re-flagged and renamed “Marco Polo”, and “Cap San Antonio” re-flagged and renamed “San Miguel”. Both vessels were taken over in Europe and worked progressively towards Asia carrying a variety of cargoes along the designated route over the ensuing few months, until eventual arrival at the shipbreakers. The last one of the Trio purchased was the “Cap San Diego”. This project had an interesting twist because the ship having arrived in S.E. Asia, pending imminent delivery to the breakers’ yard, received an eleventh hour reprieve. An offer from a Hamburg

based ship conservancy group was received to purchase the vessel and deliver her back to Cuxhaven, as she was. Not wishing to see such a fine vessel go to the “Torch” unnecessarily, the offer to purchase her and duly delivered her back to Germany was accepted (luckily for them our contract with the scrapyard had an “escape clause”). The ship which we had renamed “Sangria” underwent a complete refurbishment upon her arrival back in Germany, had her name and German Register reinstated and is now a museum ship at Hamburg. The rest I shall leave to history.

A misty day at Kaohsiung, sometime during the late 1070s - early 1980s showing a crowed scene at a typical Taiwan shipbreakers yard. Demolition focused around economics and expediency with little regard being given to the adverse effects on the environment caused by pollution. At times, the ships awaiting their demise were banked up alongside the makeshift wharfs encroaching into the river.

In practice, it is a simple scheme; the way acquisition of suitable tonnage for demolition by scrap merchants worked was by a rate set within the demolition market based on a ship’s LDT. This allowed for a monetary scrap value to be easily ascertained for any given ship provided the LDT was known. LDT is “light displacement tonnage”, which is in simple terms the weight of water displaced by the ship – the mass of the ship excluding cargo, fuel, ballast, stores, passengers, crew, but with water in boilers to steaming level.

Ship Brokers involved in Sales and Purchase nominated suitable tonnage available on a regular basis (Brokers carefully matched their proposals as to the suitability of tonnage against our earlier defined criteria). One of our important requirements was that any vessels proposed to us for sale must still be in good trading condition and currently be in Class with a minimum of 6 months. We were not interested in ships that had been in lay-up or out of service or Class for any period. Ships were subject to prior inspection (by one of our Engineering or Nautical survey members) to ascertain suitability to proceed from Europe towards the Far East under their own power, carrying cargoes along the route. All of which was a critical necessity to turn a decent profit, as previously mentioned. The economics did not make sense, for towing global distances for demolition.

Once a suitable ship had been identified, and the economics of the proposed exercise verified, we would attempt to obtain a short period of exclusivity with Brokers pending our offer being proposed. In the meantime, our in - house team set to work sorting the short - term finances and seeking a Contract of Sale with one of our preferred shipbreakers as well as identifying suitable cargo(s). Once having become relatively well known in this sector of the industry matters tended to come together quite rapidly. A company surveyor would be dispatched to inspect the vessel’s condition and suitability, including verification of vessel documentation and Class affairs.

Broadly speaking, the important thing was to get a pro-forma Sales Contract in place for the vessel’s demolition with a wide Laycan (basically an agreed spread of dates between which the vessel may be delivered in accordance with the contract, allowing us a reasonable scope for delivery to the scrap yard.

Once agreed in principle the financial backers knew a sale was imminent and the ship had been inspected and deemed suitable, together with suitable potential cargo(s) to cover costs of the delivery

voyage (hopefully yielding a reasonable profit), the short - term bridging finance soon fell into place and the deal was finalized. The Banks were comfortable as they held both the deeds to the vessel and were beneficiaries in the demolition contract, so their risk was substantially mitigated. Our profit derived from surplus remaining once the banks had been paid out from proceeds of the sale. Depending on cargo revenues and modest gain on the sale price, overall profitability for the delivery voyage usually ranged between USD80-120,000, which on 1980 values was quite good for a short 3 months exercise. However, it was not always plain sailing, and we did meet challenges along the way from time to time, which we managed to overcome. The prosecution of a successful voyage was not without risk to us; the secrets to a profitable enterprise lay in securing the right ship with reasonable revenue earning cargoes along the way, which was not always easy. It was a good year if we could achieve 2-3 deliveries to the shipbreakers.

The actual delivery and acceptance of the vessel from the sellers varied according to what needed to be done. If it was necessary to change flag and name this usually took a little longer but with good co-ordination, on average a vessel could be made ready for a demolition voyage within 10 days. This included crewing (we had our own delivery crew consisting of ship Master and senior Officers), Insurances, Bunkers and Lubes, Fresh Water, basic Stores, Victuals, arranging Radio Accounts together with the many other needs to make a vessel ready for a voyage after acquisition.

This type of exercise lasted for about 2 years during which we delivered several more vessels to Taiwan and China shipbreakers. It was an interesting and exciting period, full of challenges. It yielded a great deal of satisfaction once a voyage had been successfully executed.

It must be said, there was a touch of the maverick doing this kind of business; one felt a little like “James Onedin” of the “Onedin Line” (TV series popular around the time). Do the math, calculate the risk, hold your breath and hope for the best outcome. Fortunately, fate was good to us during the “Golden 80s”, an era only living on in nostalgia, sadly never to be repeated.

End

An Elusive Korean Goddess

Amongst the throngs I did behold, a captivating lady in the corner of the Bar, so timid and far
Full of secrets, charm, and intellect in her every way, my eyes are drawn to her as if a shining star
Quiet and sensual with a mystery in her hidden glances, her beauty it does greatly enhance
So, I move closer, it's worth a chance, to see if I can engage her in a happy enchanting parlance
At first shy and reticent, but after a few sips of wine, she seems more open to breaking her reserve
We share laughter and joy for many hours, but to be honest the move towards her took all my nerve

With the passing of time and a few meetings more, my interest does increase beyond that of adore
I have discovered her name is Gina, a Korean woman of bonding chemistry, but still so able to elude
We become friends in every way, but still, she shuns my gestures, and remains distant to my regret
I keep trying to secure her magnetic vibes and cherished charms to no avail, remaining as a silhouette
I persist because my feelings declare, I need her more than words can say, to capture all her fervor
My efforts will persist, to break the ice and level the field, so I don't remain just like an observer

There are times when my frustration does abound, but I keep it inside and make not a sound
I dream and pray that one day, I will succeed with my deed, then my inner joy will abound
Distance does not help my efforts to reflect on her grace and brilliant qualities, in such abundance
In essence I will further pursue, to conquer my endeavor, placing no limit on my time or patience
For this is a quest in which I should succeed, to fully justify my inner need for her, one day to possess
She captures my heart as if in a vise, regardless of distance, she will remain my elusive Korean Goddess

My acknowledgement to the crew member who sketched this caricature

Sea Gypsies and Pinisi of the Laut Java

A modern motorized Dhow derivative, sometimes called a Pinisi.

There can be nothing more serene than to sight the lazy sails of a Dhow or Pinisi flapping on the horizon, continually seeking the wind, as it slowly forges its way across the Java Sea from Surabaya or Semarang bound for Makassar or Bali. Although now mostly fitted with auxiliary engines these historical sailing craft still use the wind for the bulk of their sea passage. These craft ooze charm and are very practical as they encompass a wide spectrum of sailing vessels from coastal fishing boats to ocean going cargo carriers and passenger ferries. They bear a very close resemblance to the Arab Dhows that trade around the Middle East, East Coast of Africa and across the Indian Ocean. A sight which I am sure fellow mariners of my vintage well recall.

The Pinisi, has its origins in Indonesia. Being mainly built in Makassar located in the Sulawesi Group of Islands in the eastern provinces of Indonesia and is still used widely mostly for inter-island transportation, cargo, or fishing purposes within the Indonesian archipelago.

The fist Pinisi ships are said to have been derived from the Dutch “Pinas” introduced into Indonesia around the 1600s Originally these would likely have been fitted with lateen or other similar types of sail because the modern schooner rig was not widely used before the 19th century. As with other sailing ship types, many have been fitted with marine motors which has caused a slight change in the appearance of these ships, because up until the 1970s most of these craft were totally reliant on wind power. Modern Pinisi tend to have shortened masts, or if not needed for use as deck cranes, then they have been removed altogether, whilst the aft superstructure on deck has been extended in size to accommodate more crew and passengers. Nevertheless, the Pinisi ranging in size between 100 – 500 tons dwt is still a regular sight around the Indonesian archipelago and frequently undertake oceangoing voyages of considerable duration as they are known for their excellent sea handling and sailing qualities,

hence it is still possible to see these traditional ships sailing across open Ocean to catch fish or transport cargo. They remained active in the Java Sea Timber Trade well into the 1990s. I remember seeing convoys of these beautiful craft sailing across the Java Sea (Laut Java) during the 1990s and making a note in my Night Order Book alerting my duty Mates, especially since many did not display the brightest of navigation lights. The traditional home for building these vessels remains South Sulawesi (Makassar area).

A Pinisi under full sail

Nowadays, although still used for sea trade, many Pinisi are engaged in the Tourist industry and offer voyages to adventurous tourists around the Indonesian Islands. This is now becoming a very popular holiday venue, especially with those interested in scuba diving holidays.

Lined up Pinisi at a wharf in Surabaya, in the process of loading cargo ca 1980-5.

The traditional Trade Routes across the Laut Java from Surabaya and Semarang were mainly into the "Coral Triangle", bordered by Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the 1600-1700s this was the center of the Islamic world in South East Asia and became the crossroads of trade between the Java, Bali, Flores, and Banda Seas. Trade was mainly confined to Spices, Tobacco, grains, groceries, and assorted foodstuffs from the more industrialized Java region to the more remote parts of the Indonesian Archipelago then usually returning to Java with cargoes of Timber from Kalimantan. The trade was controlled mainly by Sea Gypsies and Island Tramps, but also some ethnic Chinese Indonesian groups.

"Sea Gypsies" were semi-nomadic Austronesian boat peoples who originated in the Mergui Archipelago located in the Andaman Sea, which consisted of a group of some 800 islands. The other main group was the "Bajo" of eastern Indonesia which derived from the Sama-Bajau, who were widely scattered throughout and indigenous to Southeast Asia.

The Sama-Bajau were arguably the most prolific and widely dispersed group throughout Southeast Asia. These peoples became interspersed throughout an area stretching from Eastern Palawan, coastal Mindanao, throughout the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines to the Northern and Eastern Kalimantan, southwards through the Straits of Makassar to Sulawesi and generally widely scattered throughout Eastern Indonesia. In short, they became known as the "Sea Gypsies". For those living in regions of Mergui Peninsula, between May and October when the Southwest Monsoon was blowing, with strong winds and heavy seas, they traditionally built stilted shacks above the water, on the sheltered side of their islands. In fact there are still many such "Stilted Villages" that can be seen even nowadays, dispersed widely across their traditional homelands of Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia.

The Traditional method of building a Penisi in Makassar. In Singapore they are known simply as

"Makassar Traders"

These craft usually engage a crew of 7-8 men, who act as both deck hands and stevedores for the cargo. Generally, other than the Captain, they all sleep on the deck in a large multi-purpose cabin. The original method of steering was by using double quarter rudders, but this may have been modified if fitted with a marine diesel engine. With the right sea and wind conditions they can reach a speed of 9-10 knots when under sail.

Because of their speed and excellent handling characteristics they were the choice vessel of Pirates that infested the region in times long past. Nowadays, Pirates use fast, high powered craft which are equipped with all the most modern navigation aids and communication equipment. Unfortunately, they remain a dangerous menace especially in the Celebes Sea and Mindanao - Zamboanga areas. Right the way down to the notorious Jolo Island, Sandakan, and Tawau on the East coast of Sabah. In fact I have personally seen the Pirate's dwellings on Jolo Island as I sailed past – Stilted Shacks on the beach or over shallow water. Reminiscent of their ancestral "Sea Gypsies" homes, except they are all equipped with tall radio antennas (I wonder why?).

I sadly miss those warm, calm, balmy days and evenings when transiting the Java Sea, deep in thought sitting out on deck with the quiet hissing of the sea flowing down the ship's side as we forge ahead, the heavens above, the masses of stars and planets in crystal clear skies, looking so close that one was tempted to reach out to capture them. Of course, not forgetting the GT, close to hand.

End

Notorious Reefs of the South China Seas

What do Scarborough, Lincoln, Macclesfield, and Bombay all have in Common?

Mariners may deliberate over what all these names have in common. Well, they are all notorious reefs, shoals or islands in the South China Sea that cast an arc of danger to the unwary navigator, and which over centuries have taken their toll of both ship and sailor. Perhaps it is not common knowledge to many but, in certain parts of the South China Sea it is a vast beehive of dangerous ground, strewn with reefs, shoals and atolls, which can quickly prove to be the undoing of any inattentive mariner, proven over the centuries by the tangible proof of countless shipwrecks scattered throughout the area. None of this is made any easier for mariners by the frequent Typhoons and Super Typhoons that regularly rip through, especially during the summer months. In short, the South China Sea has gained notoriety for the dangers it can create for ships.

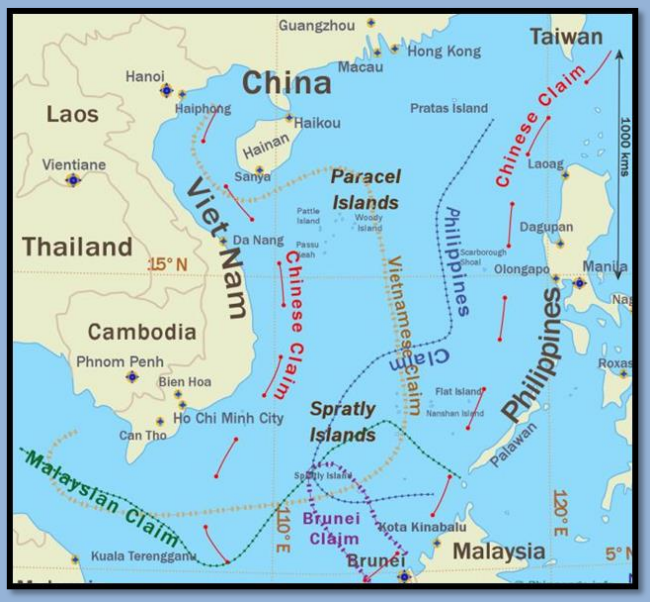
The current day disputes in the South China Sea over "Who Owns What" have changed the geography of this area, due mainly to the expansionistic moves of China in claiming sovereignty over almost everything in the region. This includes the militarization of many of these islands and shoals with the inclusion of numerous man-made islands. Several of these Islands and shoals now have aircraft runways and military installations, all of which raises fears of "Freedom of Navigation" and the fundemental cause of on-going conflicts between several Asian nations. This has, to some degree, forced changes to some traditional shipping routes

However, this short narrative focuses on the notoriety of only some of the better known of these dangers to navigation and just some of the casualties they caused in more recent years, particularly 1950-60s which was an era of many shipping casualties, caused in part by the advent of Asian shipping entrepreneurs and the exponential expansion of their fleets, many manned with inexperienced crews

There are two main Groups of Islands and atolls in the South China Sea, namely, The Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands. The "Paracel Group", is located in the Northern sector, whilst the Spratly Group are in the Southeast, more towards the Philippine Islands, both groups bear the skeletons of many ships having come to grief on their rocky outcrops, reefs and atolls.

Another prominent and hazardous feature of the region is that of Pratas Island (Dongsha) located about 170 nautical miles more or less south of Hong Kong. This small Group consist of one Island, two coral reefs and 2 shoals, and falls under the sovereignty and administration of Taiwan (Republic of China), although claimed by the PRC. Approximately 40 nautical miles to the westward of the Pratas Atoll, lie the adjacent North and South Vereker Banks, close to which are located a number of Oil wells and platforms.

The Pratas Atoll claimed a prominent casualty when the US. Destroyer "Frank Knox" grounded on the reef in 1965. Following a difficult salvage operation, the ship was refloated and taken to Japan for extensive repairs, returning to fleet service in 1966, and Vietnam War deployment.



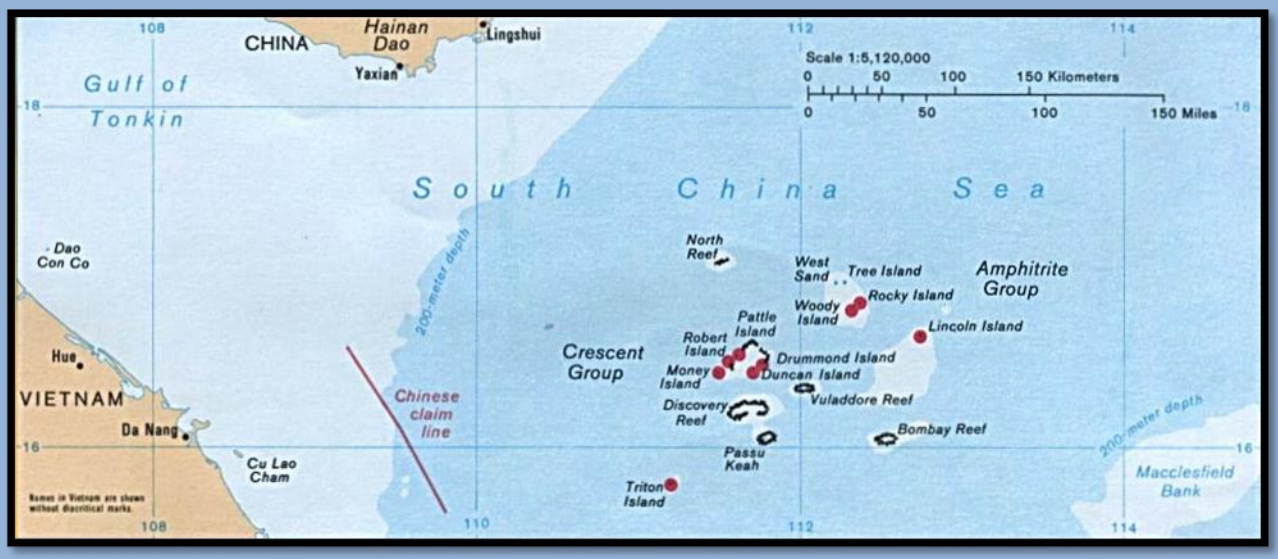
Pratas Island has no permanent residents, although there are a few facilities for fishermen and official visitors undertaking research. A small airbase and runway is located towards the Northern end of the island, which is used solely for military purposes. There are no lighthouses or navigation beacons of any significance on the Island or surrounding hazards. This Atoll must be given due respect as it lies very close to the major shipping routes to Hong Kong, Taiwan Straits, Japan, Philippines and various major Ports in China as well as the Northwestern Pacific.

Map of South China Sea showing location of the Pratas, Paracel and Spratly Groups including the boundaries of disputed sovereignty between respective Asian nations. All known as “Dangerous Ground”

The Paracel Group of Islands (Xisha) is an archipelago consisting of about 130 small islands, islets and coral reefs. The archipelago is located about equidistant from the coastlines of Vietnam and the PRC (Peoples Republic of China) and half the way between Hainan Island and the Northern Philippines. The Crescent Group of islands lie to the west, whilst the Amphitrite Islands lie to the eastern end of the archipelago. Hence it lies right in the middle of a direct shipping route between the Singapore and Taiwan Straits. The widely spread islands and shoals pose a significant hazard to navigation. Within the archipelago is located the deepest sink hole on the planet, the “Dragon Hole”

A well-known danger is Bombay Reef (Pengbojiao), which is considered to be the most southerly and notorious reef within the Paracel Group. This has claimed many an unwary mariner over past centuries. Bombay Reef is the site of various shipwrecks, many still visible to the eye over a considerable distance or on the radar of passing ships. A lighthouse was built by the French in 1980 and is located at the southwest end of the reef. The Paracel Islands are administered by the PRC and patrolled by Chinese Border officials.

Lincoln Island is low lying, 1.3 miles long, and situated towards the east of the Island Group and is significant because it is one of the few remote Islands where Fresh Water may be found and therefore frequented by fishing boats. A well was dug by fishermen seeking fresh water and continues to collect water. There is a reasonable anchorage with 10m of water which affords good lea during the North East Monsoon period. It is reported that in the south west sector there is a rocky spit extending some 11 miles offshore. These Island Groups are mainly used as fishing grounds or as strong points by the PRC military. Commercial ships give these islands a wide berth. A special lookout is kept by passing ships for Pyramid Rock which has an elevation of about 17 feet and is about 7.5 miles southwest of Lincoln Island.



The Paracel Islands positioned more or less right on the direct shipping route.

Discovery Reef is the largest single reef in the Crescent Group of the Paracels, being like a horseshoe in its structure. It spans 17 miles tip to tip, East to West and 4 miles North to South. There are two deep openings into a central lagoon on its South side. The reef is generally always submerged and creates a significant hazard to shipping. The notorious “Dragon Hole” lies 17 miles to the southward.

Macclesfield Banks (Zhongsha) is a submerged group of atolls, reefs and shoals that lies to the east of the Paracel Islands, southwest of the Pratas Islands and north of the Spratly Islands. These treacherous waters extend over a distance of 80 miles (running southwest – northeast), and have a width of some 43 miles at their widest point. Consequently, it is one of the largest areas of shoal water in the world. Macclesfield Banks were named after HMS Macclesfield which ran aground on the shoal in 1804

Scarborough Shoal, which is triangular with a perimeter of about 29 miles, is situated about 123 miles west of Subic Bay is part of the disputed area of the South China Sea between the Philippines and China. Originally administered by the Philippines, the 2012 stand-off between the Philippines and China resulted in China unilaterally assuming administration over the Island, ultimately claiming sovereignty and positioning Naval ships to the area. This claim by China was rejected by the International Court of Arbitration Tribunal but ignored by China. Taiwan also claims jurisdiction over the Shoal and is party to the dispute. The area is a rich fishing ground frequented by Filipino fishermen and offers limited shelter for fishing boats in bad weather. It most definitely warrants a hazard to commercial shipping transiting adjacent seas.

The Spratly Islands are in the southern sector of the South China Sea and hotly disputed as to sovereignty, mainly because of their abundant fishing grounds and potential Oil and Gas deposits. It forms one of the major archipelagos in the South China Sea and is close to strategic shipping lanes in the region. China claims overall sovereignty, but this is disputed by both Taiwan and Japan with a partial claim from Malaysia and the Philippines. They have a notorious reputation when it comes to shipwrecks. The actual Spratly Island is located to the southwest of Dangerous Grounds in the western sector of the Spratly Islands. Ladd Island lies to the west and London Reefs to the east. By definition, Dangerous Grounds, refers to a large section of the Southeastern part of the South China Sea, which encompasses

the northeastern part of the Spratly Islands and typically, it consists of many low laying islands and cays, submerged reefs and breaking reefs, rising steeply from the ocean depths. The numerous islands are uninhabited by and large except my military contingents from Malaysia, Taiwan, PRC, Philippines, and Vietnam.

Spratly Island is triangular in shape and relatively small. It is under Vietnamese administrators that have upgraded facilities in recent years, including the establishment of an airstrip which is quite short and can only accommodate small Vietnamese costal surveillance aircraft.

Investigator Shoal (not to be confused with North Investigator Shoal) is a coral atoll in the eastern part of the Spratlys about 140 miles southwest of the Philippine Island of Palawan and about 130 miles northwest of Malaysian Sabah on the Island of Borneo (ex-British North Borneo). It forms part of a cluster of reefs, including Erica Reef 22 miles to the west and Commodore Reef 26 miles to the northeast. Investigator Shoal – This reef claimed an old friend the “MV Thanes Breeze” which grounded in 1969 and was declared a CTL.

In keeping with its expansionistic claims over the Islands of the South China Sea, the PRC has constructed various lighthouses on many of the Island it has occupied, far too many to gazette in this short essay. Similarly, what were once deserted islets or atolls have now been developed into mini-harbors or military installation by the Chinese in the quest for what appears overall sovereignty of the South China Sea

The Destroyer, USS Frank Knox, photographed hard aground on Pratas Reef, in July 1965.

Following a difficult salvage operation, spanning some 6 weeks, the vessel was eventually refloated and taken to Japan for drydocking and extensive repairs, upon completion of which she returned to the US fleet.

MV. Thames Breeze photographed at happier times. She stranded on Investigator Shoal in December 1969 whilst on a voyage from Shanghai to Ceylon. She was eventually declared a CTL.

The “Ripley” which eventually became “Thames Breeze” when sold to Far East interests. There is no disguising her origins as a classic British built tramp ship. A sad ending for a vessel which had such refined lines.

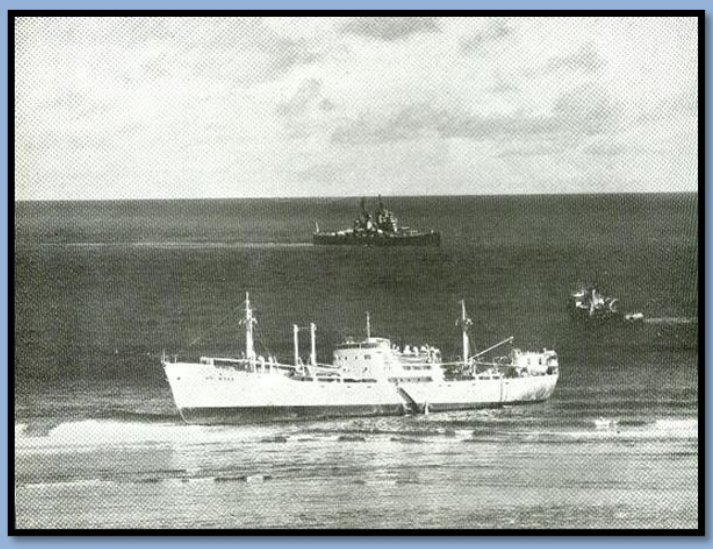
The Philippines “Gregorio del Pilar” aground in the Spratly Islands on Half Moon Reef, which lies about 68 miles from the southern point of Palawan Island and south of the disputed Thomas Shoals.

Another of the most controversial and hotly disputed areas in the Spratly Group is the Second Thomas Shoal which is another submerged reef. During 1999 the Philippines Government authorized the deliberate grounding of their aging Tank Landing Craft “Sierra Madre” to create an outpost and Filipino presence on the reef, in support of their claim of sovereignty. A small military contingent is stationed on the dilapidated ship.

A satellite image of the “Sierra Madre” showing it firmly stranded on the Second Thomas Shoal. The image was taken Ca 2015.

Another view of the “Sierra Madre” aground on the Second Thomas Shoal – not going anywhere in a hurry!

October 6th, 1958 the Norwegian cargo passenger ship “MV. Hoi Wong”, whilst on passage from Swatow to Singapore carrying 130 deck passengers, ran aground on the northeast side of Bombay Reef. The ship stranded in rough seas which made the evacuation of passengers impossible. The USS Helena, a cruiser, came to her aid and airlifted all 130 passengers to safety using her helicopter. The USS Helena then proceeded to Hong Kong where the passengers were safely landed.



The “MV Hoi Wong” pictured well and truly stranded on Bombay Shoal in the Paracel Islands. The USS Helena can be seen in the Background together with the iconic Hong Kong Salvage Tug, “Taikoo” in attendance.

This is only a snippet of the groundings and stranding in the “Dangerous Grounds” of the South China Sea, but as is obvious, it is where accurate navigation is absolutely essential when transiting these dangerous waters, to avoid the dangers that cannot always be seen and lurk just below the surface.

End