

# **HOMeward BOUND** **MARCH 2017**

## **THE EXPERIENCES OF A CATERER WITH ELDER DEMPSTER LINES**

**JOHN MARTIN**

**SUBMISSION: My time with Elder Dempster becoming part of Ocean Fleets - 1966 to 1974.**

### **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLE OF A MARINE CATERER**

It may seem obvious, but people who work or travel on ships need to eat and be accommodated. The role of Catering Officer was to ensure that food did not run out, that it was nutritional enough to maintain health and was served in an appetising way. They also made sure that the company's interests were also maintained in that wastage was kept to a minimum for the sake of economy. Being responsible for all aspects of 'Hotel Services' on board they also supervised cooks and stewards who served meals, looked after cabins and maintained cleanliness of the living areas of the ship. They were in charge of the bonded stores, mainly for the sale of liquor, tobacco products and beer.....or so it was in my time with the Merchant Marine. In the modern day, alcohol on board is mainly a thing of the past – apart from passenger shipping.

### **JOINING ELDER DEMPSTER LINES LIMITED**

Colour Blindness was the cause of my career direction. In my early teens I decided I wanted to go to sea. Mainly as a result of looking out over Cardigan Bay from the family holiday home, helping on the ferry and day trip boats around the Mawddach Estuary and feeling a sense of excitement of being on water. I was at boarding school but tried to convince my parents that I would like to go to HMS Conway at Plas Newydd on Anglesey. This was regularly advertised in the Meccano Magazine as a school for those who were hoping to choose a seafaring career. Pictures of boys in naval uniform, doing practical boat work and sailing fostered my enthusiasm. My aspiration was to be a deck officer in the Merchant Navy.

My parents found out that colour perception was a pre-requisite to be a navigating officer. They had their suspicions as to my competence in this area. I was tested and found that I was quite badly colour blind. I did not understand why it should affect my choice of career, but the optician explained that it was probable I would not see a red light at distance and green may appear white which he proved to me. I had practical experience of this a few years later. I was helming alone at night on a yacht returning from a school trip to France and the Channel Islands. The skipper came on deck to check me. A rather panicked "all hands on deck" – "go about for heaven's sake" rather confused me. It appears what I had thought were two ships at a distance was a tanker drifting in the middle of the English Channel through the middle of which I was trying to steer. The steaming lights I saw as apart, but not the portside or NUC lights. At least that was what I was told!

As I was, and still am, not mechanically inclined and Radio Officers also needed good colour perception it looked like my hopes of going to sea using my expected GCE's was a non-starter.

My father was Managing Director of a factory in the hosiery trade in Leicester. I think he had hoped I would join the family business as I did spend some time during school holidays and after leaving school working in parts of the factory and distributing and collecting from outworkers as well as meeting with suppliers. However, a life in an office did not appeal. He always respected that decision, as long as I pursued something that would engage me. There was no previous experience of seafaring in the family.

Looking at various other career options that could be of interest to me and after experience in a country house restaurant as a waiter, barman and commis chef, I prepared to enrol in an OND Hotel Management course when I heard on Radio 4 about the opening of a new dedicated college in Liverpool for Nautical Catering. Now that sounded a possibility. They must eat at sea!

On enquiry with the British Shipping Federation they advised that there were two companies that offered cadetships in catering; P&O and Elder Dempster Lines. I chose to try Liverpool. After an interview in March 1966 I was selected to start in September that year and was sent a kit list of uniform requirements for this role. Not only a doeskin double-breasted jacket and trousers, peaked cap, tropical shirts and shorts, white hose, white shoes, No.10's, mess jackets but chef's whites, checks and toques as well. This was at our expense.

As my uniform was bought in London, I found on arrival in Liverpool that the cadet lapel flash was wrong and the brass buttons were not company proscribed. A quick visit to Bakers sorted out the zig-zig lapel flash and the ED (African Royal Mail) buttons for all the uniforms and shoulder boards. The zig-zag braid was the traditional Merchant Navy insignia for officers of the stewards department.

## INDENTURED



For the princely sum of £26 per month in the first year rising to £36 in the third year, the company was willing to train me to a level where I could take on the responsibilities of a Second Steward and acting Catering Officer on standbys and Home Trade (Coasting) voyages. Thereafter, given that we were considered reasonably competent we could aspire to a Catering Officer for Foreign voyages. This title was reasonably new. Traditionally the person looking after accommodation and catering services was known as the Chief Steward. That title tended to stick.

The Catering Cadet scheme was instigated by the then company Catering Superintendent Claude Boswell, I believe in 1964. I understand he had been recruited from BOAC.

Traditionally, Chief Stewards came from elevation from 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward who started their seagoing, usually as a boy steward then ship's steward without any formal catering qualifications apart from their pre-sea course. It seemed rare that Chief Cooks became Chief Stewards. A British merchant ship was required to have a certificated Chief Cook on board. Not all Chief Cooks, especially non British, were so certified. The Department of Transport made a recommendation that all Chief Stewards/Catering Officers held a Ship's Cook Certificate.

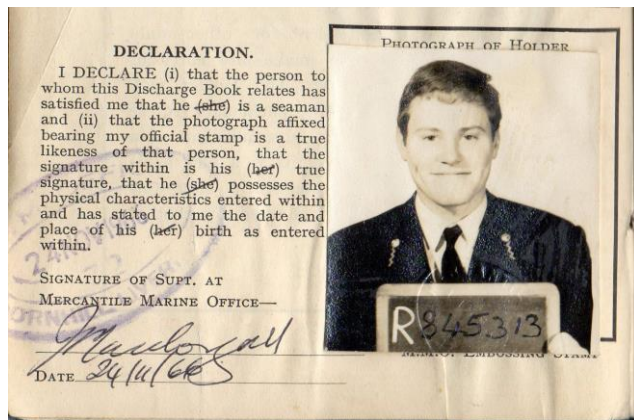
As Elder Dempster stewards and cooks on the cargo ships were all African, the pool from which potential Chief Stewards could be drawn was limited. This at a time when the role was the requisite of a British or Irish national. The positions of Cadet Catering Officer, which is what we were formally known, and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Catering Officers seems to have been unique in the British Merchant Navy. We were nicknamed Bozzies Boys, after the founder of the scheme, although he had left the company by the time I joined to go onto a senior position with a national gastro-pub start-up.

P&O's scheme was for Cadet Purser (Catering). In a later life I was a Snr. Purser/Catering Officer with their Bulk Shipping Division, before coming ashore with P & O Cruises as a Training Officer to Training Manager and, in yet in another life, as an Assistant Purser (Catering)/ Purser on P&O North Sea Ferries. On the cruise ships and ferries the route to Purser in P&O (or known as Hotel Manager in some other cruise and ferry companies) could be via Administration or Catering.

Over the three year period, Elder Dempster would help us gain our trade qualifications in cookery and food & beverage service with supervisory and administration training to OND standard. Some cadets who had already obtained catering qualifications were streamlined to a two year apprenticeship. It was known as a sandwich course in that time at college was mixed with practical experience on the ships in block periods. The two year cadets spent less time at college.

Three of us reported to River House on Riversdale Road, Aigburth in September 1966 where we were to be accommodated in single berth 'cabins' during our shore training, travelling daily to the Liverpool Nautical Catering College in Canning Place. We were expected to wear our 'college uniform' of blazers with the ED badge on the pocket and ED ties, white shirts and grey trousers. Two of us were indentured for three years and one for two. The college had the usual practical kitchens, bakery and public restaurant in which most other courses were six-week Ships Cooks, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Cook and Bakers, advanced patisserie and advanced cookery as well ships stewards to the level of working on passenger ships. There were some Chief Stewards from other companies or on 'the pool' who were doing a crash 12 week course to get their Cooks' certificates. Our course was to the level of City & Guilds and therefore of a longer duration and supposedly over a two year period, the third on a more practical basis as acting 2<sup>nd</sup>. Stewards under the supervision of an experienced Catering Officer.

Initially, Monday mornings were at a secretarial college in Childwall to learn touch-typing. As we sat at the back of the class of young ladies, we cheated trying to impress and I never became proficient. In our second year, Mondays were spent sailing on West Kirby boating lake. I liked this element of the course, though was not sure what it contributed to our qualifications. The college had a gym and every other Friday afternoon was spent playing badminton, trampolining and even going out to play golf in the summer! The other Fridays we were required to report to the Prince's Landing Stage by the Pier Head, in uniform, to help with embarkation, baggage loading and distribution on the mail boats.



In November we were duly registered as seamen at the Cornhill Merchant Marine Office.

### THE MAIL BOATS

Until the latter part of 1967 a mail boat would sail from Liverpool to Lagos every other Friday. Each ship would undertake a complete round voyage in six weeks. 13 days to Lagos via Las Palmas, Bathurst, Freetown, Monrovia and Tema. A 5 day turn-round at Apapa wharves and 13 days back, calling at Takoradi instead of Tema. Back in Liverpool there was a ten day turn-round – before the next trip. Because of their regular schedules the company was contracted to carry Royal and Colonial Mail to West Africa.

The APAPA and ACCRA were sister ships that had accommodation for 245 First Class and 24 Third Class Passengers. The latter in six four-berth cabins. The AUREOL could carry 269 First Class passengers and 76 in Cabin Class. The latter was far more comfortable than the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Class in the other ships who only had a covered promenade as their public space while Cabin Class, an area aft of No.3 hatch, had their own lounge, library, bar and smoke room. I never did find out why it just wasn't called 2<sup>nd</sup>. Class. It was rare that expatriates travelled 3<sup>rd</sup>. Class but nuns and Salvation Army officers were regular users of Cabin Class. Nigerian traders used to fly to the UK then take advantage of the generous baggage allowances for the return journey. A lot of the baggage that went into the baggage storeroom sailing from Liverpool during this period really should have been in the holds!

During the Liverpool turn-rounds the ships were used for conventions, conferences and seminars, not all being Elder Dempster business. Sometimes they could be three day events. We did a dinner for judges. ED pensioners had their reunion lunches on board. When in Liverpool, the Catering Cadets were 'on hand' to assist with these functions, usually coming straight from college. Notably, in February 1967 the Daily Mirror hosted a 'Salute to Liverpool' when the AUREOL was turned round so that dignitaries would not see her 'backside' when viewed from the dock road. Those dignitaries included Prime Minister Harold Wilson who said the AUREOL was the first ship he had visited since being on HMS Tiger in negotiations with Ian Smith after Rhodesia had declared UDI. Other notable guests were Brian Epstein, Gerry Marsden of the Pacemakers and Sir Bill Shankly.

\* I don't have a copy of the programme, but believing this to be a milestone event in my career, especially as I was the Prime Ministers 'escort' for the use of a cabin to change, I copied it into a diary and will attach separately. I was quite struck with Lynda Baron as a singer, being part of the cabaret, although she is better known as an actress. (Think Nurse Gladys Emmanuel in 'Open All Hours') She sung the theme tune to BBC's Political Satire show 'Not so Much a Programme, More a Way of Life' (1964 – 65) and was resident singer to the subsequent Robert Robinson's 'BBC3' (1965 – 66), both successors to the popular 'That Was The Week That Was (TW3)' 1962 – 63.

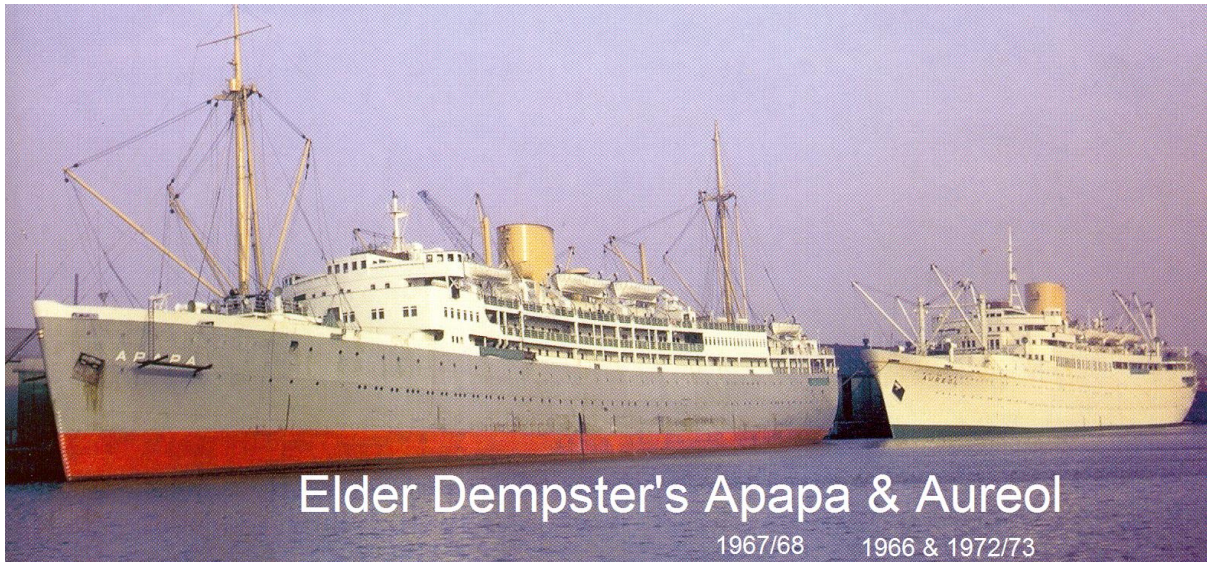
### **FIRST TRIP**

My first seagoing trip was in January 1967 on the AUREOL (Voyage 132), just prior to the Salute to Liverpool event. Two of us Catering Cadets shared a two berth cabin, one of two identified as the Half Deck. We were made familiar with the various sections of the catering department. My first familiarisation was with the storekeepers. As the stores were low down in the ship with no natural light this made for an uncomfortable working environment on a first trip and there were a number of rushes up to find fresh air and a lean over the taffrail. On the third day out I felt much better. I have rarely suffered sea-sickness since. The Chief Catering Officer made us learn the Board of Trade Mercantile Marine Victualling Scales. i.e. how much food a seaman was entitled to per week. The five and a half eggs included those that were used in cakes and puddings! As this was constituted by law, nobody could officially complain if they could only have an egg for breakfast 3 times a week. While I was with ED's all the victualling records which had to be signed off weekly by the Master were by consumption, rather than cost. Thankfully, the company were more generous in their allowances.

Our only view Africa was from the ship and quaysides until we arrived in Lagos. My colleague and I ventured out beyond the Apapa dock gates one afternoon with a deck cadet and a junior engineer and tried a local bar and Star (most common Nigerian beer). Being the only white people around at that time we were constantly accosted by ladies asking if we wanted "jig-jig" or others asking "what you got for me?" It became quite wearing but thankfully not too intimidating. It was not worth repeating the experience. Many of the regular European crew and officers had developed contacts within the expatriate community and were invited out to meals or to the mainly expatriate Apapa club. There was a Seaman's Mission on the Apapa side and there were hotels and restaurants in central Lagos across the harbour. I was lucky. A contact had already been made for me.

After this trip we went back to college but our on-board practical training was brought forward after a month as the college had not submitted the applications to take our first set of exams, due in May.

I spent the rest of the year sailing five trips on the APAPA while my compatriot served on the ACCRA. Six had been planned but dock strikes disrupted that arrangement.



*The Apapa and Aureol in Brocklebank Dock believed to be during the 1966 Seaman's Strike*

### **THE APAPA VOYAGES**

The APAPA's Half Deck was a four berth cabin with which I shared with a Purser Cadet and two Deck Cadets. I spent each voyage in a particular department, sometimes just outward and then another homeward. The restaurant; on tables and serving drinks and wine. The galley; on the stoves, on the service counter, in the bakers shop, the butchers shop and cold larder. The storerooms including the bond; the public rooms, either 'pushing a tray' in the Smoke Room or serving at the various cocktail parties; with the Linen Keeper /Laundry Master who made sure not only bedding but table linen was available in a good condition. A major emphasis was on bookwork; bar accounts, inventories, repair lists, average books, stock records, overtime sheets, customs declarations and reports.

When not on food preparation activities we were expected to be part of the Captain's inspection rounds, most days at 11am prompt outside the Purser's Bureau. The turn-rounds in Lagos were quite relaxed, just working in mornings on either bookwork or helping with linen for cabin servicing or burnishing silver, unless we were required for a function on board, usually requested by Elder Dempster Agencies or the British High Commission.

On arrival back in Liverpool we were involved in the silver 'count'. All salvers, serving dishes, cutlery, etc. was silver plate. At the beginning of the trip stewards would draw a box of cutlery and table centres from the silver-men, who were restaurant stewards with this side job, and sign for it. They were expected to return it without items missing and there was the facility to padlock the boxes. I slept with mine when 'running' tables. Anything that was missing from this huge inventory was searched for – down to the last teaspoon! As the silver was stamped with the Elder Dempster hallmarks, as with everything else, it was very collectable – thus the level of control on it. (Examples can be seen at <http://www.elderdempster.org/photos/ed-ph83.htm> of teaspoons salvaged from ACCRA when at the breakers in Cartagena) Even each sheet of toilet paper had ELDER DEMPSTER LINES printed on it.

Once this task was completed to the satisfaction of the 'bean counters' from the office we were allowed to take leave until the preparation for the next voyage. We could be back in a week for functions and then storing. Storing duties was mainly tallying and 'watching' when bonded stores were being loaded. Draught lager was brought by tanker and pumped into tanks on board the ship. Otherwise one just helped push the stores along the collapsible rollers to their various destinations.

### VOYAGE 165. April-May 1967

After sailing, the port engine had problems and we had to return to Liverpool. We eventually sailed on the Monday evening having watched the ACCRA arrive into NE Brocklebank Dock and berth behind us. The Lagos turn-round was reduced to 3 days and we arrived back in Liverpool 2 days behind with an 8 day turn-round to maintain the mail boat schedules. During the voyage we seem to have had a beer crisis. Possibly with the extra days. On the second day of the return journey we only had 1½ tanks of draught beer left that would not have seen us back to Liverpool. We were starting to use the keg beer that was for the crew bar in the Lido Bar and the crew were restricted to canned beer. We picked up canned Heineken in Freetown that the ACCRA had left us on its outward passage. After the Captain's inspection two days later of the galley, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Class and crew quarters, the crew were restricted to 6 cans of beer per day! The crew who took advantage of 'The Pig'\* were mainly the white deck crew, white stewards— mainly public room (and stewardesses), chef's, butchers and bakers et al. As I had been assigned to work with the bars/stores department, I was involved in a lot heaving stuff around.

\*Crew bars on British passenger ships are traditionally known as 'The Pig & Whistle', but generally known as 'The Pig' for short.

### VOYAGE 166. June-July 1967

On the outward voyage while alongside in Freetown, I was walking through the working alleyway, past the Petty Officers Mess, when a blob of oil popped out over the lip at the bottom of a closed door onto my buckskin white shoes. Having caught my attention it started to ooze out into the alleyway. Baffled by this, I made a speedy run up three decks to the Purser's Bureau where I was confident I might find the Mate passing the time of day with his friend the Purser. Although he looked quizzically at me when I tried to explain what I had seen, but pointing to the offending stain on my shoe, a quick 'phone call to the Chief Engineer had that gentleman flying past on his way down from his office on Boat Deck A to the Main Deck E. Interested to know what this was all about, I went back down to the galley to see a lake of black oil spreading forward up the working alleyway toward the main galley area. Wondering how far this might spread back toward the aft end, I used the alleyway on the port side of the galley through the other catering areas in time to see it pour over into the open hatch of No. 4 Hold where the Purser Cadet was tallying butter being discharged from the refrigerated cargo rooms. We were taking bunkers through the portside filling station, but the starboard filling pipe had not been blanked off from previous bunkering causing the overflow.

### VOYAGE 167. July – August 1967



President Tubman of Liberia travelled from Liverpool to Monrovia. There was chaos with the baggage handling with the amount that the president and his entourage was travelling with. In Bathurst the Gambian Prime Minister came on board to meet the President. In Freetown the ship was greeted with a 21 gun salute and a military parade on the quayside. Sailing was delayed waiting for the President to return from a visit ashore. A chaotic welcome in Monrovia. The military band getting jostled by the crowds and the troops in American style uniforms trying to make an Honour Guard. Another delayed sailing waiting for the Captain to return from lunch ashore with the President.

*President Tubman with a passenger*

This voyage was mainly spent with the Linen Keeper/Laundry Master not only humping clean and soiled laundry, understanding 'issuing' procedures for various groups on board – for passengers and crew but Laundry Accounts, Linen Stocks, Passenger Section and Bedroom Cards. Warnings of ruptured hernias and spontaneous combustion. Casey having experienced both. He was a standby steward on the Empress of Canada in 1953 when it caught fire in Gladstone Dock for its winter re-fit which resulted in it capsizing. It was believed that compacted soiled laundry in bags being stored in cabins while in refit, generated heat and then igniting could have been the cause.

The 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mate let me have a go steering the ship one afternoon before Las Palmas. A telephone call from the Lido Bar asked who was at the helm. It was the Captain saying that I was managing to empty the swimming pool with my zig-zagging as I kept overcompensating from the compass course. Not as easy as it looks.

The return voyage was spent 'topside' working in the public rooms. This covered service on the decks, Lounge, Library, Card room and Smokeroom. Apart from bar service and cocktail parties there was also afternoon tea service as well as 'Beef Tea' and Ice Creams on deck. Although Pink Gins, Gin & Tonics and Brandy Gingers were popular in the Lounge and Card Room, draught beer was the most common tippie in the Smoke Room. This was served in barrel tumblers. I returned some glasses of beer to the Main Bar with the complaint that the passengers had said it tasted salty. Without even blinking, the Chief Barkeeper went to the sink water tap turned it on, tasted it and commented "blasted engineers". When 75 Nigerian crew went on strike on the Accra in 1959 citing racial discrimination between African and European crew, one of their complaints was that beer for the Africans was diluted. A spokesman for the company at that time commented "As regards the allegation that beer is watered down, it's just unthinkable!"

Despite being given the 'out of the way' areas to cover for bar service, I earned £16-3-3d in tips over ten days mainly for serving glasses of beer at 1/- (5p) each. That was over half a month's pay!

#### VOYAGE 168. August – September 1967

Sailing postponed by a day due to a strike by Igbo crew who did not want to sail having had news of genocide activities against them in Lagos. The Nigerian Civil (Biafran) War had started in July. The company allowed those who did not want to sail to be paid off, though there were some who were more optimistic and remained. Due to a shortage of Saloon Stewards (Waiters), I was detailed to run a section of 2 x 6 tables. With passenger seating arrangements finalised on sailing, and stewards brought through from Cabin Class, I was transferred to wine and bar service and supervising the starboard half of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Class Dining Saloon (120 Pax.) with the Head Steward looking after the portside. Apart from the three main meals of the day I looked after the children's tea which was held earlier than Dinner.

Arriving in Lagos and before the ship could 'clear', the army came on board and assembled all the Africans on board, passengers and crew in the Dining Saloon. They started to segregate them with an officer identifying nationality and Nigerian tribal affiliations – even by cheek scarring. Our Master-at-Arms was recruited to help. The Master-at-Arms was a Nigerian who travelled between Lagos and Freetown and return, overseeing the deck passengers who we picked up along the coast from Freetown – and those travelling back from Lagos. In effect he was the security officer ensuring these passengers had bonafide tickets and they didn't stray into other passenger areas of the ship. The passengers themselves 'lived' under canvas awnings rigged from the derricks of No.'s 5 & 6 hatches with a galley and ablutions in the mast house.

Despite the efforts of Captain Hutchinson insisting the crew were under his protection, claiming the authority of the British Flag, those identified as Igbo's, the last being the Master-at-Arms himself, were taken off the ship under armed escort. The last we saw of them was being taken round back of the sheds. Gunfire was heard. Bodies were seen floating in the lagoon on an outgoing tide.

**The Biafran Civil War.** Recognised as from 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970.

Nnandi Azikwe, the national Governor General appointed at independence in 1960 became President when the Federal Republic was established in 1963. After elections in 1965 the balance of power was held by the Hausa's in the North and Yoruba's in the West. Due to perceived irregularities and corruption in the election process and provocations against Igbo's in Northern Nigeria, Igbo soldiers led a bloody coup but failed to form an administration. Acting President Orizu (in Azikwe's absence) handed over government control to the Federal Army under the command of Major-General Uguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo. There was a counter-coup against this authority mainly led by northern officers in 1966 in which Ironsi was assassinated. Igbo's in the North started suffering persecution, many fleeing to the East. The conflict resulted from political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions and Igbo people felt they could no longer co-exist with the Northern dominated military administration. Oil production in the Niger Delta played a vital strategic role.

Igbo leaders declared Biafra an independent state from Nigeria in the South East. The Federal Military Government countered by surrounding Biafra, capturing coastal oil facilities and the ports of Port Harcourt, Calabar and the oil terminal of Bonny Island, enforcing a blockade that led to a severe famine. Biafra conceded defeat having been starved into submission despite being supported by France, Portugal, Spain and South Africa, amongst other African countries, and were helped with mercenaries from these countries.

Theoretically there was curfew in Lagos from July 1967. How this was enforced was not evident. We had reports during the conflict of mercenary flights over Lagos, dropping barrel bombs. Apparently, there were anti-aircraft guns placed on the lagoon sides of Lagos and Victoria Islands. A story told to me was that one such gun managed to put a shell into the side of the ACCRA knocking out a couple of passenger cabins.

Television programmes were regularly interspersed with a fanfare, a picture of Government House and Head of State, Colonel Yakubu Gowon, with a statement "To keep Nigeria one, is a task that must be done." Gowon was not President but headed the military government that came to power through the counter-coup and had not been elected.

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On that return Trip I was placed with the Extra Chef i.e the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Chef who had charge of everything cooked that was served in the Dining Saloons, Officer and Crew Messes. The Third Class Dining Saloon was served from a separate pantry but from basic items that were on the menu for 1<sup>st</sup>. Class.



*The European Galley Crew I worked alongside  
A photo taken on Apapa's final voyage*

In 1960 the ship had the benefit of having air conditioning installed in the passenger accommodation. This did not extend to crew or working areas. Working with ovens, stoves and grills in the middle of a metal floating box in the tropics was warm work. I needed to change my chef's gear – as we still had to wear full cooking regalia – after each meal as I was soaking. Popping salt tablets prevented dehydration. I think I was taken advantage of by being placed on the omelette corner during breakfast and lunch service which involved working with skillets on the stove top throughout the meals.

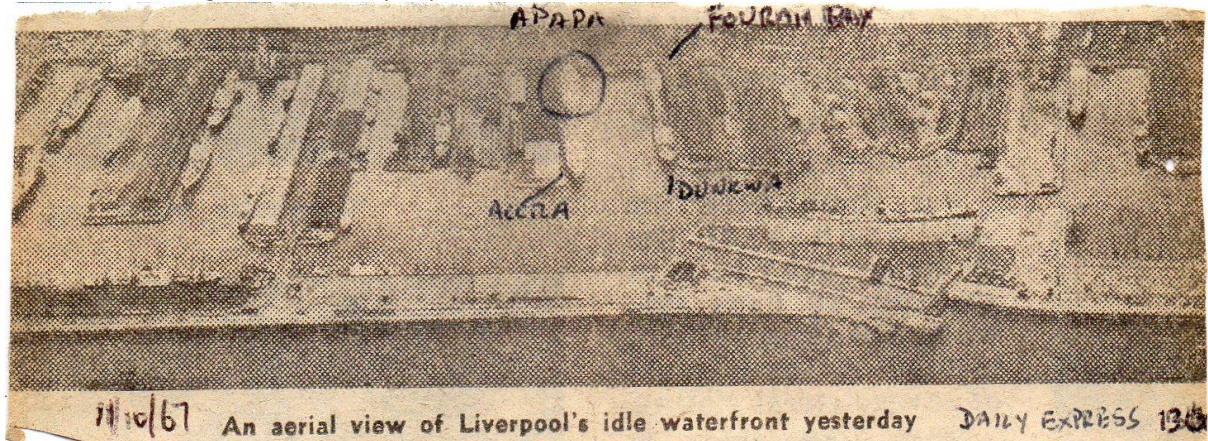
Most of the crew accommodation, messes and catering areas were on E (Main Deck). The best ventilation was opened port holes and when the ship was at sea wind chutes would be used to scoop any cool air generated by the ships forward motion. However when there was a 'running sea' these port holes had to be closed and 'dogged down'.



VOYAGE 169. October – November 1967

A dock strike prevented the scheduled sailing. We remained in Liverpool for another week. Although living on the APAPA, I was usefully employed 'working-by' i.e. temporarily standing in for Catering Officers on other ships held up by the strike. I was also asked to take a couple of stewards and a cook across to Birkenhead to feed the crew involved in shifting the closed down MALLAM (ex SHONGA in Guinea Gulf colours), further up the Mersey to Bromborough.

A cutting from the Daily Express from an article about the national dock strike



Alexandra, Langton, Brocklebank and Canada Docks. This was the end of Accra's service with EDL.



The ACCRA was first to go. She finished her service in October 1967 and her 'run' was taken over by FOURAH BAY.

The company then tried to market both AUREOL and APAPA as a 'cruise with a difference' offering a 30 day "round voyage of 8,000 miles to fascinating, exciting West Africa. You can sail from winter to sunshine and blue tropical skies."

Included was 7 days at the Continental Hotel in Accra or 5 days at the Ikoyi Hotel in Lagos or even taking a flight (for a supplement) to include both, so that they could take advantage of "a thrill of expectation, for here is something new, colourful and exciting; a vast country, filled with warm sunshine, for you to discover"

I am not aware of this being very successful.

After the extra week in Liverpool, we had orders to sail to Amsterdam for loading. MATRU and DONGA had also been diverted there. The ship hosted a large dinner party there for European agents before sailing to Dover to embark passengers for the outward passage.

Outward bound I was assigned to the Bakery, where, apart from baking all the bread on board, including having to hand roll 1,000 bread rolls each day as well as making croissants and Danish Pastries, we made all the hot and cold desserts. I managed to improve my preparation of puff pastry products and was entrusted with making the choux pastry desserts.

I was not popular with the Chef or Chief Baker in Lagos though. The ship hosted a special luncheon party for top people in Lagos including Sir David Hunt, the British High Commissioner. 80 glass ramekins were required for the dessert. I made arrangements for these to be washed by the glass pantry-man and brought to the bakery.

While in Lagos the regular Nigerian crew were able to leave the ship until the morning we were due to sail again. In their place we had temporary relief crew. I saw the relief steward with a tray stacked with the glassware trying to get it through the pantry half-door which was too narrow for the tray to pass through frontwards. I suggested he turn the tray round to which he answered "Sah" and promptly turned it upside down! Thereafter, I have always tried to be as specific as possible when giving instructions. The menus had been printed....but an alternative dessert had to be concocted. I was happy that for the luncheon itself, I was serving wines rather endure the mutterings of those in the galley.



On the return trip it was the turn of the butchers where meat and fish was prepared for cooking. This all came out of the freezers into handling rooms to defrost. We had to know what was on the menu two days in advance for 'the throw-out'. It had to thaw naturally under refrigerated conditions before we could start cutting, trussing, trimming, mincing, portioning, gutting or filleting and pass on to the Extra Chef for cooking.

*In butchers gear. Thankfully, we didn't need to wear straw boaters*

The butchers were also responsible for any animals that travelled. This is because it was they that fed them. I was put in charge of the kennels and cages for that trip. These were in the mast housing between No.'s 1 & 2 hatches. I had a very intelligent African Grey on this trip. When I went to feed and water in the morning it would say "say good morning to the butcher, say good morning to the butcher", this was only after one introduction. Toward the end of the trip I found that he (I believe) had managed to pick the hooked wires that held the cages closed and opened all the others and the parrots had changed cages and then started to cackle with laughter. I had to get the owners to come and identify which was theirs and put them back in the right cages. They were more securely fastened from then on. I found out later it was the mucking out of cages and kennels that landed me with this, what I thought was, a privileged job!



*AUREOL as seen from the APAPA. When the ships were due to pass during the voyage, they 'closed' to be able to salute each other with their horns.*

VOYAGE 177. September – October 1968. HER FINAL VOYAGE



*In the Half Deck - ready for service on a formal night  
This may have been during the weekend Farewell Cruise to the Equator and back from Lagos*

Both my compatriot with whom I started the three year Catering Cadet scheme and I were on APAPA's farewell voyage some ten months after I had last sailed with her. We were needed to supplement the crew as the ship was on reduced manning from Lagos back to Liverpool. We became Dining Saloon Stewards. Back to sleeping with my box of silver cutlery and serving gear. One of my tables was assigned to the Chief Engineer and five guests

As Las Palmas was a Duty Free port with prices that were competitive to ships prices, even to crew, we used to stock up on our favourite tipples to take home – within the customs allowance – of course. As Rum and Coke had become my preferred sup in the tropics, a couple of bottles John Morgan's were brought into the Half Deck. After duties in the evening we thought we would broach our purchases. So enjoying a convivial evening, I did not notice that my colleague was 'enhancing' my glass and was not aware until I tried to sleep. I was violently ill. Nor was I much better in the morning. I managed the early morning 'beer carry' to the bars and the 'scrub-out' of the lounge foyer and down the main staircase to Deck C. One of the Third Mates passed me climbing the stairs as he went aft to raise the ensign and then passed me climbing the same set of stairs on his return. He said I hadn't got very far. In reality I needed a quick visit to the ablutions in between. My passengers were very kind. Looking at me they said I should have just left a note on the table for them to help themselves. Thankfully the Chief did not take breakfast in the Saloon. As it was, when I took the orders, I left them on the service line for a quick exit to the P.O.'s bathroom, wash my hands and mouth out, then back to pick the order up. Not a good example to my African colleagues.

Another pastime in the Half Deck was the 'cockie hunt'. Whenever *Blatellae Germanica* became too troublesome, either by waking us up by exploring our ears as we slept or deciding to hide in our uniform caps, we did a purge. We referred to them as steam-flies, but were in fact German Cockroaches. As we didn't have stewards to regularly spray our cabin – this was left up to us. We sprayed everywhere, especially into the cracks and crevasses. This drove them out of their hiding places and we went round eliminating those that hadn't succumbed to the spraying. The trick was to do it again three weeks later to deal with the hatchlings from the eggs that the females dropped, usually in well-hidden places before they matured enough to reproduce. They reached adolescence very quickly. On one trip we found a Preying Mantiss on deck and decided to adopt him (?). We kept him in a clear ventilated box and fed him on the cockroaches. He seemed to prefer them live so we tried to chase and catch any errant pests who were brave enough to come out of hiding. Best trick was to turn the lights off, wait for a while, turn them back on and catch any that were slow in scurrying back to their hiding places.

Back in Liverpool we were still required to undertake the silver count. In fact everything that had the ED logo on it was counted and was sold with the ship, 'lock, stock and barrel'. I still regret not having the presence of mind to 'acquire' sets of silver for prosperity. Especially when APAPA and AUREOL finished their working lives, their owners at that time sold them off. Only until recently they were selling at \$7.50 an item.

I note from photos that our cap badges changed from Elder Dempster to Ocean Fleets between November 1967 and September 1968 – the time between my last two trips on APAPA.



The ACCRA had gone to a breakers yard in Spain but I came across the APAPA again at Penang and Singapore in 1971 when I was on the Blue Funnel ship ULYSSES. She had been renamed the TAIPOOSHAN, running between Hong Kong and Penang. I was pleased to know that she managed another six years of life.

*TAIPOOSHAN ex APAPA at Penang*  
The ship is flying the Hong Kong colonial Red Ensign but, interestingly, is still registered in Liverpool.

### THE SOCIAL LIFE OF A CADET IN LIVERPOOL

While it is true that a Merchant Navy Officer under training could not afford a mortgage or raise a family, it did not restrict an active social life as a relief from their studies while in Liverpool. As living was 'all found', we were fed and accommodated whether ashore or on board, our annual allowance was free to spend as we liked. With beer at 1/6d (7½p) a pint and petrol at 5/6d (27½p) a gallon (3.8 Litres) this went quite far. We also found that the music hall song popularised during World War 2 'All Nice Girls Love a Sailor' – even apprentices and caterers at that – proved to be true. There were three teacher training colleges for young ladies not far from Riversdale, two within the area of Aigburth itself. I.M.Marsh specialising in PE teachers (nicknamed the PTI), Notre Dame for Roman Catholic Primary School teachers and then Calder College for those specialising in Domestic Science. Additionally, all the hospitals in Liverpool seemed to have residential Nurses Homes for those under training to become 3 year SEN's or 4 year SRN's mixing their learning on the wards as well as the classroom. It seemed quite easy to strike up acquaintances with these fellow students preparing for their respective careers. Invitations to parties and dances, formal or otherwise were regularly forthcoming. The Aigburth Arms (now a Toby Restaurant) was our regular 'watering hole'.



*Invited to a formal dance at I.M. Marsh College.*

*The braid we could wear on the sleeve of our 'blues' mess kit was a half gold/half white zig-zag reflecting the braid on the Catering Cadets shoulder boards (or epaulettes) when wearing tropical uniform and mess kit. I believe introducing an element of white as part of our braid was not universally popular with junior pursers who seemed to believe that white was their distinctive insignia! Every subsequent shipboard position I have held in other companies, white with the gold identified me as a catering or hotel officer.*

The price of petrol may have given a clue as to the ease of making such acquaintances. When at Riversdale for the first two years I had my own transport in the form of a Bedford 15 cwt van that could seat 6 passengers, though we could squeeze quite a few more in, if required. Seat belts were not a legal requirement then, nor were there any fitted. This was popular for transporting fellow cadets to pubs, clubs, sport and socials and for making sure young ladies got returned to their colleges by curfew and even a taxi service for those needing to be taken to Lime Street Station with their baggage. We used it for trips further afield and one Easter I took four Deck Cadet Officers to the Cairngorms for a week's skiing.

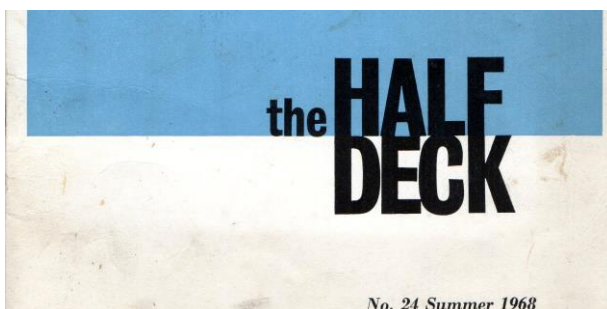


Then there was 'The Mish'; The Mersey Mission to Seamen at Kingston House on the corner of James Street and The Strand, opposite Albion House. On certain nights there was a combo band that played dance music. On such nights hostesses were in attendance. They were nicknamed 'Flying Angels' after the Missions to Seamen logo of an angel flying over water. One of whom I didn't get to meet until 1969 and later became my wife.

*Kingston House  
The Mersey Mission to Seamen*

I played rugby for River House, but when we integrated with Alfred Holt (Blue Funnel) new teams were created when the two adjacent cadet establishments joined together and the team name became Aulis, the name of their building. The sports fields behind us supported football and rugby pitches in the winter months. As a first team we used to travel to places like Wigan, Widnes and Warrington for games mainly against work teams and other colleges, including the police cadets. At an away match where we beat RAF Hawarden, they told us that 10 of the team were county players – for Flintshire! When we hosted home games we entertained in a side room at the 'Aigi', mainly competing in bawdy songs. As I had the privilege to captain a number of these games, it was I the landlord singled out to come and clear up any mess or graffiti resulting in our hospitality.

Then there was sailing for summer. Riversdale College had GP 14's based at Leigh Flash and a small fleet of Hilbre keelboat day-sailors at Tranmere Sailing Club at Birkenhead. With permission we could take these out once the college lecturers responsible were happy with our competence. These were taken to the annual Menai Straits Regatta each summer and I assume the lecturers were happy with my abilities as I was asked – even ahead of my seamen cadet colleagues – to helm both types of boat in the regatta races. However, one year helming a Hilbre from Menai to Beaumaris where I had chosen to short tack against the tidal flow on the island side of the strait, when sailing through moorings I felt, because of the strength of current, I wasn't going to pass ahead of a moored yacht and told the three crew that I was bearing away to go behind. One of the crew was a college lecturer who believed I could luff up enough to pass in front. A moment's indecision is all it takes for disaster to happen. There was not enough way to go about, so I brought the helm hard over to go behind – but too late, the bowsprit managed to punch a hole in the yacht. The startled owner popped up with glass in hand to see what was going on. I left the lecturer on board to sort out the insurance details and had to retire the boat. Sailing up to a mooring near Beaumaris, we found that we were still ahead of most of the main fleet who had been tacking up the strait on the mainland side.



The Half Deck was the magazine for 'Midshipmen and Engineer Cadets training with the Ocean Steamship Company and serving in the ships of the Ocean Group'. I made sure Catering Cadets were not excluded by writing to the editor in this edition making the comparison of training in cargo ships to mail boats. Nearly all items in this edition were ED related. I also get a mention under Rugby in the Sports Results section for 'moaning his way through the mud but with some success and no little momentum obviously enjoying the game'!

## LAGOS

A kind Deck Cadet gave me the contact number of a young lady whom he had met when she had sailed to Lagos on one of the mail boats with her parents. Very generously he had written to her to expect me on my first voyage. Not only did it give me an opportunity to enjoy a social life during the Lagos turn-rounds but also an insight into an expatriate's lifestyle. She was a hairdresser working at a salon in the Leventis store on the Marina, Lagos Island. Leventis was not far from the Elder Dempster Offices and one could either cadge a lift with ED's launch or catch a ferry to cross between Apapa Wharves and the Marina, otherwise it was a drive around to Iddo and then across Carter Bridge onto Lagos Island. Her parents lived in an area on Victoria Island on the south east side of Lagos Island and were quite happy to send their car to come and pick me up or deliver me back to the ship. They often came themselves.

There was still a large expatriate community in and around Lagos helping the Nigerian infrastructure after independence in 1960 and through the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1963, living a colonial type lifestyle. Mr. McCormack was an electrical engineer who had come out to help repair damage to a power station on behalf of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) – a mnemonic that became generally known as Never Expect Power Anytime. The story he relayed to me; cooling systems for the generators required chemical analysis to ensure that these were efficient in pumping running water around these large machines. A Nigerian with a chemist's degree from Cambridge was appointed to replace an expatriate to oversee this programme. This involved drawing water from various points in the system, analysing it and dosing it to prevent calcification. Purely as a cultural expedient, nationals with a senior position are expected to share their influence by offering opportunities to family or clan that could support the importance of their duties. One young man was suitably recruited to collect the water from the various points around the power station to bring to his oga (boss) who duly did the necessary. After eighteen months the generators had started to overheat and pumps were beginning to seize to the point where power was having to be reduced or disrupted. At an enquiry it was found that the said young man had 'savvy' and to save the effort of collecting water at all the various locations, he filled an oil drum with water from which he drew the samples to pass on for analysis whenever required.

As the mail-boats were in Lagos over the weekend and duties were reasonably relaxed I could spend a lot of time with the McCormack's, their friends and especially their attractive daughter. In the afternoons we could go swimming at the Excelsior Hotel, the Ikoyi Club or catch the Mission launch from Apapa wharves to Tarkwa Beach which was on the outside of the West breakwater at the entrance to Lagos Harbour. I would meet the boat that came from the Federal Palace Hotel pier on Victoria Island. I was able to join in on invitations from other expats to meals or restaurants. In the evenings and into the early hours we could eat out and go on to the popular night clubs mainly for expatriates; The Domo, Bagatelle, Tam Tam and Excelsior Hotel amongst others. I was allowed to host them to meals on the ship when the 1<sup>st</sup>. Class Dining Saloon became the officer's mess in Lagos and, along with other officer's guests, to watch the films we showed on board in port. Although at that time it was reasonably safe to move around independently and use taxis, I am sure the McCormack's driver was glad when the ship sailed, having to ferry them and me around nearly every day the ship was in, especially in the early hours of the morning!

My first Chinese meal was in Africa. For the discretion needed in styling his hair, the owner of the Cathay Restaurant had invited his hairdresser and her parents for a private meal and 'the boyfriend' got included. I was introduced to the etiquette involved in eating a Chinese banquet.

The relationship continued after the McCormacks' returned to the UK, driving over from Liverpool to North Yorkshire on occasional weekends and I brought back their talkative African Grey. With the two fellow Cadet Caterers who joined ED's with me, I collected her to take to my weekend 21<sup>st</sup>. birthday celebrations at home. It only ended when she emigrated with her parents to the USA.

## **THE LIFEBOAT COURSE**

My sixth successive trip in 1967 on the APAPA did not come about because I had been booked on a Lifeboat course and the two week delay to the schedule meant I would not be back in time if I had sailed. The theoretical aspect of the course was held in the Mann Island Shipping Federation offices and the practical work in Albert Dock. Others on the course included Canadian Pacific stewardesses. This was the last Lifeboat Course run at Albert Dock, the facilities were being transferred to Trafalgar Dock. We were actually tested on our man-overboard drills while rowing the boat down the Mersey to Trafalgar as it started to snow!

## **WORKING BY**

When not at college full time or actually 'signed on' to a ship, we were available to help out with ships berthed in the Liverpool docks or at the Victualling Dock Office based at Brunswick Dock, which was also the main store for the catering hardware. On the ships, it could be acting as Second Steward, filling in for standby Catering Officers temporarily away or helping with storing.

It was nearly expected that despite stores being received and 'watched' from the quayside by a member of ED's dock victualling office and then slung over in nets onto the deck where it was also 'watched' being sent down the stores chutes, that items would go missing – especially cases of beer. When only 23 kegs of beer arrived into the stores alleyway when there should be 24, the missing one was found down a hatch where the dockers were relieving it of its contents. Regrettably, at that time, Liverpool stevedores had a reputation for 'lifting' anything that may have value - or not. Once I was watching flour being loaded into No. 5 hatch. The winchman, instead of lifting the netted cargo high over the side and across into the hatch let it swoop over the deck when suddenly two pairs of hands shot out of the poop deck accommodation entrance, grabbed a bag, and hauled it back in. I did wonder what they wanted to do with bags of flour.

I once remonstrated with a docker who I found in possession of some of our stores only to be approached by someone to tell me it was not my job to address the dockers. When asked who he was, he said he was the Shop Steward. I explained to him that I was the CHIEF Steward – and it was MY stores that the said person was handling – not cargo. Such confrontations were known to have stopped the ship working, fortunately, on this occasion it did not. Bonded stores were usually safe as they had to be proven to a Customs Officer as having been received to be put under seal. If we were short we immediately reported it and a 'Black Gang' would come and investigate – and usually knew who the culprits were. Their powers of search were greater than the Dock Police.

The ship's menus in Liverpool were criticised as not as good as meals at sea. Unfortunately, we never knew how many people we were going to be feeding. It was rare when company officials, visitors and those in charge of maintenance gangs actually had the courtesy to advise us whether they would be needing meals on board. All they were required to do was sign the Extra Meals Book. The menus had to reflect meals that were flexible to numbers. Even, if advised on the day, the planning and preparation had already been done.

After exams in 1968 I worked by the FOURAH BAY, DEIDO, OWERRI, PATANI, DEGEMA, AUREOL, DUNKWA and ONITSHA without sailing, mainly travelling daily from River House unless there was an appropriate cabin available on board.

On one working-by in 1969 I was tasked to be the Night Chief Steward on the AUREOL during her 10 day turn-round. This was mainly a security role, going round all the catering and public room areas using a Patrol Clock. I was 'Chief' to only one other person; a relief Night Steward & Boots who was the father of the actor Tony Booth, then popular in the TV series 'Til Death do Us Part' and therefore grandfather to a certain future Prime Minister's wife. As this period coincided with the first moon landing – I was able to watch the whole event on TV as it happened during the night.

**AS A CARGO SHIP 2<sup>ND</sup>. STEWARD**

Although I had 'worked-by' cargo ships in Liverpool, the first cargo ship I was to sail in was the FORCADOS, acting as 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward, having completed my basic trade qualifications after a further five months at college. We joined by air from Liverpool to Antwerp for a 'Coasting' or 'Home Trade' voyage, visiting European ports, flying back from Rotterdam.

The role of the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward was as storekeeper of provisions, bonded and bar stores as well as linen keeper and in charge of accommodation services. We were not responsible for the meals apart from supervising the service of them to the Officers Saloon. We would issue provisions to the galley only on the authority of the Catering Officer's signature. Crew issues for national deck and engine room ratings were to set scales. Bonded stores were kept under seal while in each port but were given an allowance of cigarettes, tobacco and spirits if we were nice to the Customs Officers. We ran the officers bar pre-lunch, pre and post dinner to set hours. Normally the Catering Officer maintained the officers and crew bar accounts, but I got entrusted with this task.

On storing, I had to make sure everything received was correct and properly stowed. As we had no laundry on board, all soiled linen would be bagged to go ashore which then had to be counted back in when returned clean.

A run ashore in Hamburg. M.S. FORCADOS (Coastal Voyage 22/23) - August '68



*Hamburg-St. Pauli*

*Zillertal <sup>Haus</sup>-Zillertal*

Self, the bandconductor  
with

3<sup>rd</sup>.Engineer.

A/Purser

2<sup>nd</sup>.Engineer & Wife

4<sup>th</sup>.Mate / 2<sup>nd</sup>.Mate s wife

Jr.Engineer

Electrician

?

2<sup>nd</sup>.Mate

3<sup>rd</sup>. Mate & wife





After the APAPA's final voyage I went 'Deep Sea' or 'Foreign' on FORCADOS' sister ship FIAN, joining in Rotterdam and returning to Amsterdam nearly two months later, visiting some more West African ports as far East as Douala in Cameroon.

*FIAN at Bathurst, The Gambia.*

FIAN (Voyage 23)

During the two calls into Lagos, one outward discharging and one homeward loading, I was befriended by a couple, friends of the McCormack's who by this time had returned to the UK, introduced to the Apapa Club and was able to try water-skiing on Badagary Creek. Such hospitality was always reciprocated on board whenever possible. This tended to lead to a greater network of shipboard/expatriate friendships.

There seemed to be a family feel amongst Elder Dempster seafarers and whenever ships were in port together there was a lot of fraternising and it was rare not to know anybody on another ship, especially amongst the cadets. It was common to have three to four ED ships together in Lagos. On one occasion a certain 'D' boat was coming alongside and was surprised to note the captain wearing his cap on the bridge wing. I had met him before and also learned of his reputation as laid-back with a very informal approach to his duties. He also had the reputation of knowing the Delta Rivers and knew the 'shortcuts'. He was known to have 'bumped' his ships across river entrance bars, rather than take a longer way round. He also had the reputation that once his ship was in port he would 'hibernate' in his cabin with some bottles of gin and a bucket of Palm Oil Chop\*. Soon after their docking I went on board to try and arrange a swap of a box of Cattermoul 16mm films to bump into the captain in an alleyway, still with his cap on but just in a vest, underpants and a pair of sandals. With the integration of Elder Dempster Lines and Alfred Holt into Ocean Fleets, I understand that there were new Instructions to Masters, one of which was that masters and bridge officers were required to wear uniform caps on arrival and departure of ports. This captain demonstrated what he thought of that! Regrettably, such characters were not appreciated by the new regime and, though popular with his crews, I understand he was retired early.

\*Two African Dishes that appeared on menus was 'Pepper Soup', a thin stew that was flexible with different meats or fish – but as the name suggests – extremely spicy with ground dried chilli peppers and ehu seeds. 'Palm Oil Chop' was a traditional West Coast Sunday lunch. A beef and chicken stew with yams and okra with spices where the palm oil, in which it was cooked, was absorbed. It required quite a few gins or cold beers before tackling it to counter the oiliness and was definitely 'deck head survey' food because of the heaviness on the stomach and the sweat it induced!

Toward the end of the FIAN trip in January 1969, I was asked if I would be returning for the following voyage. I explained that I would be returning to college to complete my trade and supervisory qualifications to which the reply was "is that when you learn to put gravy on the plate first so that we cannot see it through the meat?" As the person who saw the portions going out to be served in the Officers Saloon, perhaps I had perfected my carving technique to get as many portions out of a joint too well. And maybe this was after the request for "outside of lamb" by too many people, I sent the stewards in with a plates of cotton wool.

### **AS A SECOND CATERING OFFICER**

My last voyage as a Catering Cadet was on the Cadet Ship FOURAH BAY; Voyage 42, sister ship to both FORCADOS and FIAN. As my three year apprenticeship came to an end in September 1969, I was elevated with three others to 2<sup>nd</sup>. Catering Officer. Two of us who had completed three years and two who joined the year after us on the two year scheme. We were the last to hold this unique rank, wearing one and half zig-zag stripes. Now we were part of Ocean Fleets there was no further need to succession plan for Catering Officers as Alfred Holt ships had a pool of British stewards and cooks from which to draw.

I did a further three voyages (Voys.43-45) on FOURAH BAY which had taken over on the mail boat schedules, running an 'Express Service' from Liverpool to Lagos, only calling at the Ghanaian ports there and back and Las Palmas for bunkers on one month round trips. I was carrying out exactly the same duties as when I was acting 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward as a cadet, but on an enhanced salary and invited to join the contributory Nestor Pension Scheme.

### **EBOE VOYAGES 80 & 81**

1<sup>st</sup>. February 1970 was when I achieved my goal; signed on as a Catering Officer – albeit in an acting capacity – and for a coasting voyage only from Avonmouth to Tilbury on the EBOE. Thereafter two voyages to West Africa as Second. We spent long periods at anchor off Lagos waiting to discharge as there was a chronic problem in clearing imported goods – partly because of increased cargoes to meet the demands of new national projects but mainly due to customs being tardy with clearance paperwork from the docks until sufficiently 'recognised'. We spent over two weeks waiting to enter harbour on the first trip. On our second voyage we were surprised to be taken in quite quickly, especially as there were over 30 ships in the anchorage. A certain Brigadier Benjamin Adekunle who had gained a fearsome reputation in the Biafran war, and was reputed to have commanded a phantom army unit for which he was claiming salaries and provisions and generally known as the Black Scorpion, was made responsible for decongesting the Lagos port. We had on board 'his' car. The army came on board to make sure this was discharged expediently and safely, before being sent back out to the anchorage again to await our turn for the rest of the cargo to be discharged.



*M.V. Eboe in West African waters. A painting by John Stobart.*

On return from the second voyage I remained on board, taking over the senior role again. Although signed on for a Home Trade voyage, this had to be amended because of a national dock strike and we had to quickly remove ourselves from Avonmouth and got sent to Bordeaux to sit the strike out. A more pleasant place to spend four weeks on a ship in the height of summer could not be imagined. The popular beaches of Arcachon were only a bus ride away. As the Gironde is beyond Ushant and outside of Home Trade limits, my Discharge Book was amended to FGN (Foreign).

As we had left in a hurry, we were depleted in stores, having come in from a two month trip and did not have a chance to store before leaving Avonmouth, apart from the fresh that we had ordered for arrival. Devising menus became an interesting challenge as I tried to use as much of what remained on board, but still make meals as varied and interesting as possible. We were short of beef products and the chandler assigned to us by the agent assured that he could get “boeuf number one”. I ordered some rump, topside, chuck, sirloin, striploin and rib. The chandler duly turned up in his Citroen 2cv van with half a carcass. I had to ask the carpenter if he could saw it in half for us so that we could man-handle it into the galley. Thankfully, this did not faze the Chief Cook who managed to get all the joints required out of it. But then, in Nigeria, this is how their meat comes – and that sometimes on the hoof, not neatly packaged in boxes of frozen cuts which is how meat stores usually arrived.

There was another coasting voyage on DUMURRA as acting Catering Officer before getting married to my Flying Angel.

The voyage following was somewhat different. Sent to London Docks for a European coastal voyage on the Glen Line CARDIGANSHIRE, ex Blue Funnel BELLEROPHON, was my first experience of working with a Chinese Crew. They seemed to have far more control in running the Catering Department than I had, or was used to. The menus were just presented to me to sign off. The No.1 Steward and Chief Cook gave me their issues for me to fill in the paperwork. As we seemed to be in a new port every few days getting the ship’s paperwork for immigration, customs and port health clearances kept me on my toes, arriving back in London two weeks later.

Before getting clearance from Customs in each port, they have to seal the bonded stores and there was always the negotiation as to what they would allow out beforehand for crew consumption during our stay, having declared what was in the bars and on crew personal declarations. When joining in London I had to ask for water-guard officers to come aboard and sweet-talk them into an issue of cigarettes and spirits as, on hand-over, the incoming Catering Officer had said they made no allowance for the joining coasting crew. It appeared he had managed to upset them over some slight to their senior officer.

On my return home I found out via the grapevine that three of my compatriots had all been promoted to Catering Officer and appointed to ships for voyages to West Africa. When I went into Head Office to enquire why I had not been ‘given’ a ship the reply was “Well you obviously haven’t heard yet that on your promotion you have been appointed to the ULYSSES.” It rather took my angst away that my first ship as a ‘fully fledged’ Catering Officer was a Blue Funnel one destined for the Far East.

### **THE OUTWARD INTERVIEWS**

Once appointed to a ship for a Deep Sea voyage, all Catering Officers attended an interview with the Victualling Superintendent and a director of the company at India Buildings before sailing. Marshall Meek, who was awarded his directorship as the naval architect who designed the Super P’s, first generation of container ships and then the Panamax’s was the director to whom the victualling department reported to after the Ocean integration. The ‘books’ from the previous voyage had been scrutinised and a summary of expenses, foreign invoices, consumptions, bar accounts and master’s reports were shared with any probing questions as to why there might have been certain discrepancies – even if one had not been on the previous voyage. We were also told that if we had any concerns about the ‘habits’ of our captains as we were most likely to know what their alcohol consumption was, which they could hide in the accounts, that we should advise the company in confidence as they treated any forms of response to stress as a psychological illness and would be treated sympathetically. Thankfully, I never had a need to do so.

## THE FAR EAST

It is not in the remit of this submission to fully record experiences on other ships within the Ocean Group apart from Elder Dempster, but have been asked to comment any differences between the operations. ULYSSES had a full Chinese crew who were from Hong Kong, whereas the Catering Crew on CARDIGANSHIRE were Shanghaies. I had a 'conference' with the Chief Cook every morning in my own office concerning the following day's menu. This involved the menu being presented with the inscrutability of daring me to make any amendments. In time I did get some of my suggestions incorporated. This was accompanied with list of ingredients required from the stores. Having signed this off, the cooks withdrew all frozen and fresh produce while the No.1 Leading Steward i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward issued the dry goods. The only time I was expected to visit the stores flat was with the Captain on his weekly inspection of them. Having said that, we were fed well, control was accurate and the averages were within allowances. My four-weekly stocktakes were usually 'spot-on'.

We were also endowed with generous manning. To look after 14 officers not only did we have the Chief Cook and No.1 Leading Steward, but also a Leading Steward, another Steward, a 2<sup>nd</sup>.Cook & Baker, Galley Boy and Pantry man. On ULYSSES the deck and engine crews had their own cooks and galleys. They just passed their requirements through the catering crew for authorisation. My only catering involvement, apart from oversight, was ordering stores to make sure that we were able to maintain the feeding schedules, typing up the menus and completing the consumption records. As we carried no Purser all the port documentation to clear the ship was done by the Catering Officer, but as we had always dealt with the customs declarations the only extra involvement were the Crew Manifests. The Chief Officer dealt with the Cargo Manifests and Bills of Lading and the Radio Officer the crew accounts.



We sailed in the New Year 1971 and the ULYSSES was eventually sold on arrival back after a second voyage in October of that year. Noticeable, was the length of voyages. Because of the closure of the Suez Canal it took five weeks to our first discharge port - Hong Kong, calling at Dakar, Durban and Singapore for bunkers and four weeks back to Avonmouth from our last loading port - Colombo, Ceylon (as it was then).

*SS. Ulysses, Rejang River, Sarawak*

Of course, this was all new geography for me, Philippines, Sabah, Sarawak, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia but thankfully the Captain was an old ED master and was supportive in my familiarisation, having already done one trip to this part of the world. We also 'survived' our first Chinese New Year which was celebrated with enthusiasm by the crew hosting the officers.

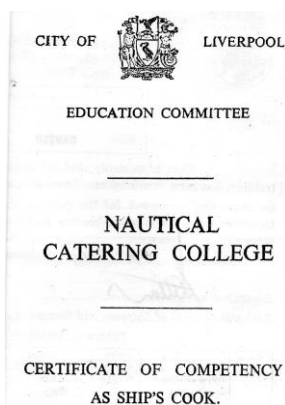
As ULYSSES was a steamship, we had Elder Dempster engineers undertaking their steam 'endorsements' as ED ships at that time were all motor ships.

In between the two trips which was a 7 week turn-round for discharging and loading with a coasting crew, I was required to standby as Catering Officer on the AUREOL during her turn-round period in Liverpool, but the company did arrange for my wife to join me for the second Far East trip.

## HOTEL MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATIONS

Although not part of the formal training toward Catering Officer, the company very generously supported me in my request to study for HCIMA (Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management Association) qualifications by correspondence course. They advanced me the fee initially to study Part 1 (to HND level) reclaiming this from my salary over several months and once I had passed, they refunded the whole fee to me. They made a similar arrangement for me to continue with Part 2 (first degree level) but as I left the company before completing the course I did not gain the refund. I was also supported by the Nautical Catering College and arrangements were made to sit the various exams, if on a ship with the Captain holding the papers or if in the UK, at the college. Part 1 subjects were more advanced Food Safety, Nutrition, Financial book-keeping, Cost Control, COSSH-HSE, Pest Control, basic services i.e refrigeration, electricity and plumbing. Part 2 went on to Accountancy, building maintenance, law, furnishings, fabrics, interior design etc.

## SHIP'S COOK



I was told I needed to be in possession of a Board of Trade Certificate of Competency in Cooking. I was looking forward to another six weeks at college, only to be told that as I had already obtained both City & Guilds 147 and 151 in cookery, I only needed to sit the theory and undertake the practical examinations. As the examiners were my old lecturers and College Principal, this was a matter of formality.

## SHIPS MEDIC

The Catering Officer on Elder Dempster cargo ships was also the medic. Each ship had its own dispensary and a two bed isolation 'hospital' that had its own ventilation system. Our training for this onerous responsibility was a one week course organised by a company Nurse/Purser, a position in existence for the GLENLYON class of ship that still carried passengers to the Far East. It was intended as an anti-panic and reassurance initiative. Even in cases of medical emergency, there was time to sit down and read 'The Ship Captain's Medical Guide'. Two of us were given white coats and spent 3 days in A&E at Fazakerley Hospital. After half a day upgrading our CPR practice we could then witness people with eyes hanging out just being told to wait holding a pad to the injury. Having practiced on a pig's trotter we were then allowed to suture wounds of patients after giving them local anaesthetics. We also were allowed to administer injections, both into the bottom and in the arms, under supervision. (23 years later when taking a two week Ship Captain's Medical Certificate Course at Hull Royal Infirmary, where we observed but were not allowed to touch, even nurses with 4 years training could not carry out such procedures. Only doctors or Nurse Practitioners.) Half a day was with the Liverpool VD clinic, half a day at the Tropical School of Medicine, half a day on board going through all the drugs and equipment found in a ships dispensary and another half day going through the 'Ship Captain's Medical Guide' with all its gory pictures in colour including the advanced stages of Syphilis and Gonorrhoea.

## ONITSHA VOYAGES

Despite its brevity, I was glad to have undergone this training. Having been appointed to ONITSHA, FOURAH BAY's replacement as the company Cadet Ship, the Shipping Federation doctor came on board to inoculate the crew against Cholera before sailing from Southampton. He let me do a few. As not all the crew were on board, the doctor left me enough phials and syringes with a "you know how to do this, I'll just sign and stamp the certificates".

Apart from the 15 cadets who were accommodated in the previous passenger cabins, we also carried a full complement of 10 white deck crew. The latter group were the prime clients for my ministrations. Not only having to take samples in the proscribed way to retain confidentiality as they were sent to a port's VD clinic, but also to administer the ongoing treatment as advised by the doctor. One of the crew fell into the water from a quayside after a night ashore and something must have bitten him as he presented in the morning with a badly swollen arm spreading into the shoulder. A double dose of penicillin was administered before being sent ashore to the doctors. My kudos went up when I overheard "this Chief's alright – he gives a good jab." I found shore doctors always very good at feeding back about any treatments given before a person was sent to them. Especially satisfying were the commendations on the neatness of any stitching of wounds that was needed.

### VOYAGE 78 (December 1971 – February 1972)



CHRISTMAS 1971  
Catering Crew;  
Steward,  
Chief Cook,  
2<sup>nd</sup>. Cook & Baker,  
Pantryman,  
Galley Boy,  
Steward,  
2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward,  
2 Stewards  
+ the 'lampy' (squatting).

## SHANGHAIED

We had been expecting a normal round voyage, Europe to West Africa and back. While on the coast we learned that we would be loading for the States. Another new venture for me. The company asked me if I would like my wife to join us when we got to America. It would have only been three months since she had been on her last trip and, at that time, officers normally could have their wives join them for deep sea voyages with at least a year between trips. Masters and Chiefs, more frequently. My bosses were agreeable for this to happen. They would arrange the flights and deduct the cost from my salary over so many months. This was a no-brainer. She would be signed on as supernumerary at 1/- a month and living on board would reduce living expenses at home. She flew from Manchester with the Captain and Chief Engineer's wives to New York.

Another wife joined in New York when she transferred with her husband, a 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mate, from a Blue Funnel ship on the round-world Far East- USA Blue Sea service. She proved to be a good companion.

My wife started a comprehensive diary/scrapbook similar to one in which she recorded our travels to the Far East which has helped recall the remainder of the trip in some detail.

As ONITSHA had not been to the States for a few years the American declaration forms on board were out of date. Everything that had been prepared was not acceptable to the Boarding Officers. A ship cannot start 'working' its cargo, or crew allowed ashore until it has been 'cleared' by the various officials. Only when the stores declaration had been re-written on the approved proforma would the customs allow clearance. Thankfully, they accepted the crew declaration lists. But all the crew's Landing Permits had to be redone before they were stamped by the immigration officers. As each permit not only gave a name, nationality and ship, it included personal address, relative residing there, date and place of birth, personal description, Discharge Book/Passport number, address in the US (agents). The ship was allowed to work, but no crew member was allowed ashore until this was completed. All my previously typed up cards, in duplicate were of no use. Over 60 cards had to be hand-written in block capitals on the new forms. A lesson learned. In future years, I always checked with the agents of our first US port as to the Form serial No.'s and had them send them and any amended versions to the port prior to arrival so they could be completed by the time we were due.

It was only the States that were fussy about having the correct forms. It didn't seem to matter much what was actually recorded on them! Each country had their documentation to fill in, but usually made allowances if these were not quite right and clearance was usually expedited quite quickly with a 'gift' from the bond. One could work out what size of 'gift' was expected by the size of briefcase or bag that the officials came aboard with. Theoretically, the agent was able to advise what was acceptable, but then some agents seemed to have the concern of the boarding officers rather than the ship at heart. One got an idea which countries had officials that needed 'lubricating' to expedite a quick clearance. My experience was that only in Singapore was this not acceptable, but the declarations had to be 'spot on' as they thoroughly checked all stores and charged duty, with a fine, against the ship for any discrepancies. In many ports one might expect a visit from customs 'Rummage Squads' or 'Black Gangs' to search the ship for contraband items. They had access to everywhere and knew where any illicit material might be hidden. Spaces in the engine room seemed to be popular; the stores were not excluded and dutiable items were especially counted. It was not worth hiding extra bonded stores for use in port.

ONITSHA carried an African Assistant Purser and a Writer, mainly for cargo documentation but they also dealt with the crew's articles, wages, accounting, cash handling, foreign currencies and crew advances.

### **USA AND CANADIAN PORTS**

A positive aspect of having a wife on board is that agents and chandlers are helpful in giving information about the sights of 'their' city and offering lifts and even invitations out to meals. While I was dealing with ship's business my wife was away finding out the interesting places to see, go or do. I certainly saw a lot more of the locations we visited than I would have managed or even bothered had I been on my own. As ONITSHA was a training ship, we had a Training Officer on board who also arranged trips for his charges. Wives managed to get invited to these....so a visit to the US Coastguard AMVER centre on Governor's Island and to the United Nations building while in **New York** were appreciated. My highlight was a trip up the Empire State Building on an exceedingly clear day and looking toward a pair of tower like 'skyscrapers' that were being built in lower Manhattan that were going to exceed the height of what was then the tallest building in the world.

In **Baltimore**, Maryland, advantage was taken of a trip to Washington DC by bus with other officers and wives while I stayed on board...but one morning we walked over to see Fort McHenry, the sight of the inspiration for the American anthem 'The Star Spangled Banner'. Sailing out of Chesapeake Bay we had to sail through developing sea ice en-route to **Norfolk**, Virginia, where we passed the Norfolk Naval Station and rows upon rows of mothballed warships and the liners UNITED STATES, INDEPENDENCE and CONSTITUTION laid up.

A visit to the buildings of the first capital of America was interesting including Independence Hall with the cracked Liberty Bell in **Philadephia**, Pennsylvania, and where the American Colonists declared independence from Britain. My wife disabused a ranger who told us that this building was exactly as it was in 1776 by asking how it could be as the British burnt it down the following year during the American Revolutionary War, when the new Congress of Colonists had to move to Baltimore temporarily. Otherwise it was a scruffy city and not one that proved attractive for further visits ashore.

The 4 day passage from **Philadelphia** to **Halifax**, Nova Scotia was eventful, encountering a strong storm. The ONITSHA was somewhat underpowered to cope and being flat bottomed, more suitable for river creeks there was a great deal of motion on the ship; enough for some heavy machinery on the foredeck to break loose. The normal methods of keeping items on the Saloon tables in heavy weather; table fiddles raised and cloths dampened down with water were inadequate. The anchor points in the deck for the chair anchors were blocked over years of deck polish so they couldn't be used and we had chairs sliding around. On one particular roll during dinner service the cadets around the central table all ended up in a heap in a corner accompanied with their meals, crockery, cutlery and table condiments. A steward bringing in a tray of food shouted "Alleluia" and tossed his tray into the air – to grab something to hold on to – just to add to the mayhem. Shortly afterwards the emergency alarms sounded and we mustered on deck at boat stations with lifejackets. Most of our apprentices were very apprehensive. Thankfully, it was the result of a false alarm. I'm not sure how long we might have survived had we taken to the boats. Most were inadequately clothed. There was great relief when we entered Halifax harbour 18 hours later than the voyage plan. We had a visit from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on water-guard duty come and rummage the ship. Some of our bar stock was confiscated because the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward had not submitted an accurate declaration to me. Not happy.

Despite the extreme cold during our stay, one day being the coldest they had experienced in 80 years we enjoyed our time there. The chandler was very hospitable and were entertained at his home and with friends after a meal out. Despite taxis sliding about on ice we managed meals out, bar visits, trips to the cinema and an ice hockey match v an American team. We also stored in Halifax for the trip back to West Africa. Containers had been shipped trans-Atlantic from Liverpool with frozen and dry goods. While receiving the flour, I noticed that the bags were marked as originally coming from the same mill across from the dock where we were berthed!

When I 'phoned the Liverpool office I was told they were working in the dark. I said it was nice of them to admit it. It was the time of the first miner's strikes and the country had been put onto a three day working week to conserve electricity supplies.

#### ONITSHA VOYAGE 79 (February – April 1972)

It was so cold in Halifax that the direct overboard discharge scuppers froze and we had grey water back up into the galley. Having to bail out dirty water while trying to cook was not an ideal situation. Walking round the decks was dangerous, not only slippery but the metal of the superstructure contracted causing layers of paintwork to crack and drop in sheets. We were 4 days behind schedule on arriving in Halifax and 5 days behind on departure and into another storm. I lost more crockery; that which had been replaced by supplies that had come from Liverpool.

There had been a bunker overspill during our stay and the oil had been scooped up into oil drums which had frozen into the deck. When the weather settled and got slightly warmer the state of the ship was something to behold. The oil drums had come loose and the contents had managed to splatter around the whole foredeck from wheelhouse to forepeak covering the newly secured, brand new, pipe-laying machinery on deck. Much of the superstructure, masts and derricks were also devoid of paint. It was lucky that we not only had a full crew of sailors but also a workforce of cadets to help in the clean-up.





*The Training Officer supervising the cleaning and re-painting of the foremast and derricks. Note the jumbo derrick that was forward of this mast.*

First port of call back on the 'coast' after an 11 day trans-Atlantic crossing was **Dakar**, Senegal. In **Freetown**, Sierra Leone we had a crew change when I had to settle in a new bunch of stewards and cooks and all the chaos that entailed in a short turn-round while also trying to exchange some much needed replacements with the PATANI. My wife managed to get me to the Ducor Intercontinental Hotel in **Monrovia**, Liberia, for a swim one afternoon. The French colonial city of **Abidjan**, Cote d'Ivoire was more tempting even though it was expensive and got persuaded to go ten-pin bowling at the Hotel Ivoire though I declined the ice-skating rink and casino. My wife always found the local markets, honing her bartering skills and came back with something – usually to wear. She was also entrusted to buy material for new officers smoke room curtains on behalf of the Social Committee which she and the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mate's wife made up. After a short stay in **Tema**, Ghana, we sailed on to **Cotonou**, Dahomey (now Benin) where the Training Officer had arranged a trip for the cadets to the Cité Lacustre de Ganvie which we were invited to join. This was on a lake that was about 30 miles inland where all the dwellings, made mainly of reed, were built on stilts over the water. Each family had their own dug-out canoes while traders went 'door to door' in theirs.

The Black Scorpion seemed to have worked wonders with the port congestion on arrival at **Lagos**. After an overnight anchor we were taken in to the Lever Brothers OMO wharf to discharge tallow. However, the customs and immigration were being bloody-minded. The captain was informed that no supernumeraries i.e. wives could go ashore as they had no MN Discharge book or Nigerian visa. After an 'inducement', they relented. More shopping for the wives at the stores on the marina and relaxing by the pool at the Federal Palace Hotel. Moving across to the Apapa wharves, I was able to introduce my wife, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mate and his wife to the Apapa Club. We were in Lagos for St.Patrick's day and were invited to the KOHIMA to celebrate this that evening. My wife records 'What a party!'

**NB** My experience of having wives on board tended to help with the social cohesion amongst fellow crew members when they joined in on activities especially during sea passages. This involved card and board games, Scrabble and Monopoly being favourites on this trip. They planned '20 Questions', 'Call my Bluff' and other quiz evenings. Wives who integrated well, tended to get invites to the occasional cabin 'sessions' (drinks parties). Although the bar was adjacent to the Officer's Smokeroom, purchases could be taken back to cabins. It also served the crew who would take their issues back to their own accommodation, mainly on the poop.

## **THE CREEKS**

Our next ports of call were **Warri** and **Sapele**, inland on the Niger Delta. While waiting for the river pilot at the Escravos Bar, we noted all the oil rigs scattered around this area. Little was I to know that 30 years later I would be based at Chevron/Texaco's oil terminal at the entrance to this river responsible for the Health, Safety and Environment, including food safety, of the facilities management company contracted to feed and accommodate the 1700 residents of this camp; and be associated with the contract that was involved in building a huge gas to liquids plant on an adjacent site. Nor that I would be visiting these rigs by helicopter to visit staff providing catering services to those who worked on the platforms.



As we travelled up the series of rivers to the river ports, the horn would be sounded as we approached river-side villages to warn them of our approach as the 'squat' caused by our draught would pull water off the land, including anything floating on it, so villagers took to their canoes – their only form of transport – to ride the wash as the waters returned.

After a brief stop at Warri, we anchored overnight off Cocoa Island with the stern lines tied to trees on the bank before carrying on to Sapele where we had to wait for 5 days for the cargo of logs to arrive down-river.



A series of social activities were arranged; rowing competitions, football matches; a visit to a saw mill. The cadets won the rowing race v the deck crew by fixing a drogue anchor under the opposition's boat! There was also paint chipping of the hull with cadets, sailors and krooboyes competing to cover the most area.

Social events, including film nights, were held on board for Sapele Club members which was reciprocated by allowing crew and wives to use club facilities.

One of the days a car and driver was arranged for the Captain, Chief Engineer and their wives to visit Benin City. In the event the Captain and Chief were unable to go. The younger wives got invited to go instead. Despite the senior wives wanting to stay and investigate the shopping and craft workshops, the junior ones wanted to see the Oba's Palace, the royal home of the king of Benin, the traditional ruler of the Edo people and the Benin kingdom. They met a Prince Edun, the Oba's 6<sup>th</sup>.son and local businessman who made an interesting guide around the 12<sup>th</sup>.century mud walls. They were also taken to meet some of his father's wives; a rare privilege as they were told by expatriates that very few other Europeans manage to do so.

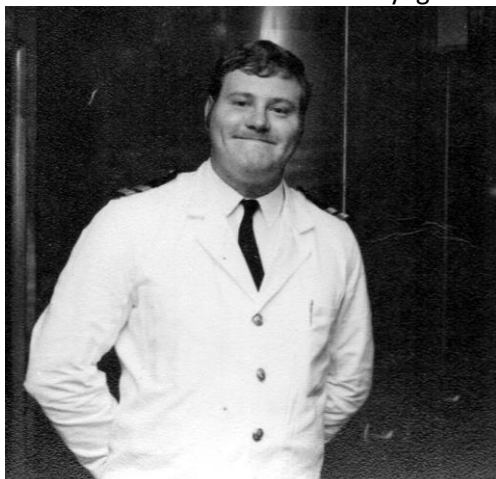
After a brief stop in **Cotonou** on the return leg, we spent five days in **Tema** on the aluminium berth. My wife was able to join the cadets on a trip to the Akosombo Dam and join me in a trip to the Accra Brewery to get gas cylinders refilled for our keg beer, otherwise it was spending time at the Mariners Club and Meridian Hotel. We hosted a horseracing night for our expatriate friends there. **Freetown** was the last port of call 'on the coast' before sailing homeward bound. Except our first discharge port was **El Ferrol del Caudillo** on the North West coast of Spain, a naval dockyard and where the largest tanker in Europe was being built. It was in El Ferrol that we learned that the ONITSHA was up for sale and that this was likely to be her last voyage. This port was also the one I had the most difficulty with language in all my years at sea. The ship's agent had very limited English and the doctor I had asked for, for one of my 'patients', had none. I had no Spanish.

Our first port in 'Home Trade' waters was **Antwerp**. We said goodbye to the cadets and most of the officers and European crew that I had sailed with over the previous 4½ months, while my wife and I stayed on for the coastal voyage. I gained a new 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward. In **Rotterdam** it was nice to have a dinner together away from the ship in the Eurotower Restaurant, having been there in the afternoon for coffee and travelled to the top of the mast in the revolving lift. We thought we might be in **Amsterdam** for two weeks, but then learned that the ship was going to be handed over to new owners once discharge had been completed. While I was busy preparing the ship for closing down, my wife took full opportunity of three days in Amsterdam before we had to fly home, not only exploring the cultural delights of that city but also travelling to Alkmaar for the cheese market and visiting Haarlem, although we did manage some together time one evening ashore, including a trip in one of the canal boats. This was the second ship we were both on that finished its service with Ocean Fleets at voyage end.

### **SERVICE IN OTHER ED GENERAL CARGO SHIPS**

It was not all 'F', 'E', 'O', or ED 'D' boats in which I served. I did spend some time on ex Paddy Henderson (British & Burmese Steam Navigation Co.Ltd.) ships. There were no 'airs and graces' about these vessels; floating warehouses with basic accommodation with their galleys aft, serving the officers saloon on the front. Deck winches and capstans were steam driven. Coasting voyages on the KOHIMA and KUMBA with their coal fired galley ranges where one of the duties of the galley boy was to collect coal from a bunker on deck. The DUMBAIA had an oil fired galley which smoked away and blackened the whole galley with an oily film. Another oil fired galley was the MANO (ex SULIMA in Guinea Gulf colours) in which I stood by during a two week stay in King George V dock, London. Not only was grey water (waste water from sinks and showers) discharged directly overboard but waste water from toilets was too. Boards were suspended over the side to make sure discharges did not land on the quayside or onto barges moored outboard when the ship was light. We were required to use the toilets on the quay should we need to defecate. I had to fight the docks board to make sure that these were maintained in a decent condition – even getting the Officers Union involved, who proved hopeless. There was ruction when excreta was found on a barge which I used in the argument to make sure their facilities ashore were fit to use.

### **AUREOL CATERING OFFICER Voyages 181 & 182 (August – October 1972)**



AUREOL transferred to Southampton as her terminal port in April 1972 after sailing as the solo mail boat from Liverpool for 3½ years. Officers and European crew were flown by charter flights between Speke and Bournemouth airports. The Catering Officer was traditionally known as the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward on a mail boat whereas the Chief Steward was the three stripe Chief Catering Officer. The role of Catering Officer did not correlate with either that of a cargo boat Catering Officer or 2<sup>nd</sup>. Steward. It was mainly a clerical and supervisory position overseeing the 1<sup>st</sup>. Class Dining Saloon, Public Rooms and Cabins. My ten weeks covered the leave arrangements of the Chief and regular Catering Officer – who relieved as Chief for a trip.

Before sailing I had to scrutinise the passenger list with the captain. Although the company suggested VIP's who could be invited to the Captain's Table, it was he who made the final decision as to whom he wished to have as company. It was then my duty to write up the invitations, seek the passengers out and extend the invitation. I did have one refusal. A self-made millionaire Yorkshire business man who responded "What lad, when I go on t'buses I don't sit up with driver – give me table for two out the way". I then had a conference with the Head Waiter as to who we might put on senior officers tables when drawing up the table plan and was in attendance when the passengers came to make table reservations.

Another role was discussing passenger needs when they wanted to book cocktail parties, either in their cabins or using one of the public rooms and arranging the bar set-ups and the manning of them. The Purser's dealt with the daily passenger programmes and entertainment to which I had to make sure that venues were covered with appropriate staffing and laying on any catering arrangements required. The Purser's Bureau dealt with any cabin assignment queries whereas I dealt with cabin servicing. Arriving in Lagos on one of the trips, I was walking down one of the passenger alleyways as the stewards were preparing their trolleys for servicing the cabins and looking into an open door I noticed one of our passengers rolling up all of his bed linen, counterpane and all and stuffing it into an empty suitcase. I had to let him know that it was the property of the ship and his ticket did not include the bedding as well.

And, of course, there were the Captain's daily inspections when the ship was at sea.

Meals were on a one sitting basis only and I was in attendance at all three assisting in the service.



*Head Waiter, Catering Officer, Chief Baker, Chief Catering Officer, Cabin Class Chief Steward*

On return home, I was called into Head Office concerning one of my reports. Why, they wanted to know, was the ship suddenly infested with cockroaches that meant having to move passengers out of sections of accommodation? Having read the previous voyages' Pest Incident Reports that blandly stated 'that there was some indication of cockroach activity', I felt that truth ought to be known, especially as they were also falling out of the pipe lagging in the galley areas and not only into the pails of milk used to fill the jugs that went into the restaurant. I had the temerity to ask whether a pest control contract had been established in Southampton since the ship had transferred from Liverpool, and if so, this needed reviewing.

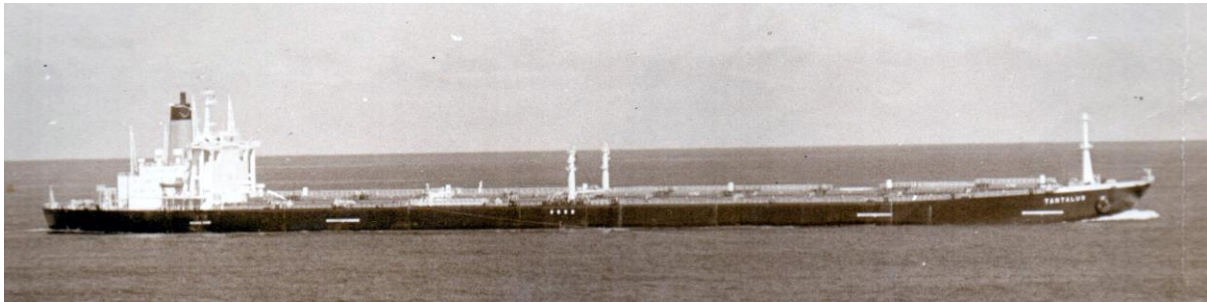
This proved to be my last trip to West Africa – until I returned there nearly 30 years later working for an International Facilities Management Company.

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### **WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

I have not identified my favourite West African Country. The French colonies came across as the most civilised as they felt 'very French' and it seemed there were a lot more French expats compared to British colonies/ex colonies, but we tended not to integrate with them, not only because of language difference but because they had their own social lives. Ghana, despite its previous attempted communist influence, felt very safe and British....but I suppose I still have a soft spot for Nigeria (especially Lagos) because of the time and hospitality that was extended to me there, despite a sense of underlying tensions.

For the remaining two years I remained with Ocean Fleets, apart from an occasional coasting voyage, I served on the 215,000dwt. oil/ore carrier TANTALUS, OCL's Panamax container ship TOKYO BAY and the Libyan flagged tanker EL-BREGA.



The SS TANTALUS ran between Europe and the Arabian Gulf in ballast, returning with crude oil. I joined for her 2<sup>nd</sup>. & 3<sup>rd</sup>. Voyages. One month each way via the Cape of Good Hope, with helicopter rendezvous' at Las Palmas and Capetown for stores and mail. In the gulf we either moored on a 'sea island' miles offshore or picked up pipelines from off the sea bed. Discharge in Europe would be 48 – 56 hours in which we had to store for the round voyage, land and get returned laundry as we did not have a commercial one on board. We were given a 'tanker bonus' on top of our normal salary.



This was followed by two voyages (10 & 11) to the Far East on SS TOKYO BAY, one of them being a round world trip.

Overseas Containers Limited was a consortium of British & Commonwealth, Ocean, P&O and Furness Withy. Ocean operated the Far East ships.

Originally designed as having a service speed of 27 knots, but because of an oil embargo by OPEC in 1973 which caused a sharp rise in prices from \$3 pb to \$12 pb this was reduced to 21 knots.

Because of the stacked containers on deck she was heavily stabilised and coming northbound through the Bay of Biscay the mug on my desk moved as I was finalising accounts. I looked out of the window to see that we were steaming through a heavy gale and noticed other ships 'hove to'.

Between trips, my wife was able to join with our toddler daughter for the coastal voyage around European ports. Leaving the berth in Southampton in a high wind, the tugs dropped the lines before the pilot ordered it and with the high freeboard, the ship was blown onto a buoy which wrapped its cable around a propeller. Quick thinking by the engineers saved damage to a shaft but we nearly hit a P&O passenger ship without the use of one engine, and had to lay over on Ocean terminal while divers freed the buoy.

Because of quick turn-rounds at ports compared to conventional cargo ships we were granted extra days leave per month served, theoretically because we would have less time at each port to enjoy time off. I made the comment that a day in Port Kelang, 4 days in Singapore (over Christmas), a day in Hong Kong and 5 days in Kaohsiung were days in port that we could only dream of when on a tanker.

# Ship of the month 'El-Brega'

by BRIAN TAIT



'EL-BREGA', registered in Tripoli, Libya, is an oil tanker of 86,939 dwt. She was built in Yokohama in 1973 and is owned by the Libyan General Maritime Transport Organisation but is presently on charter to ANTCO Shipping Co. Ltd. of New York. The 'El-Brega' manned by Ocean Fleets men and Libyan cadets is presently trading between the Arabian Gulf and Freeport, Bahamas.

When her present voyage is completed, the 'El-Brega' will be sailing to Greenock to be fitted with heating coils, to enable her to carry Libyan crude oil, which is thicker than the present oil she carries.

It may be of interest to note that the 'El-Brega' and in fact all other Libyan vessels carry a copy of the Koran in a metal box on the foremast in the belief that the ship and the crew will be kept in safe hands while they are at sea.

Which is what my next ship was. Ocean had started obtaining ship management contracts and one of those contracts was with the Libyan General Maritime Transport Organisation which was a new venture for Libya, having ships to carry their own oil. These were EL-BREGA and RAS LANUF. We carried Libyan deck and engineer cadets.

I joined the former in Milford Haven for a 3 month voyage to the Gulf then to Freeport, Bahamas, to discharge before sailing in ballast to Greenock where she would be fitted with heating coils to carry Libyan crude.

This was my last voyage with Ocean Fleets. The day after sailing I got news that I had been accepted for a Crown Agents appointment as a Marine Catering Instructor at the Tarawa Marine Training School in the Gilbert Islands, Central Pacific.

*From the October 1974 edition of Ocean Mail*

Personally, the most challenging aspect of the role Marine Caterer was trying to make sure that the menus were interesting and variable, especially on the longer passages. For a seafarer where the daily routine could be the same day after day, meals could be a break from the monotony if there was some thought in their composition and with the occasional surprise. Cooks could happily settle into serving up dishes that were easy to prepare. Most were happy to be given a bit of challenge, some less so. The worst critique would be "if it's American Pot Roast, it must be Thursday". Having the occasional bar suppers or lunches were a relief from the traditional 4 course sit down served meals in the Officers Dining Saloon. I even tried 'Selecta Menu' lunches where the officers and crew would choose from a selection of 'fast food' options by morning 'smoko' that gave a greater range of choice and was prepared for times requested. This included a sandwich selection if they so wished. This was particularly popular with engineers on day watches that saved them having to get changed to eat in the saloon. This actually was saving on food consumption too, which gave a greater scope to be more generous with the evening meal. I tried to find out if people had favourite dishes that did not normally turn up in regular menus and introduce them into a meal, even if did mean I needed a recipe or even allow them into the galley to show how it should be prepared. One was also aware that taste buds were not the same. Liver, heart, tripe, kidneys, sweetbreads, rabbit were getting less acceptable as menu items – but there were others who still loved dishes prepared with these ingredients. There were the usual 'moaners' about 'crap food', but I like to think that I managed to keep 'a good table'.

In Head Office once, when as 2<sup>nd</sup>. Catering Officer, I was invited to an interview between the Victualling Department and a 4<sup>th</sup>. Engineer who had made a written complaint about the food on his ship. He was asked if he could be more specific. Apparently there was not enough beef on the menus. The voyage's Menu Book was produced which was landed with all the other paper work at the end of a trip. There were regular beef curry's, stews, braised steaks, pot roasts, minced beef dishes as well as steaks and roasts. The roasts weren't frequent enough. I said I believed that on average once every six days was quite generous. It was the fact that they were not given enough slices and wasn't cooked well enough. He was asked if he had mentioned that he liked his beef well done or asked for more slices. It eventually transpired that he didn't like the ship and the Chief Engineer was making life hard for him. He didn't want to go back.

Although the managers of the Victualling Department said I would be welcome back after my two year contract with the Gilbert & Ellice Island Govt., in the event I was asked to undertake another two year contract, but instead extended it to three after some home leave. By that time it was difficult to return to Ocean as every new ship coming into service replaced six conventional ships and a lot of people were being made redundant. Thankfully, there did seem to be vacancies elsewhere. However, when I went to re-register at Mann Island I was told that there were already Chief Stewards/Catering Officers waiting for ships and they weren't registering for such positions. Asking how many they had – they came back with three. I showed them four letters or contacts of offers that had been made to me; Blue Star/ACT, Kuwait Shipping, CP Ships and I said I would take the P&O Bulk Shipping offer for their new-build LPG Carriers to be manned with NUS Barbadian crews.

I have been really grateful for the opportunities that Elder Dempster afforded me. I achieved the ambition of a career at sea that truly did engage me. I was glad I opted for the ED Catering Cadet scheme. There appeared to be a far more paternalistic attitude towards their seafarers, especially those under officer training where different disciplines were integrated socially. I still remember those that influenced me during that period and felt that Norman Christian, the Victualling Superintendent and the Victualling Personnel Officer, Alan Pemberton, still maintained Claude Boswell's vision for the Cadet Caterers. Having worked in three divisions of P&O, I still believe that ED's with its less formal approach was right for me. They were very supportive of my development and I felt I was respected as an individual rather than just someone to fill in on the fleet rota. I was readily accepted not only by my cadet peers but those I worked alongside on the ships.

It gave a good grounding to the rest of my seagoing and overseas careers. I alternated between being a training specialist in shipboard hotel operations and being part of a senior team, not only in passenger ships, cruises and ferries, but also entrusted in carrying out company projects in ship handovers, recruiting national crews to take over catering operations and manning reviews etc.

I was also very lucky that my 'Flying Angel' agreed to marry me. Her social life in Liverpool had been very much associating with M N Officers through the Missions to Seamen and already had had boyfriends who were seafarers, she fully understood the 'psyche' of those who chose such a career and was aware of the demands likely to be made on the wife of one. A couple of deep sea trips helped her appreciate the life of a seafarer. It was not all glamorous and could be very monotonous. She has been fully competent in managing a home and raising a family while her husband spent months away pursuing his career. There was the advantage of having "block" times together when on leave, but it was not always easy to assimilate back into family life. She has coped very well.

As I transferred my Nestor Pension scheme into the MNOPF, I have no continued contact with company pensioners and have lost contact with many colleagues during the years of changing companies. Regrettably. I am delighted that there are initiatives to record the years of this traditional and forward looking liner company.

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SOME ASPIRATIONS MET AS A RESULT OF THE TRAINING ORIGINALLY OFFERED BY ELDER DEMPSTER

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*Relief Chief Purser (Administration) Ocean Cruise Lines 'OCEAN PEARL' with Pursers team. Far East Cruising. Also 'OCEAN PRINCESS' – S.America and 'OCEAN ISLANDER' – Caribbean & S.America. 1989 - 1990*



*As Deputy /Relief Hotel Manager with Premier Cruise Lines based in Port Canaveral, Florida*

*The official cruise line of Walt Disney World, the precursor to Disney Cruise Lines.*

*STARSHIPS 'OCEANIC' and 'ATLANTIC' 1990 – 1991*



As these contracts involved long periods away from home and the companies themselves experienced difficult operating conditions, my next steps turned out to be working for Sealink Ferries out of Holyhead and North Sea Ferries out of Hull. Still at sea – but closer to home!