

A Vindi Boy Down Under

We Don't Get Paid Much But We Do See Life!

(Sequel to A Vindi Boy's First Voyage)

Written by

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My first leave at home had been a pleasant interlude after the adventures of the voyage to New Zealand and spending Christmas with the family was an added bonus. Snatching a few days in Norwich (my birthplace) visiting relatives and old friends also made a welcome break. It was a strange feeling in some ways having been reluctantly shifted away from my beloved home town as a thirteen year old boy only to return as a visitor. One of my uncles (Jack) had spent many years in the Royal Navy up to and including W.W.I. Old photos of him could have been used for the Players Cigarette trade mark. He now owned a pub and I felt very worldly wise swapping yarns over his Bar. Another uncle, Billy was interested in my travels and when told that I expected to go through the Suez Canal next trip recounted some of his World War One experiences in the Middle East. Like many lads he had 'upped' his age to get to the war and was just fifteen when he joined the army. In 1917 he was sent out to Egypt with General Allenby's Expeditionary Force to fight the Turks in Palestine. He claimed to have seen Lawrence of Arabia after the fall of Damascus. On arrival in Egypt the troopship landed them at Port Tufiq, at the southern end of the canal, a place he particularly remembered and asked me to take a photo of the place as we went past, I did!

My mother's brother in law, another Uncle Jack had spent twelve years in the Royal Navy between the wars. He had completed a two-year commission on the Battleship H.M.S. Royal Oak on the China station and also spent two years in the Mediterranean on H.M.S. Sussex, a County class cruiser. He had some wonderful photographs from that time. The 'Oak' of course had been torpedoed at Scapa Flow early in the war with great loss of life.

By the middle of January it was time for me to return to Liverpool and rejoin the Hororata. Having been promoted to J.O.S. (pay now twelve pounds ten shillings a month) I arrived at Lime Street Station feeling like an 'old hand.' With just a suitcase containing my kit the bus ride to Gladstone Dock seemed like going home. The cobbles on the Dock Road were wet with rain and slush; patches of dirty, partly thawed snow littered derelict bombsites. I loved

the sight of the familiar steam driven lorries that chuffed their way along on solid tyres, many of them bearing the name of Tate and Lyle Ltd. the well-known sugar refiners. The soot stained structure of the Overhead Railway dominated the road, running parallel with it for most of its length. Known locally as the Docker's Umbrella the Overhead was the preferred means of travel from the various docks to the area of the Pierhead and beyond giving a superb view of the shipping and busy waterside activities. Liverpool was one of only three cities in the world enjoying this system of transport, Chicago and New York being the others in fact Liverpool's line was based on the New York (The El) system and contained many similarities with it. Liverpool's Overhead Railway was unique in being the first electrified system of its type.

Dockers were discharging the last of our meat cargo and she was riding well out of the water by the time I re-joined. As I climbed the steep gangway I was met by Frank Newell who informed me that I would be in the same cabin as before. He hadn't changed, the same old bib overalls and battered beret, smelly pipe and all. It was cold so he did have a thick jumper on under his bib but he looked very old! There was an extra crease on his face that I took to be a smile, a smile of welcome. It made me feel good! The welcome I received when I entered the cabin was somewhat different. Sitting on the couch was a fair-haired athletic looking guy rolling a fag. "G'day" he drawled, with what I took to be a sneer. He didn't seem pleased to see me! 'Ullo, I thought, another weird bastard! I introduced myself and without standing up he shook my hand and said "Jack Barman!" A bloody Aussie I thought recognising the accent and wondered if *he* was on a one-way trip like Paddy was last time. As it turned out Jack was a good shipmate and we got on pretty well. His last trip had been on the maiden voyage of Federal's new M.V. Nottingham and was a Senior Ordinary Seaman. Jack had been born in New South Wales but his family had returned to live in Dulwich, South London, when he was in his early teens. He turned out to be very useful on the Aussie coast. Having spent his boyhood in the outback town of Moree he was a hive of information and knew some good old Aussie songs too.

Both Arthur Brewster and Alec Nicholson from last trip arrived the same day, Alec now at last an AB, the rest of the deck crew were 'working by.' Some would be sailing with us but several of the old crowd were still on leave. They were to return over the next week or two. Paddy Nolan being the first to arrive followed by Jack Fisher, Freddie Veal and 'Duke'

Telfer. Ted Kendall returned much later. He'd been doing some 'dummy runs' around the coast.

None of the Ordinary Seamen apart from Arthur were coming back, so with Jack Barman and myself the 'new boys' working by would be signing on for the trip. Among them was Dave Wilcox from Lowestoft, Frank Geraghty, from the midlands somewhere and Lennie Shakespeare a Londoner. Arthur Brewster, or 'Arfur as we called him, Lennie and I became great mates and had some wild times together. 'Arfur also got nicknamed 'Harpo' because of his remarkable likeness to the Marx Brother. His blond curly hair and sharp features were a dead ringer. Lennie was a typical cockney kid, short, he sported a fashionable 'duck's arse' haircut and had a habit of grinning with his teeth clenched that made him look guilty when caught short! As he often was. The deck boy (peggy) was a smart looking lad from Edinburgh, Kenny Rutherford. Only Arthur and I were ex Vindi boys, at least no one else owned up to having been there. I often wondered why. Some of the older hands took the piss out of the Vindi but most of them had to train somewhere! There were many other sea schools of course. I don't think I was particularly proud at the time of having been there but then the painful memories were still fresh. I believe though that the basics of seamanship and the rough discipline drummed into us at Sharpness was invaluable. Generally the lads from the Hebrides went straight to sea, as many of them had been fishermen from an early age. They knew their stuff!

Hororata's stay in Liverpool was to be an extended one. The repairs to the damage sustained homeward bound were put in hand and some work done in the engine room. We took full advantage of this enforced delay, enjoying every minute of free time. It was to be nearly three months before all repairs were completed and the outward cargo loaded.

Two notable changes to our living conditions were much appreciated. Firstly the old rock hard kapok mattresses that had made a warm home for bed bugs had gone, to be replaced with lovely soft innerspring jobs. How would they get us up out of these at seven bells? Long past were the days of the infamous straw filled 'Donkey's Breakfast!' Sailor's comforts received another huge boost when a 'Hoover' washing machine was installed in the bathroom. Primitive though it was and having a small capacity it would make 'dhobying' so much easier, no more hours spent with a scrubbing brush and 'hard soap' on a wash board. Even my own mother didn't have the luxury of a mechanical dhoby-wallah at that time.

A new seafarers club had opened in Leece Street, not far from Lime Street Station. Called the Atlantic Club. It became a magnet for us most weekend evenings and often during the week. Run by the Catholic Missions to Seamen organisation it had every thing except a bar. The girls who frequented the club were really lovely and full of fun but there were strict rules and none of them would get involved with the boys. (Being good Catholic girls!) At least we knew where we stood. The dancing was terrific and we all enjoyed ballroom dancing as many of the girls were expert teachers. The music was first class with some very good bands. Latin American was my favourite. -Ole! Quite often, guest solo musicians would perform. It was there that I heard an electric guitar for the first time, played Hawaiian style. Almost as popular was the Grafton Ballroom where with our new found confidence we stepped out to the rhythms of such greats as Joe Loss and Edmundo Ross. The big band era was in full swing and I loved every minute of it.

The day to day routine on the ship was not very strenuous; mostly overhauling gear and restocking stores. There was always plenty of activity with tradesmen, shipwrights and dockers coming and going. Some like 'Taffy' Evans the foreman of the shore gang spent more time in our messroom than on deck. He was a big jovial character with a penchant for the gee-gees. A regular visitor, a mate of his, was a bookie's runner, a greasy looking runt who always wore a battered bowler hat. Taff and he spent many long smokos together studying form. During March the Grand National Steeplechase was run at nearby Aintree and we weren't going to miss that. I was not really interested in gambling but our bookie 'friend' talked me into taking a small wager on the Spring Double. Pick the winner of the National and a horse to win in the Doncaster Handicap to make the double. I put five bob on! At least it was an interest! The Grand National was a great experience and a social occasion attended by over a hundred thousand spectators. Special trains were run on the Overhead Railway to the Aintree racecourse and we watched the race from the Canal Bank close to Beecher's Brook. We couldn't see much of the race as it was so foggy and only a hundred yards or so of the course either side of our position was in sight. Thirty odd horses started but by the time they passed us the first time round half had fallen. (Or lost their way!) The second time around there was only three horses left with riders, one of these actually fell at Beecher's but the jockey remounted and finished third. I never even saw *my* horse!

The football season was in full swing and I made several visits to Goodison Park, the home of Everton. They were in the first division and the most popular of Liverpool's clubs at that time. It was my first experience of first division football. (I never went to Anfield!) Huge noisy crowds filled the terraces but they were generally well behaved. It was exciting to see some well-known players performing, especially internationals. One game I remember particularly was against Middlesbrough. Wilf Mannion was in their team. He was one of the famous England 'three Ms' The others being Stan Mortensen and Stanley Matthew's.

Because of the long layover at Liverpool we were allowed weekend leave about once a fortnight. The union issued us with free rail passes to wherever we wished to go (About the only thing they did for us) I would catch an afternoon train to London on Friday arriving home in Brentwood fairly late then return on Monday morning. I had about four of these breaks during that time. On one occasion three of us caught the ferry to Dublin for a boozy weekend, staying at the Seaman's Mission. We didn't see much of Dublin!

The nearest pub to Gladstone Dock was the Caradoc, Standing in the shadow of Seaforth Station on the Overhead Railway. My preferred brew was a 'Black and Tan' (half a pint of Guinness in a pint glass topped up with mild ale) another favourite was a local special called a 'Blue Mix.' Threlfulls Brewery bottled a brown ale with a blue label; Mild ale and a bottle of Blue in a pint glass made a 'Blue Mix' "bootiful!"

Liverpool is populated with many people of both Irish and Welsh descent, consequently there are at times some deep feelings of a sectarian nature, to put it mildly. Returning from town after closing time on Saint Patrick's night we boarded the top deck of a tram and were soon joined by a group of 'Paddys' who had obviously been celebrating to excess and were quite boisterous. A couple of stops later the tram's lower deck was invaded by a crowd of 'Taffies.' It was soon 'all on' with abuse being hurled from top deck to lower and back and arms flailing on the stairs. It was hilarious to watch the conductor trying to get between them. When he finally collided with a fist he yelled "'datt's a nuff!" And rang the bell. The tram stopped and the driver, a huge man, came round and threw them all off whereupon they continued their donnybrook in the road. Discretion played the better part of valour as far as we were concerned. We had to talk the driver out of chucking us off as he'd got into the swing of things and we were in the firing line! I think the fact that we were wearing suits saved the day, not that we were any more sober than the other lot.

Drinking and dancing was not our only form of entertainment; The Liverpool Empire was an occasional attraction. Variety shows were the main features with artists like Ronnie Ronalde, Gracie Fields, Joseph Locke and all the great comedians of the day. Frank Geraghty bought an old wind-up gramophone, which he ingeniously converted by adding a magnetic pick-up and connecting it to a wireless set. We started buying records at a shop in Bootle. Frankie Laine, Sinatra, Eddie Fisher, Al Martino etc. Surprisingly Beniamino Gigli the great tenor had his devotees (including myself) while some of my cretinous friends were smitten with Mario Lanza! (An upstart!)

At the beginning of March we moved the ship into the massive Gladstone Dry-dock for survey and bottom painting. Scaffolding was placed around the propellers and rudder, both anchors and cables were lowered to the floor of the dock for inspection. I took the opportunity to go down to look at her from below. From the floor of the dock Hororata looked enormous. I walked to the bow and the view from beneath her towering stem was awesome. Fifty feet above me it soared seemingly knife edged, then looking aft one could appreciate the fine lines flowing out to her full beam. I tried to find the area between numbers four and five holds where the torpedo had wrecked such havoc in 1942 but the shipyard repairers at Cammell Laird had done a superb job. Apart from some plate doubling there was no sign that the hull had been damaged. While in dry-dock the ship was fumigated with something a bit stronger than 'Flit.' No doubt Captain Hopkins would be pleased to know that. Every opening was sealed and poisonous gas pumped in. This was done while I was on leave. Those staying aboard were housed at the Sailors Home for a night. After fumigation Frank Newell, the bosun searched the ship for dead rats, there were plenty!

The Gladstone graving dock was one of the biggest in the country. It was opened in 1913 and designed to take the great transatlantic liners of the time. Vessels like the Aquitania and Mauritania regularly docked there and during the two wars it was one of the few docks able to hold the big battleships and carriers. As big as she was Hororata didn't fill the dock. The whale factory ship Southern Harvester that followed us in nearly did. She was a huge vessel with a large opening in her stern through which the whales were hauled to be sliced up on the flensing deck. Big money was to be earned on those ships but it didn't appeal to me. I think most of her crew was Norwegian.

It was about this time that I bought a second hand folding 'Kodak Brownie' camera. It cost me a quid but after several rolls of film I almost felt like chucking it 'over the wall.' Most of the snaps turned out with the left-hand side slightly out of focus, which was most frustrating. It wasn't until well into the voyage that I discovered accidentally that the lens body was not clicking fully home. From that time on until I could afford a new camera it served me reasonably well.

After re-floating we moved to number two branch to commence loading general cargo for Australian ports. Articles were signed on the 31st of March and the voyage officially began. The next day we sailed to Glasgow. It was good to feel the ship moving under our feet after such a long time in port. A week later saw us back in Liverpool for topping up including some deck cargo of drums. At last on the eleventh of April we got under way bound for Melbourne Australia. The leaving of Liverpool had come at last.

Securing the hatches was probably the most important task when leaving port and had to be done in a seaman like manner to ensure the safety of the ship. Heavy beams are placed across the openings and bolted to the brackets in which they lay, then wooden hatch covers are fitted between the beams. Two or sometimes three layers of canvas are stretched over the top and clamped into rows of cleats by steel bars called 'irons.' A wooden wedge is hammered into each cleat (wedges had to be placed pointing aft to ensure that seas coming inboard didn't knock them out) As an extra precaution ropes were lashed across the tarps both athwartships and fore and aft. Usually this was completed before the open sea was reached, more often before sailing.

No sooner had we dropped the Liverpool pilot than we were enveloped in thick fog. Lookouts were set and even though we were equipped with radar it was dead slow ahead. Fortunately it was only a minor delay and soon the mist cleared, speed was increased and by noon the following day we were off Land's End.

Every inch of deck was hosed and scrubbed from stem to stern to remove the dirt and debris of the docks. Mooring ropes and wires stowed away in either the forepeak or the lazarette or in the case of wires, secured on their reels with canvas covers over them. All derricks had been lowered and secured and over the following days their associated gear unshipped, overhauled and stowed below. The routine of watch keeping was by now well established and

as we headed south the weather improved. I was in the four to eight with Jack Barman and Alec Nicholson, which wasn't bad as it enabled us to get a reasonable night's sleep although being called at seven-bells, (three thirty a.m.) took some getting used to.

Lifeboat stations had been allotted and the first drill practiced including accident boat drill. One boat was always ready for emergency launching, 'man overboard' for instance. This boat had a petrol engine and an engineer checked it out, making sure it was serviceable. Hororata carried six boats with numbers one and two being slightly smaller than the other four. The company's other ships of this type carried just four so I presumed that as she was a war time build the extra two were to accommodate the additional personal carried at that time, gunners etc. A total of 98 compared with about 70 in peacetime.

Crossing the 'Bay' turned out to be a non-event weather-wise as the seas stayed reasonably calm, not what had been expected. Around noon on the fourteenth we passed Lisbon and the following morning entered the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar, or as an old naval Commodore I once met called it 'Giberaltar!' The 'Rock' looked magnificent in the bright sunshine.

The strait is a narrow and busy waterway and there were many vessels of all types in sight including a pair of destroyers heading into the Naval Base. To starboard was that part of Africa that reaches up towards Europe like a pursed lip. The mythical Pillars of Hercules. Buildings in the Moroccan towns of Tangier and Ceuta sparkled white against the surprisingly green landscape. It was difficult to imagine while steaming through these historic waters that less than ten years before they were the scenes of carnage and incredible bravery. The convoys following this route on their desperate endeavour to relieve the besieged island of Malta included many of this company's ships among them the Durham, Orari and the heroic Dorset. The first two I was later to serve on, the Dorset lost during the infamous 'Pedestal' convoy.

But this was peacetime so our present task was not to scan the skies for bombers and the seas for torpedo boats but soogie the white paintwork. Samson posts, derricks, winch-houses, and even the rails at the ship's side. Then all had to be painted, two coats, flat white-lead undercoat then marine gloss. To paint thoroughly the endless miles of rails a wad (piece of cloth, usually mutton cloth) was dipped into a tin of paint, hands and all, then wiped along the rail. Painting the deckheads usually evoked an outburst of disgust from those that had to

tackle the 'banjo fleets'. That's the sections of the overheads that contained pipes and brackets and thus awkward to paint. A small brush attached to the end of a long handle (a dog's cock) was employed. Anybody deliberately avoiding their share of the 'banjos' was called a 'headworker' or much worse and got a hard time. "Where d'yer think you are? On yer Daddy's yacht?"

Those of us keeping watches also worked on deck when not on watch, at overtime rates! At 'one and threepence' an hour it was cheap labour but helped to add up to a good pay-off. Working two watches a day, then six hours overtime for five days plus more on Saturday morning meant that I was doing over eighty hours a week. We sure slept well at night!

In spite of this there was usually a good feeling among the lads for when the weather was fine someone would start singing and we'd join in or yell abuse. Len Shakespeare would chant "Ow many fevvers on a frushes froat?" The reply in mock cockney. "Forty four farsen and four on 'is frottle!" Usually the songs were crude versions of well-known ditties but the Scots and Irish blokes loved their sentimental ballads. "Westering home with a song in the air, light of my life and it's goodbye to care!" 'Maggie May' was always belted out with enthusiasm. The days of sea shanties had long gone but there were still many songs with a nautical theme that got a good airing.

You may 'ave been in sailing ships, you may 'ave been in Tramps.
You may 'ave been in schooners on the great Newfoundland Banks.
You may 'ave been in liners and had a hell of a time,
But you've never been a sailor 'till you sailed the Baron Line.

It was said that you weren't a proper sailor until you'd achieved three milestones, they were, 1, bought your own knife, 2, sailed 'round the Horn and 3, had a dose of the clap! At least I'd done the first! (then!)

Knives of course were tools of the trade, together with a (marlin) spike worn in a double sheath at the waist. To all of us it was an important tool but to an AB named 'Brum' Sheriff it was an obsession. Sheriff by name and Sheriff by inclination. Normally a mild mannered man from Birmingham he wore his knife on a separate belt, low on the hip in the style of a gunslinger's six-shooter. In his spare time he spent hours practicing his quick draw against

the full sized outline of a figure chalked onto a spare hatch cover leaning against a winch-house. He was incredibly fast and accurate. In one swift movement he'd draw the knife, flick it and place it unerringly into the target. At first we were inclined to take the piss but none of us could emulate his skill. Some of us tried with varying degrees of success but more than one knife sailed over the wall!

Around noon, the day after entering the Mediterranean we passed Algiers and by late the following afternoon the rocky Island of Pantelleria was abeam. Malta was off to starboard during the eight to twelve that evening and we arrived at Port Said three days later, the 21st of April. It had been steady steaming through the Med. with only the occasional temporary change of course to 'blow the tubes.'

At first light Hororata steamed slowly past the statue of de Lesseps into the long approach channel to the canal then moored fore and aft to the buoys off Port Said to await transit in convoy. Several ships were ahead of us and more formed up astern. We were immediately besieged by hordes of bumboats, The gangway was lowered and maybe two or three traders allowed on board. Their wares included cheap lighters, watches and 'ciggy' cases embellished with pictures of naked ladies. Silk scarves, photo albums, leather goods and colourful mats. "You like dirty postcard Johnny?" A cheap copy of the banned book "Lady Chatterly's Lover" was slyly offered. The normal currency was cigarettes but they would accept any currency and knew the exchange rates to the penny. I bought a nice 'camel skin' photograph album and a couple of prayer mats. The bumboat boys were a diversion and created a bit of fun. They would send up from the boat whatever article you wanted to examine in a basket tied to a heaving line then a bit of lively bargaining would take place. All the shouting and abuse added to a colourful scene. 'Gypo' policemen came on board, presumably for peacekeeping duties! They were dressed in a skirt, blue jacket and red fez and armed with very ancient ex British army Martini-Henry rifles. At the least provocation these would be aimed at you, the large calibre muzzles looking like the entrance to the Mersey tunnel. It didn't stop us taking the piss!

While we were waiting to depart, a northbound convoy came through. It included the P&O liner Maloja sister ship to the Mooltan that had caused a recent smallpox scare in the U.K. There was a tatty looking Russian Liner, a smart Orient Liner and many tankers and cargo ships, the majority flying the red ensign. This convoy had completed a night transit and

carried on their bows the unique Suez lantern. When it was our turn to leave, our convoy slowly proceeded south but the P&O Strath' liner ahead of us must have given offence to the bum boat boys because they stood off in a line, lifted their long striped shirts and waved their dicks at the passing parade! To the chanting from our crowd of "King Farouk, King Farouk 'ang yer bollocks on the 'ook!" Paddy Nolan sprayed a hose at them as we slowly passed but they were just out of range. It was an hilarious sight! I wondered what those 'POsh' ladies thought of it.

My previous trip had taken me through the Panama Canal, now it was the other great artificial waterway, Suez! Each canal shortens the shipping routes between east and west but they are as different to each other as can be imagined. Whereas Panama winds its way through tropical jungle and crosses a mountain range via a system of locks, Suez is a hundred-mile long ditch excavated through the desert. It connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea. Opened in 1869 it took ten years to dig, using the labour of 1.5 million Egyptians, an unbelievable 125,000 of whom lost their lives. (Not a lot of people know that!) There are no locks in the Suez Canal although it passes through three lakes, Lake Timsah near the town of Ismailia and the Great and Little Bitter Lakes. The banks of the canal are raised above the surrounding desert but a good view can be gained from the upper decks of the landscape which to the east looks barren, the sandy waste stretching to the horizon glaring in the blazing sunshine. In the book 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' Lawrence of Arabia describes how he reached this side of the canal after crossing the Sinai Desert from Aqaba. The most interesting sights though are on the water, native boats, dhows and feluccas etc, and on the west bank where there seemed to be some sort of road. Now and then would be seen a laden camel with its owner sitting high on top. Rickety carts hauled by a reluctant donkey and occasionally a British army motorcyclist racing along mindless of anything in his path. A narrow waterway called the 'Sweetwater Canal' also runs parallel to the West Bank.

After a long hot day we reached Suez pausing only to drop the Canal pilot and continued at normal speed into the Gulf of Suez. (I remembered to take the photograph of Port Tufiq for Uncle Billy) It was stiflingly hot and was to get worse as we steamed into the Red Sea. While working on deck we wore little more than lap-laps made out of light toweling material but it was worse for the poor sods down below as it was over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the engine room. Greasers and firemen grabbed every chance they could to get on deck for a breather. There were always one or two of them leaning over the rails, half-naked with greasy sweat

rags tied around their necks Fortunately there was an ice water tap on the port alleyway and the ubiquitous lime juice was issued to all hands. The cool air in the evenings was bliss. I wondered how the Red Sea got its name and presumed it must have been for the magnificent fiery sunsets that painted the distant mountains glowing crimson and turned the sea into burnished copper.

During the four to eight on the 25th we passed Perim Island at the entrance to the Red Sea and dropped the hook in the harbour of Aden the following morning. Once again bumboats besieged us but they seemed slightly more refined though blacker than the Port Said lot. I was impressed with the appearance of the Somalis that came aboard. Tall and elegant, their black faces contrasting strikingly with brilliant white robes. You still had to be wary of the bumboat boys; I bought a cigarette lighter shaped like a small automatic pistol! Our stay at Aden was brief, a bunkering stop only but we took on board sufficient fuel oil for the remainder of the round trip back to Aden.

I was on the wheel the following day when we rounded Cape Guardafui and steamed into the Indian Ocean. The Equator was crossed just before noon on the 1st of May and as on my first trip nobody bothered. Calm seas allowed the mast and foremast posts to be painted. A fun job that, swinging from bosun's chairs, although the slow rolling meant one had to bend a line round the mast or the ladder to prevent swinging out too far. It was difficult to follow the old dictum 'one hand for the ship, one hand for yourself.' Blacking down was a godawful job. The chair was shackled to one of the shrouds or stays then a rope rove through a block aloft which led down to a winch to heave you up to the top. (Your life was in the hands of the man on the winch!) A bucket of 'Stockholm Tar' was lashed to the chair, then as you were slowly lowered down; a wad was used to smear the shroud to protect the steel wire. You usually got covered head to foot with the black sticky stuff. Kerosene was the only thing to remove it followed by a hot shower. I think it was a mixture of tallow, pitch and god knows what else the lamptrimmer concocted. Days on end of chipping decks was soul destroying and filthy. Working almost naked, kneeling on a sack or anything to prevent being burnt by the hot steel your body was soon covered in thick dust that clung to your sweat. The bare steel was then given a coat of fish or boiled oil. When that was dry a final coat of Red Oxide applied using 'Turk's Head' brushes lashed to the end of a pole. It's as well those old ships were built with thick steel, as the amount of rust that came off was amazing.

It was not all mundane drudgery; I assisted Paddy Nolan put an eye-splice in a wire spring. It was great to watch him work the wires into the lays; a skill that is not often called for these days. All I had to do was to hit it with a hammer at the right time but I learned a lot from him. I even replaced some serving on a stay one day. “Worm and parcel with the lay, serve the rope the other way!” Worming wasn’t required in this instance but the canvas parceling had to be replaced and greased before being served using a serving mallet.

One day while moving some dunnage that was stowed in a winchhouse I got stabbed in the thumb by a rusty nail. It didn’t bleed much so I just sucked on it and left it at that but the next day it started to throb and swell. The Chief Officer was on the bridge during my wheel the following morning so I told him about it. He took one look, by now it was the size of a golf ball, and said “You’d better come and see me at nine” Telling me to sit down he put my hand on a table and said “I’ll have to lance this.” Producing a scalpel he told me not to look but I did and the last thing I remembered was an eruption of red blood and white puss. I must have passed out because the next thing I saw was the mate dabbing the thumb with iodine. The pain was excruciating but the throbbing had gone. The way he’d stabbed down with the scalpel I was surprised I’d still got a thumb! After dressing it with lint and bandage he gave me a couple of codeines (the vindi cure) “Don’t get it wet!” was his only comment. At least it got me out of soogying for a few days.

A week after crossing the line the first really bad weather of the voyage was encountered, heavy swells and head winds so severe that the ship’s speed was reduced to prevent damage. Green seas swept along the foredeck and weatherside of the accommodation. We smashed into this for five days until on the 12th made landfall off Cape Leeuwin, Western Australia. Shortly, after rounding the cape we entered the Great Australian Bight, a stretch of ocean whose reputation was more fearsome than the Bay of Biscay’s. In the area of the southern ocean known as the roaring forties great storms circle the earth unfettered by any landmass. They travel from west to east and in the Bight can give east bound ships a nasty time. The day after rounding the Cape they caught up with us. The head seas of the Indian Ocean became monstrous following seas. It was an awesome experience to face aft and watch these huge waves bearing down on us. The stern would drop into the trough then the next wave would tower high above it threatening to engulf us. At an unbelievable speed the stern would soar skywards and the ship charge down the face of the wave like a gigantic surfboard. At the wheel, it was a tiring two hours work, as one cannot afford to lose concentration. The effect

of the following seas is to reduce rudder effect and even a large ship can 'broach too,' that is slew sideways with disastrous results. One had to hang on when venturing right aft as the stern would be rising and falling thirty or forty feet at least with vibrations caused by the flailing props adding to the discomfort.

For three days these mountainous seas raced us across the Bight but at midday on the 16th of May the Hororata hove to off Port Phillip Heads to embark the Melbourne pilot. The narrow entrance to the great harbour of Port Phillip is guarded by a series of reefs that have seen the downfall of many a stout ship. Indeed the rusting wreck of a steamer could be seen high and dry on the reef to starboard. Once in the sheltered expanse of the bay it was simply a matter of following the marked channels the forty miles or so to the entrance of the Yarra River at Williamstown and thence to Melbourne. Ships can dock close to the city or at Port Melbourne, which is on the bay itself. On this occasion we were going up river to tie up at the Victoria Dock. Mail from home was eagerly read but none of us could wait to get ashore, the first touch of dry land beneath our feet for thirty-four days. It was a strange feeling, no wonder sailors roll when they first step on 'terra firma! Even when sober.

We had left Liverpool in the middle of an English spring but here in the most southerly part of Australia it was the beginning of winter and surprisingly cool. Berthing just a short walk from the down town area was a great advantage and in spite of the dull weather that greeted us I soon discovered that Melbourne was an agreeable town. It had a big city atmosphere about it that was missing in New Zealand cities except perhaps Auckland. I loved the green trams that swayed smoothly along the wide streets and the city was obviously well served with trains that appeared to encircle the central area. Pubs or Hotels as they were called were plentiful although I was surprised to find that closing time as in N.Z. was six o'clock.

As neither Arthur, Lennie or I had been here before we set out to find the hotspots, soon discovering the Palm Court Dance Hall in the seaside suburb of St. Kilda. Situated opposite a fun park called Luna Park it was an ideal place to put into practice our new found confidence in all kinds of ballroom dancing. At the Palm Court there were three dance floors each in its own room catering for different styles. In one, traditional ballroom, in another Latin American and the third was devoted to Country or Western dancing. The latter proving to be very popular in Australia in fact the further north we went the more 'cowboys' we encountered! The popular songs at the time were numbers like "Tennessee Waltz"

“Whispering Hope” “Mule Train” etc. Al Jolson singing “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” was probably the most popular song at the time. I believe it was his last recording before he died.

This was a time when the Australian Government was encouraging immigrants from other countries in Europe other than Britain, the so-called ‘New Australian’ policy. Already many people from places like Italy and Yugoslavia had settled especially in Melbourne. Some evidence of resentment was noticeable among the ‘fair dinkum’ Aussies which in some cases produced some comical incidents. One day on a tram a group of vociferous Italians were yapping away in ‘Itie’ when the exasperated conductor, not being able to understand or hear himself think, yelled at them “Why don’t you flamin’ wogs learn to speak flamin’ English!”

The Sky Pilot (Padre) from the ‘Flying Duck’ (Flying Angel Mission) invited us to a bus trip on our first Sunday afternoon in Melbourne. Seeing that the pubs were shut, a group of us including Lennie, Freddie Veal, Jack Fisher, Frank Geraghty and myself accepted. Arthur was gangway Quartermaster so missed out, I don’t think it worried him too much. The trip was to the Dandenong Mountains about thirty miles east of Melbourne. An attractive area of forest clad hills with Mt. Dandenong being the highest point. A winding road led to the summit where we stopped at a large carpark. A cage in the centre of the parking area held a Cockatoo, which had a large and saucy vocabulary. Being Englishmen we had difficulty understanding such ‘lingo’! Nearby were tearooms and a lookout from where we had a panoramic view of Melbourne. Returning to town the bus stopped briefly at the Fitzroy Gardens so that we could visit ‘Captain Cook’s Cottage’ and the surrounding gardens. Altogether a pleasant Sunday outing especially when the tour finished at the Seaman's Mission for tea and tabnabs.

Generally the weather was disappointingly cool and damp for most of the three weeks that we were in Melbourne but it didn’t stop us exploring the ‘hotspots’ not that there were many in those days with six o’clock closing. As ordinary seamen we had to perform quartermaster duties which meant standing gangway watches and also take turns to give the peggy a break.

By the second weekend we knew our way around the city centre reasonably well. That Saturday afternoon Lennie, ‘Arfur and I went out on the town, at least that was the intention. Just outside the dock gates the road passes under a railway bridge and leads directly to Flinders Street near its junction with Spencer Street. On the opposite corner was a pub called

the 'Sir Charles Hotham.' Not wanting to waste any drinking time the three of us thought this was as good a place as any to start our entertainment! We resolved that after chucking out time we would go up town, find a 'greasy spoon' for a feed then head on down to St. Kilda and try our luck again with the local 'talent'

Close to the hotel was a taxi rank so when closing time came we grabbed a cab but as we were getting into the taxi Lennie said "hang on, I'm busting for a pee" and headed back towards the pub. It was dark by this time so we didn't see where he went. Several minutes passed, the cabby was getting stropy and the meter was ticking so I went to look for him. The pub doors were locked and he was nowhere to be seen. After giving it a few more minutes we said, "bugger it! He knows where we're going!" So off we went. Inch thick steaks and all the trimmings at a nice little 'caff' on Collins Street helped to absorb some of the 'schooners' we'd sunk, then jumped on a tram in Swanston Street for the ride to St. Kilda. 'Arfur and I had a great time that night! Our recently gained expertise in the Tango and Samba at the Atlantic Club gave us plenty of confidence and no shortage of partners. The only trouble with the Aussie girls was that although generally fantastic to look at, their accent was terrible. 'Shrieking sheilas!' was an apt description. Some of them were pretty smooth movers though. Although they were painful to listen to, one had to have a good line. When asked where I worked I usually used the old one "I'm a traveller on a big steel job!" or "I'm a rep' for a shipping company." One never admitted to being a 'Pom' so I claimed I came from Eastern Pommerania. "Where's that?" "A hundred miles north of British West 'ackney!" There were lots of *comings and goings* at the Palm Court, not only between the three halls but also out side where the local blokes parked their cars. No drinking was allowed on the premises so they were making quick trips to re fuel from booze stashed in the cars. Later the beach proved to be a popular destination! On a cold dark night, with a sun burnt daughter of 'Anzac' where else would you go?

Shakespeare didn't show up during the evening and as it was late when we returned to the ship his absence wasn't noticed then. Next morning (Sunday) he was still adrift and some speculation was made to his whereabouts. I was on gangway duty from eight o'clock and around ten the phone rang. When I answered it an angry sounding voice said "Ave you got a bloke named Shakespeare in your crew?" "Yes" I replied "but he ain't here" "I know!" he said " 'e's ere! This is Russell Street p'lice station and we've got your bloke in custody. One of you'd better bring five quid and bail 'im out!" "What's he done?" I asked but all I heard in

reply was the phone slamming down. I stuck my head through the mess room porthole where some of the boys were having a cuppa. “Hey! Lennie’s in the nick and they want five quid to let him out!” Duke Telfer said he’d go and get him so I rang for a cab.

An hour later they returned. A dishevelled Len, sporting a bit of a shiner and his usual toothy grin came up the gangway. At the top Brewster and I asked him “What happened to you? And where’d you get too last night?” “You won’t believe it,” he said, getting a bit serious. “When I got out of the cab I only wanted a slash but when I tried to get into the pub it was bleed’in locked. By now I was really busting so I went up an alley at the side of the pub. It was pretty dark, and there I was having a quiet ‘jimmy’ against the wall when a hand gripped my shoulder and this copper spun me round and said, “What’s your name?” “Shakespeare!” I said “And I’m flamin’ Churchill! He said”, “Bang! Bloody thumped me and dragged me off to the pokey” “What’d they charge you with?” Arfur asked. “Indecent exposure!” Said Len in disgust. Frank laughed “I always knew your prick would get you into trouble!”

We became a bit wary of the local ‘gendarmes’ after that. They were a mean looking bunch, especially the ones around the docks. I think they were on the look out for illegal gambling among the wharfies. At smoko and meal breaks little groups of wharfies would be seen huddled in a quiet corner playing ‘two up.’ There was always one of them on look out. On the q.v. as they called it. Some of the cops were members of the vice squad, in those days the only ones that carried guns. As they were dressed similarly to British policemen it was a strange sight for us to see them armed.

Unlike New Zealand there wasn’t much chance to do any seagulling on the wharves so we had to make the weekly ‘sub’ go a long way. Fortunately beer and fags were cheap but the breweries seemed to go on strike every five minutes leaving the pubs with no beer. The alternative was wine! Or to be more precise, plonk! Penfold’s Pisshead’s Plonk we called it. One and six a bottle and drunk from half-pint glasses, it left the worst hangover imaginable. There were so-called wine bars that stayed open some evenings but were frequented by ‘winos’ and down and outs. There was even an Australian made whiskey, labelled ‘Corio.’ It made firewater taste like lemonade! Horrible stuff, we weren’t that hard up!

Three weeks after arriving in Melbourne we covered the hatches, lowered the gear and sailed for Sydney. There was a memento of this area of the Tasman Sea in the ship’s saloon.

Mounted on the aft bulkhead was a wooden propeller affixed to which was a brass plate. It had been presented to Hororata in recognition of saving the crew of a ditched Australian Avro Anson aircraft in Bass Strait in 1944. It is now displayed at the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland.

After two days steaming we arrived in Sydney. It had been a fairly rough trip around the coast and picking up the pilot from the 'Captain Cook' off Sydney Heads was quite hazardous. (For the pilot!) The massive cliffs on each side of the entrance to Sydney Harbour are an awesome sight, especially in heavy seas. The pilot cutter was tossing about and had difficulty keeping station with us but they'd done it all before and soon we were steaming into the magnificent harbour of Port Jackson. Ahead was the famous bridge and in spite of the strong winds many sailing craft and pleasure boats dodged our course. To starboard I was delighted to see the outline of a three-funnel county class cruiser. It was H.M.A.S. Australia moored to buoys off Bradley's Head, beautiful ship! To port I noticed a flying boat at Rose Bay; no doubt just arrived from New Zealand. Soon the Navy Base at Garden Island was abeam and the wharf at Woolloomooloo with a Port Line boat alongside. There was also what appeared to be a 'T class' submarine in the harbour. Our engines were stopped and we anchored off Circular Quay while the liner Dominion Monarch went in ahead of us. At last Hororata passed under the famous 'coat hanger', our mast appearing to barely miss scraping the steelwork. Turning to port and entering Darling Harbour we made fast along side wharf number nine at Pyrmont. On the other side of the same wharf was the liner Stratheden the one we'd last seen at Suez.

A blustery wind and drizzling rain marred our arrival at Sydney but it was slightly warmer than Melbourne. I was beginning to think that warm sunny weather ashore was eluding me, as this was to be my third winter in succession. One always thought of Australia as a place of permanent sunshine, hopefully it would improve as we went further north to Queensland. In the meantime we had to put up with a damp Sydney. It was also a fairly abstemious Sydney as the breweries were on strike again and although some bottle beer was available you had to be "in the know." Six o'clock closing was still the norm and we only found three establishments that could be described as nightclubs! One of these was Romano's. There didn't seem to be any dancehalls downtown although there were one or two in some of the inner suburbs. Leichhardt was one but a good tram ride away. Sydney's trams weren't very modern in fact they were rather ludicrous, consisting of open sided cars with seats set across

like toast racks. There were plenty of movie houses. We rarely ventured beyond Hyde Park to William Street and the area known as King's Cross. Although notorious as a red light district it was still somewhat seedy and hadn't yet acquired the colour and 'glamour' of later years. Apart from the local pubs at Pyrmont the closest watering hole in town was the Edwardian style hotel called the 'Tattler' on George Street. It was just a short walk across the Pyrmont Bridge to town but the return journey was often steered rather erratically.

This whole area is unrecognisable today being part of the Darling Harbour tourist complex and Maritime Museum. In 1951 it was a derelict backwater, a mooring place for tugs and rust streaked fishing boats, the debris-strewn water oily and smelly.

One evening, several days after arriving in Sydney I was on gangway watch. Around midnight I noticed two strange guys ascending our gangway. The gangway was fairly steep at the time, it being high tide, so I planted myself on the top platform and asked them what they wanted. They stopped halfway up and the leading bloke, who looked a little bit older than me, asked if someone he named was on board. Not recognising the name I replied "No, he's not on this ship" In the meantime he slowly made his way up the ladder to join me at the top but his mate who was much older stayed cautiously halfway down. It was obvious they were a couple of poofs from the Strath' boat. The cheeky bastard then started chatting me up, inviting me to a party on the Stratheden. The last straw came when he suggestively squeezed my arm. Apprehension turned to annoyance and showing a rare loss of self-control I belted him. To my surprise he lost his balance and shot backwards down the ladder collecting his mate on the way, both landing in a sprawled heap in the safety net between the ship and the wharf. I thought I'd killed them at first but they scrambled out of the net before I could reach them and hobbled off yelling 'un-lady like' obscenities. This was accompanied by a wave of cheering and jeering from a group of engineers who had been watching the drama from the deck above. It was my eighteenth birthday!

The majestic Harbour Bridge fascinated me. We walked under it, over it and around it. Arthur, Lennie and I while crossing over it one day discovered that the southeast pylon contained a museum dedicated to the bridge's history and construction. It also gave access to the lookout at the top of the pylon where we gained a magnificent view of the city and harbour especially Circular Quay and Sydney Cove. (There was no Opera House then!) Below us was an area known as the Rocks, the birthplace of Sydney town. Many of the

buildings here are built with the distinctive Sydney sandstone, a warm golden material. On the north side of the bridge at Milson's point was a large Fun Park also called Luna Park. I don't know where the name came from but so far I'd found three Luna Parks. At Wellington, Melbourne and now here, but Sydney's was by far the larger.

While outward bound Jack Barman had fuelled our imaginations with stories of Australian wild life. (No not the skirted variety!) Spiders, snakes, man-eating ants etc. in fact every creepy-crawly nasty he could dream up. We hadn't seen anything untoward yet apart from purple snakes and pink elephants as a result of 'delirium tremens a la Penfolds'. This ended one evening while a group of us were returning from the Duke of Edinburgh. Suddenly somebody yelled out "Christ! Look at that!" Crouched on the kerb beneath a street lamp was the biggest spider any of us had seen, at least six inches across! We detoured around it.

Stories of sharks were bandied about in fact at this time we were painting the ships sides using stages suspended from the deck above. A lifeboat was put into the water and secured close by in case someone finished up in the drink. There was always a bit of skylarking going on and you tried not to move too far away from the ropes in case some idiot gave you a shake from above. I never saw any sharks in Sydney!

At the end of June we were ready to leave Sydney, most of our general cargo having been discharged. I was not sorry to leave, as I hadn't been very impressed with the place on what was to be the first of several visits subsequently made there. It had struck me as a city that was desperate to become American-like and failing miserably. The winter weather hadn't help but we did have tropical Queensland to look forward to. I must confess that in spite of my initial dislike of Sydney, it later became one of my favourite places to visit.

It was dusk as we steamed through the Heads back into the Tasman Sea but the steep cliffs of the 'Gap' looked as forbidding as ever. Two days later we rounded the top of Stradbroke Island at the entrance to Moreton Bay then proceeded up the Brisbane River to dock at Hamilton Wharf. It was sunny and warm. For the first time I felt that this was what we'd 'signed on for'. People were dressed in summery clothes, most men wearing shorts, their tanned legs looking like they'd worn nothing else.

I was attracted to Brisbane from the outset; after all it's a 'river city!' I *like* river cities! There were some attractive colonial public buildings and Botanical Gardens by the river and it's fairly easy to get around. Several bridges span the river that winds through the city centre, none more impressive than the steel structure named the Storey Bridge. Built about the same time as the Sydney Harbour Bridge it dominates the central city. Two minor surprises were in store for me. One was the modern tramway system; brand new shiny aluminum-clad streetcars running quietly on rubber suspensions. The other unexpected sight was to see little Morris Minor cars amazingly operating as taxis! In Melbourne and Sydney most of the cabs were big American V8s or Aussie built Holdens (The first of the breed). Generally throughout the country new cars were fairly rare as had been the case in New Zealand.

About halfway between Hamilton and the city was the suburb of Fortitude Valley or 'The Valley' for short. We found this to be a convenient place to stop instead of going all the way to town. There were one or two good pubs and public swimming baths also several shops. Brisbane was more civilised than our previous ports in one important respect. The pubs stayed open 'til nine p.m. but the beer was served ice cold. So cold in fact that when filled the glasses frosted over. The cooling masked a bland flavour. In spite of passionate and almost violent parochial claims to the contrary I considered that the only reason for drinking it was extreme thirst. I must confess though that in the quantities we downed to quench that thirst it did have an adverse effect upon ones equilibrium. We also discovered that brothels here were, if not strictly legal, accepted. I for one never pursued the matter! Although I inferred that there was civilised drinking, that's not to say that we came across many civilised *drinkers*. On my first Saturday in town I went into a large pub on Queens Street. It had a huge bar but at three in the afternoon the floor was awash with beer.

Hamilton Wharf lay on the north bank of the river and to the east of it was a large rural area called Eagle Farm. There was a small aerodrome situated there but generally it was open country mainly covered in scrub. Jack had been proposing for some time that we should have a shot at horse riding and that this could be the ideal location for it. He found some stables that hired out horses and persuaded Len, Arthur, Kenny and myself to give it a go!. With none of us being a horseman's orifice, we were apprehensive to say the least, but not wanting this Aussie to get the best of us we went along with the idea. To our surprise we really enjoyed it apart from the inability to sit down afterwards! The horses were crafty old nags and obviously didn't like us, as they always seemed to be eager to get back to the stables

rather than lug us idiots around. On the last occasion that we went riding cockiness became my downfall during a headlong gallop. Unfortunately my hack wasn't as enthusiastic as I because he stopped suddenly. A combination of reckless exuberance allied to a carelessly tightened cinch resulted in me and the saddle parting company with the horse. I found myself on my back in a shallow ditch still clutching the reins with the horse's nose inches from my face! I swear the bastard was grinning. The boys were just about falling off their horses in cruel delight at my misfortune; it was obvious that they weren't going to let me forget it in a hurry. With some difficulty and to the sarcastic comments of my companions I managed to re-saddle and remount. During our more circumspect return to the stables I had to listen to Jack Barman perform one of his favourite ditties.

“Screw down the saddle, make it good and hard.
Stay on his back; ride him if you can.
Pick up yer mate he's had a nasty fall,
It's all the same to Mandrake! Champions and all!”
Bloody Aussies!

One evening a character in a pub at the Valley regaled us with hair-raising stories of the bush. Boundary riding on cattle stations that took a week to ride across and mustering huge herds of beef for hundreds of miles. We heard all about salt pans, the 'big dry' the 'big red' and hunting wild pig in the scrub. He even invited us to have a go at this wild pursuit. Having gained our attention and interest he smugly claimed that he pursued the quarry on horse back with a rifle strapped to his forearm, riding past the boar and shooting it on the gallop! “Struth mate, Fair Dinkum” said he as we showed disbelief with such mild expletives as “bullshit” and “pull the other one.” The vision of this 'galah' hanging on to a brumbie waving a gun around was beyond credibility. When he boasted that a cobbler of his made the pig charge him while standing with feet astride, then at the last minute leap over its head, reach down and grab its back legs, flip it over and cut the pig's throat with a knife, it was time to go! You will have noticed that we were picking up the idiots of the country as well as the idiom!

We were certainly absorbing the ambience of the real Australia, if only from a distance, an understanding of what was meant by the outback. Beyond the (mythical) 'black stump.' For the first time awareness grew of the vastness of this land, that there was an ocean of space

beyond the coastal city. Arthur and Lennie particularly liked what we saw and were starting to indicate a desire to stay here if the opportunity arose.

Soon the last remnants of outward cargo were discharged and the holds cleaned and made ready for loading. We moved to Dalgety's wharf where frozen lamb and bales of wool were stacked into the holds then finally moved down stream to the wharf at Borthwick's meat works on the south bank. At Borthwick's carcasses were loaded directly from the works into the ship.

Fortunately the stay there was not for long (as it was some distance from town) but one evening we were treated to the most incredible thunder and lightning storm that I had ever experienced. The sky all around was crackling and flashing; continuous thunder assaulted the ears and rain thrashed down in torrents. It seemed to go on for hours, bloody scary really.

When I was a child one of my favourite radio programs on the BBC was a series called 'Travellers Tales.' An episode that stood out in my memory concerned the Great Barrier Reef! It stirred my imagination. I was enthralled by this imposing natural wonder with accounts of crystal clear waters, coral islets, a myriad of coloured fish and endless sunshine. It became a marvel I dreamed of one day seeing. That dream was soon to be fulfilled because our next port of call was to be a place called Bowen, in North Queensland.

Hororata steamed out into Moreton Bay and turned north. Over to port the bizarre looking cones of the Glasshouse Mountains gave an alien appearance to the landscape when suddenly, not more than a cable length away the sea boiled as a whale sounded, lifting its body high out of the sea. Leaping with it and appearing to attack it was a shark with a long tapered tail, a Thresher Shark! They vanished as quickly as they had appeared. Only my contemplation of the view had presented me with this fleeting and unique event of nature.

Early the following morning we crossed the line of the Tropic of Capricorn and soon saw the first visible signs of the beginning of the Barrier Reef. As the day progressed, gently breaking waves and small islets to port and starboard indicated that we were well into the reef. The shipping channels were well marked and we steamed ahead at normal speed. From time to time the mainland was faintly visible with some headlands standing out more prominently. The sun beat down from a cloudless sky while for a day and a half we journeyed through this

natural wonder, the waters so pristine and clear that the bottom could be seen at times. Hundreds of islands, large and small lined our passage, my boyhood dream had come to pass and I was not disappointed. But this was not a luxury cruise; Frankie Newell kept us hard at it. Chipping, soogying and painting was never ending but made bearable by the tropical sun. The spell at the wheel became a pleasant interlude; soft breezes wafting through the open wheelhouse doors and windows plus numerous course changes helped pass the time more enjoyably.

If the town of Bowen was set down in the middle of a desert, I doubt it would have looked out of place. Lying in a sheltered bay the sun beats down mercilessly on a wide dusty main street leading from the waterfront. Its shabby wooden and corrugated iron buildings raised above the ground on piles that stood in metal pans. To guard against termite attack apparently. (Do they actually eat houses?) There were a couple of hotels, which provided shady retreats, and a milk bar, which had a feature unique and most welcome. By the counter stood two large steel vats, condensation dripping from their frigid walls. One containing pure chilled orange juice and the other pineapple! A huge glass full cost a penny! This oasis also introduced me to the delights of iced coffee, not a milkshake but genuine iced coffee. It's a drink I have enjoyed since but never been equalled by that first one in Bowen.

The port was simply a pier stretching out from the beach with no security gate; I doubt if it was needed. As ship arrivals were infrequent the wharfies were a casual mix of local men and farm workers with a small number of Aborigines, the first we had really come across. There must have been a meatworks in the area as frozen bee

As it was so hot we managed to get most afternoons off. On one occasion us three went for an explorative walk along the beach. Much to our surprise we found, not far from the town, an old wartime flying boat base. A wide concrete ramp led from the water's edge right up to a derelict hangar type building. The greatest surprise was to find sitting out in the open at the top of the ramp an almost complete P.B.Y. Catalina flying boat. Its fabric was rotting and the Perspex browned but the engines and props were still in place as if it was ready for a patrol over the Coral Sea! We climbed inside the cockpit and into the waist where the big open blisters used to house a pair of machine guns. The guns were missing of course but their mountings were still in place. Presumably the aircraft had been sitting here since the war ended six years before! I wonder what eventually happened to it?

Further along the beach we came upon another surprise. Way out in the surf was the wreck of what appeared to be a small two-funnelled passenger ship. Lying on its side, we were unable to get close enough to identify it but could still see some paint work surviving. Mangroves lined the shores at this point and as the tide had recently receded, the sand on which we walked was still quite wet. Suddenly there was a sound! Plop! Then again, plop! Then all around us plop plop plop! To our amazement and chagrin we found ourselves surrounded by hundreds of strange looking crabs, more and more popping out of the sand as we stood transfixed by this scary phenomenon. Their bodies egg shaped and brightly coloured, they stayed motionless seemingly weighing us up. We didn't wait to be introduced and any observer would have been amused to see three grown lads fleeing for their lives from a horde of tiny crabs. Our trepidation of Australian wild life was to be given another jolt in Bowen, this time in the pitch-blackness of a tropical night. On this occasion, after enjoying a pleasant session at one of the local watering holes we bought some bottles of beer with the intention of continuing our revelry on board.

Steering a straggling, staggering course back to the wharf we started to cross a stretch of scrub that afforded a short cut to the ship. Arthur called out "any one got a bottle opener?" No one had. "I wanna open it" He slurred, meaning the bottle he carried. Geraghty called out in the dark. "Hey! Here's a heap of rocks" he had stumbled into Bowen's War memorial, a stone cairn. Lit only by the stars we together made our way to where Frank stood. "This'll do," said Arfur placing the crown top of the beer bottle on a projecting rock with the intention of giving it a sharp tap with his hand. A hiss and scuffle of a startled animal came from the rocks around which we were standing. "F----g 'ell! We all yelled and like the bunch of heroes we were, took off in all directions. In the dark I was trying to run on tiptoes not knowing what I might stand on. We arrived on board like a bunch of *wallies*! The next day, taking a closer look at the heap of rocks, (we were braver then) all that was to be seen was a tiny lizard sunning itself.

Bowen had one more trick to play on us before we departed. One of the locals told us that there were public swimming baths in the town. "Over by the gas works" he said. "Great, lets go and have a swim". We found the baths; there was nobody there to take our money in fact nobody around at all. "Very nice!" Tiled changing rooms and showers etc. The four of us raced each other to dive in. Splash! "Jesus Christ! The water's boiling!" We scrambled to get out, then noticed steam coming from the pool. Disappointed and rather annoyed we got

dressed (we were only wearing shorts) On the way out we found a man nearby cleaning windows. “What’s the story with swimming pool the water’s f----g boiling?” we asked him. “Aw” he said. “Every Tuesday they refill the pool with cooling water from the gas works, it’s all right after a couple of days”

From its harbour, Townsville looked like a colonial outpost. A long breakwater affording protection from the cyclones that are common in these parts and the sight of a Solent Flying Boat commencing its take off run added to the sense of isolation. It is though, the largest town in North Queensland and also the gateway to the vast hinterland where distances are measured in hundreds of miles.

Offshore lay Magnetic Island a popular resort for tourists and locals alike. During our stay I took the opportunity to go for a trip out to the Island where we had a fantastic view of the reef and under water life from a glass bottom boat. That was later but in the meantime our first excursion into town produced an amusing insight into one aspect of life in North Queensland.

The day after arriving was a half-day off. So after lunch and a clean up a group of us headed for town. It was about a mile from the port to town along a very dusty road. At one point it was lined with mango trees, the fruit of which lay thick upon the ground. I can still recall the smell of that rotting, fermenting mess; it seemed such a waste. Shortly we found ourselves in the main street and thankfully on a corner stood a magnificent colonial style hotel. Two storied with balustraded balconies and painted white it was complete with a raised wooden sidewalk, hitching rail and unbelievably, bat-wing doors to the bar. Without hesitation we crowded into that cool haven and ordered schooners all round. The ice-cold beer as usual was tasteless but really hit the spot and soon we were in a relaxed mood and taking notice of our surroundings.

The interior of the pub was in keeping with the exterior, its panelled walls displaying many pictures and artifacts of historical interest. The well-ventilated doors; open but shuttered windows and slowly spinning ceiling fans kept the hot tropical air at bay. A scene worthy of a Hollywood western brought our chatter to a halt. The doors swung open revealing a figure who stopped with his arms outstretched holding the bat wings apart, his eyes squinting into the gloom of the bar. Dressed in tight jeans, a checkered shirt and standing tall in high heel riding boots, a dust covered Stetson pushed back from his face, he swaggered bow legged to the bar, looked around and drawled, “G’day.” As he threw his leg over a barstool the barman

without being asked poured a schooner and slid it to him. That beer disappeared down his throat quicker than a drunken sailor going into a whorehouse. Smacking his lips and pushing his glass back to the barman he looked at us again and repeated "G'day!" "G'day" we replied, still taken aback by his appearance. As one, we looked outside expecting to see a horse at the hitching rail. Instead there stood a dust covered utility truck with a saddle laying in the back together with a battered suitcase lashed with rope. Where'yer from? Asked Jack Barman. (After all he could speak the language) "Other side'a Cloncurry" he drawled "Yeah, come in for the rodeo termorra" "How far is that?" some one asked "Ooer 'bout five 'undred I 'spose" "Miles?" queried some git. "It ain't flamin yards mate!" he said. It turned into a good session. The saddle got screwed down and the Dog still sat on the Tucker-Box five miles from Gundagai. More characters arrived and we even had a bullwhip demo out in the street! We never got to the rodeo! It was held outside town, the other side of the 'black stump' probably.

Two days later we were hit by a similar tropical downpour that had struck us at Brisbane, nine inches of rain fell in just a couple of hours. The humidity became almost unbearable until the sun dried everything out.

As the days passed Len and 'Arfur were starting to talk openly about their desire to jump ship and at one stage I even contemplated joining them. It was certainly an attractive proposition but the main question uppermost in my mind was work! They proposed heading inland to seek work at one of the cattle stations. That didn't appeal to me very much and thought, perhaps cautiously that the novelty might wear off pretty quick. Then what? Anyway any decision by them was in the future as we would be in Townsville for at least two weeks. It would be wise to leave it till the last minute

Indeed the first Sunday started off in the usual way, with nowhere to go, just lazing in the sun. One or two fishing lines went over the side but on this calm, drowsy day nobody was very keen to do anything requiring expenditure of energy. Then Dave Wilcox suggested we try to catch a shark. "There's bound to be a few around here" Coming from Lowestoft, what else would he think of? 'Borrowing' a meat hook from the galley one of the firemen took it below, sharpened it and formed a barb on the side. The hook was shackled to a fathom of chain stopper then heaving lines doubled up for the line. An empty five-gallon paint drum attached about ten feet from the chain made a substantial float. I reckoned we could have

caught a whale with that tackle! The line was led through a fairlead right aft and turned onto a winch drumhead. Finally a piece of bloody meat was cadged from the butcher and we were in business! Our 'arse end' was overhanging the wharf so there was little chance of the line floating into the wharf piles in fact it slowly drifted straight out and stayed there for what seemed like an age. We relaxed with a few cans of beer, this was the life! "Christ!" somebody yelled, "look at that!" Looking astern we saw the paint drum racing across the harbour. Springing into life we went to our pre-arranged stations. By then the drum had stopped, no movement at all! "I bet it's taken off with the bait" I thought out loud and grabbed the line, lifting it out of the roller onto the rail and slowly pulled it in. There was no weight on it so I presumed my supposition was correct and the bait had gone. Soon the drum was directly below me and I could see the line hanging straight down. I continued heaving it up hand over hand until I could see the chain and the hook come into view under the water. The bait was still attached but only just so I continued heaving it up. Fortunately most of the slack had been taken onto to the drumhead for suddenly as the hook neared the surface this bloody great shark appeared in a flash turned on its side and snagged the hook in the corner of its jaw. I don't know which of us got the biggest shock but I was shaking like a leaf and stupidly kept hold of the line. It tore through my hands as the short amount of slack whipped out then brought up with a bang. The shark was still on the hook lashing about. What do we do now? Jack Barman took control saying "someone get on the winch quick!" We hauled it up until its head was clear of the water; *it was a bloody monster!* Jack said, "get the ladder over!" One was quickly lashed to the rail and rolled down to hang along side the shark. Without turning a hair he went down the ladder with another rope, made a running bight and managed to get it around the lashing tail and haul it tight. On deck it looked enormous, ten feet long, a Tiger Shark somebody suggested. We stayed clear of its sharp end until we were sure it was dead, those teeth looked vicious! The butcher came along with a cleaver and standing astride it tried to slice open its upturned gut. At first the cleaver just bounced off then suddenly the blade cut through and all the guts spilled out. The smell was revolting, we moved further away. The butcher cut part of the head off to get at the jawbone after which we lifted a length of rail and heaved the stinking remains over the side where it slowly sank much to the annoyance of hundreds of 'shitehawks' and millions of flies that had gathered around.

Not that we noticed the flies as they are a continuous presence and we were getting used to them. I first thought Queenslanders were a friendly lot as they all seemed to be waving at me!

“Not flamin likely mate, they’re just swatting flies!” That’s why they hang corks from the brims of their hats!

At Townsville pallets of silver lead and tin ingots from Mt. Isa were loaded into some of the lower holds before dunnage was laid to take frozen meat. It must have made good ballast, as each pallet weighed at least two tons. Wool and hides also went into Hororata’s cavernous holds.

In spite of the weather in Sydney, the funnel had been painted so now we were painting the boat deck houses and bridge as well as the lifeboats, taking great care not to fall into the oggin, knowing what was down there!

My two mates were now determined to ‘skin out’ and a plan to avoid detection was devised. The night before we were due to sail they were to catch a train to a place called Charters Towers. A small town about eighty miles south west of Townsville and the centre of the sugar cane industry. They would lay low there for a few days then see what came up. Conversations with some sympathetic wharfies had given them some idea of what to expect out there also some useful advice. Their train was due to leave about ten in the evening, which meant that we could get their gear ashore in the dark without being noticed. They had intended to travel light and therefore left some of their gear in my keeping with the promise that I would forward it to their homes. This I eventually did. I went with them to the station to see them off and to wish them good luck. They were in high spirits when they boarded the train but when it pulled out of the station my spirits sank like a stone. Not only was I going to miss them I also felt a tinge of guilt as I knew that they had wanted me to go with them.

Next morning they were missed when we ‘turned to’ but I had decided to plead ignorance if asked about them, at least until we arrived at our next port. The bosun knew that we were close mates so I think he respected me keeping my mouth shut and didn’t ask me directly. As it was I didn’t disclose their destination. Not that it would have made much difference.

Almost two days steaming south from Townsville through the reef brought us to Gladstone another scruffy little town protected from the open sea by Curtis Island, a finger shaped piece of land about twenty miles long. Our stay here was very short in fact I didn’t bother to go very far onshore. I did notice a car park close to our berth where I presumed the wharfies parked their cars. (Everybody in Australia seemed to own one) What was interesting was the number of *old* cars, predominantly large American models dating from the twenties and

thirties. Makes like Buick, Chevrolet, Essex, and Hupmobile, even model "T" and "A" Fords among them. Newer models were V8 Ford and Mercury Coupes.

Our last port of call in Queensland was to be the strangest of all. Port Alma. I'd only heard of it because the Port Line had a ship with that name. Barely twenty miles from Gladstone but it might as well have been on the moon. Its remoteness emphasised by its position up a mangrove-lined creek surrounded by flat sandy desert. It consisted only of a quay and shed with little in the way of cargo handling facilities. It did in fact serve as port to the city of Rockhampton about sixteen miles inland. A single-track railway line is its only link (other than the sea) to the outside world. The view from the ship looking over and beyond the quayside building was of the railway line leading in a straight line toward the horizon but disappearing into what appeared to be a vast expanse of water, a mirage. There was not a breath of wind, the only movement being the shimmering of this extraordinary phenomenon. Among the mangroves flocks of yellow crested Cockatoos squabbled while a Kookaburra went into intermittent hysterics. On the water baggy beaked Pelicans trawled for fish or glided ungracefully through the air like prehistoric Pterodactyls.

Early the following morning we were alerted to the amazing sight of a bus arising silently from the distant glistening 'waters' like the ghostly hand in 'Morte d'Arthur' arising from the lake to seize Excalibur. As it approached we could see that it was an ancient charabanc like vehicle mounted on railway bogies. It carried the men who were to load frozen meat and wool into our holds. Meat that was waiting in the refrigerated store on the quay. At five o'clock the men climbed back on their 'railcar' and it disappeared back into the mirage. Stillness descended again broken only by an excited cry from Ken Rutherford who having rooted around the back of the building found one of those machines that rode on rail lines and could be hand propelled. I could just imagine if Len and Arthur had been here. We would have been halfway to Rockhamton in a flash. As it was we managed to get it onto the tracks, four of us sitting face to face pumping like mad. In our ignorance we thought we could have a closer look at the mirage. But by now it had gone with the sun and darkness descended as it always does in these latitudes like switching off a lamp. We were surrounded with silent darkness. Far behind us Hororata's lights were, apart from the stars our only points of reference. We kept going until the ships cluster lights were just a faint glow in the distance then turned and slowly pumped our way back again.

In spite of Port Alma's isolation, gangway watches were still maintained, even the morning ritual of breaking the flags. When in port two flags were flown from the mast, the house flag and a courtesy flag, in this case Australia's national ensign. These two were rolled up and held with a loop then hauled aloft. At eight o'clock the mate blew a whistle whereupon the halyards were given a tug making the flags break at the same time. Another hand aft hoisted the Red Duster in the normal way. They were all lowered at dusk by the gangway quartermaster.

For three days the same procedure with the wharfies took place until finally we lowered all the gear battened the hatches and said goodbye to Queensland. A couple of small tugs came from Gladstone to assist us back to sea. Then commenced the long haul round the coast back to Melbourne.

I wondered how my two pals were getting on. I had had no word from them nor expected to; neither had there been any indication by the bosun or mate that they had been apprehended. I hoped everything was working out for them. Knowing them as I did I was sure they could look after themselves. I had learned that we were getting at least one replacement in Melbourne.

It was a four-day run to Melbourne and it wasn't long before we struck rough weather again. The forecast was not good so steel shutters were shipped over the smoke room windows. Long before we got to Bass Strait it became noticeably colder and I think we all missed the northern sunshine. Iced coffee and chilled fruit juices were the last things on my mind as we stood look outs on the monkey island with woollen sweaters under oilskins and sou'westers.

This time we berthed at Princes Pier at Port Melbourne which meant a lengthy tram ride into town but was much closer to St. Kilda. It was still suprisingly cold; in fact Melbourne was suffering its coldest winter on record. It even snowed one night, the first snow recorded there for ninety years. We were now into August and our holds were filling fast. One of the old Orient liners was berthed close by at Station Pier. It was on its final visit here before going to the knacker's yard. The crew put on a farewell dance at the Seaman's Mission. Although a 'dry argument' it was a great night as we all got well lubricated beforehand. There were some beautiful looking sheilas at the dance. I happened to point one out to a guy whom I was talking to. (He was from the Orient boat) Obviously salivating over her. "I wouldn't try that

one mate” he said, “ All you’d get would be a handful of balls!” A pair of poofs from the liner put on a Tango demonstration. They were fantastic, the best I’d ever seen. They would have ‘gone down’ well at the Atlantic Club if you’ll excuse the expression.

On the twelfth of August our Melbourne cargo being on board and safely stowed we sailed that evening out of Port Phillip Bay, negotiated the reefs at the heads for the last time and laid course for Adelaide. Thirty-six hours later we were moored to our berth at Outer Harbour, Port Adelaide. The city was quite a long train ride away, but what a lovely city it was. The central or business area being completely surrounded by parks. While we were there the weather was reasonably warm and pleasant. We even managed to get in a game of cricket at the port with a local team, my first encounter with an artificial wicket. (Coir matting on concrete) A purely social event made all the more memorable by the hospitality shown us by our hosts (Who we let win for diplomatic reasons!)

Another weird encounter with Australian wild life occurred one sunny afternoon. Its amazing how wary we had become of all the creeping and crawling beasties (as Kenny called them) that we chanced upon. On this occasion Dave, Frank and I were strolling along a rough track not far from the port. I found a horseshoe on the track, picked it up and casually tossed it from hand to hand as we wandered along. There was a movement in the bush ahead then a lizard about two feet long shot out and scuttled across the track about ten feet in front of us. Instinctively I heaved the horseshoe at it striking the ground just ahead of its nose. It stopped dead; one forefoot off the ground then slowly turned its head and stared at us unblinkingly. I went to walk around it to retrieve the horseshoe and its eyes followed my every movement. Its body absolutely motionless, foot still raised. It was quite uncanny. This one was an unusual looking reptile with a tail not long and tapered like a goanna but short and stumpy. It stayed rooted to the spot until we were well past, watching us closely!

On my previous trip, to New Zealand, I had been able to buy lots of foodstuff and goodies to take home thanks to the opportunity to make extra money working on the wharf. This hadn’t been possible here to the same extent so I had to content myself with purchasing a few presents. Nylon stockings were hard to come by at home but here they were plentiful and cheap. Always an acceptable gift for Mums, sisters and especially girlfriends. A few items of tinned food were also collected at various ports together with Australian souvenirs and presents for my kid brother.

For three and a half months we had worked our way around the Australian coast and I had come to realise how vast the country really was and how diverse its culture and climate. In places there were still traces of its colonial past, even a certain allegiance to Britain. The country's history as a convict settlement has produced an independent spirit and a distinct pride in its achievements. One could always get a retort from a stroppy 'stralyan if you referred to the shackle scars on his ankles. On the other hand we came across plenty of 'Pommy bashing' especially among the wharfies but then, they were against everything! Cities like Melbourne and Sydney were fast becoming more cosmopolitan, much to their advantage in the future I would think. Although reasonably close to New Zealand geographically I found it entirely different socially. I considered at that time, of all the parts of Australia we went to, Queensland with its sunshine and casual friendliness, especially up north was my favourite. I hoped that Lennie and Arthur had found it so.

Hororata sailed from Adelaide on the sixteenth of August making a brief stop at the Port of Freemantle to pick up mail and stores; then it was out into the Indian Ocean, next stop Aden. About half way across the Indian we ran into the southwest monsoon. The sky that day was cloudless until a dark line appeared right across our path. From horizon to horizon it stretched straight as a die and we steamed into it. One minute it was calm and sunny the next all hell broke loose! The rain bucketed out of a black sky, huge drops bouncing high off the deck. Nobody ventured out on deck. Visibility was zero even from the bridge and the noise was horrendous. It went on for hours but then stopped as suddenly as it had started. By then it was night and because it had been so dark during the storm we were unaware of it.

I had the twelve to four (middle) watch homeward bound; the worst watch to have as it was bloody hard to get a reasonable amount of 'kip.' Consequently I felt continuously tired. It was tempting to 'nod off' on lookouts, especially during the long 'farmers.' That's the two-hour stint in the middle of the watch when you don't have a wheel. Woe betide you if you got caught snoozing! It meant a logging. (No not a flogging!) On calm clear nights though it can be quite ethereal to be up in the 'eyes.' One is conscious of the vastness of the ocean. Look aft and the bulk of the ship seems detached and spectral. Below your feet the stem cleaves its path through a phosphorescent light show while the great panoply of the heavens strews its myriad stars like a dome of twinkling jewels. One quickly learns the trick of scanning the horizon for the rare sight of another ship's lights. Staring directly at the indistinct division of

sea and sky soon wearies the eyes but looking at an area just below the horizon gives a far sharper indication. Standing for two hours at the wheel became equally tedious particularly in the middle of the night. Some mates (bridge officers) when they're on the bridge rarely utter a word to the helmsman except when necessary. Others are quite chatty as our 'second' was. 'Two O', as he was called couldn't stop talking about his family's business, a road laying firm. He went on and on to his captive audience about ground fill, base courses, drainage base, tarmac, and bitumen 'ad nauseum!' I don't know why he was at sea; roading was obviously his first love. Generally there was a social gap between officers and us even though we had guys in the messroom with equal if not better education. Most of the younger mates, thirds and fourths had that scrubbed face public school boy look about them. The company had a first class training ship for cadets so there was no question of their ability. This vessel was the M.V. Rakaia, better known to us common lot as the 'Company Yacht!'

Since leaving Freemantle we had enjoyed fresh food, vegetables, salads and fruit. Even real milk was available for several days. Passenger ships had a 'mechanical cow' to turn powdered milk into a reasonable replacement but we had to rely on the old 'conny.' There was always fresh bread of course and plenty of meat. With ten thousand tons of it under our feet one would expect it. Two or three times a week a tray of fresh salad, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber etc. was placed in the messroom. When this ran out we were dished up 'Board of Trade Salad,' slices of canned beetroot and raw onion swimming in a tray of vinegar! Ugh! Fruity tabnabs became rock cakes. Board of Trade 'duff' made its appearance; reputed to have been Nelson's secret weapon at the battle of Trafalgar! Used as cannonballs they wrecked havoc among the 'Frogs.' We could hardly complain. She was a 'good feeder.' But we did!

Two weeks out of Freemantle the first sight of land was the Island of Socotra then Guardafui distantly to port. Back in the Gulf of Aden it was stiflingly hot and Aden harbour was as hot as the hobs of hell! Thankfully our stay was again a short one but once more the bumboat boys provided some entertainment.

Soon after passing the 'Ten Apostles' at the entrance to the Red Sea one of our engines had to be stopped for a minor repair, consequently reducing our speed to about nine knots. It wasn't long before a new American freighter overhauled us. We heard on the 'galley radio' that the Yank had signalled a derogatory remark as he swept past. Captain Hopkins became suitably

incensed by this and according to the captain's tiger (steward) had words with the Chief Engineer demanding full speed as soon as possible. A couple of hours passed before his wish was granted but by then the Yank was just a smudge of smoke on the horizon. Hororata's economical speed was about thirteen and a half knots but legend had it that she could far outdo that as indeed she had homeward bound during the previous trip (with unfortunate consequences.) The old girl certainly got a rumble on, all through the night we roared on. The American's sternlight got discernibly brighter during the twelve to four and at first light she was in full sight. It took another day to overhaul her but we gave them a raspberry as we slowly passed her. She was well astern when we reached Suez. I think it was the only time I ever saw 'the old man' smile!

Once through the canal and into the Mediterranean normal speed was maintained and within a few days the first signs of the 'channels' were evident. Chipping the decks, that most soul destroying of jobs was accompanied by unprintable songs that only sailors long separated from female company would know. I continued with a pleasant job that Frank the bosun had started me on in the Red Sea. He reckoned my hand was steady enough for me to paint the 'safe working loads' on all the derricks, twenty all told plus the jumbo. A real cushy job that I made last for a several days. Shipping was heavy through the Mediterranean and now and again one of us on 'stand by' had to dash to the stern to dip the ensign to passing company or naval ships.

We learned about this time that although we would be paying off in Cardiff, London was to be our first port of call. That pleased me as I hoped to take some of my gear home first to save dragging it all the way from Cardiff, not forgetting that I had some of Lennie's and Arthur's belongings as well.

Once through the Straits of Gibraltar we really felt that 'home' was just around the corner. Always being aware of history, especially naval affairs (being a Norfolk man like Nelson) I was mindful that we were passing the sites of great events. Cape Trafalgar, Cadiz and Cape St. Vincent. Lisbon must have held some attraction for the 'old man' that night as he took us so close to the bay that the lights of the city could be clearly seen. The Bay of Biscay proved rather less docile this time and we saw the lights of hundreds of fishing boats during the night. Soon Ushant was astern and shipping traffic intensified as we made our way up the Channel. An unforgettable sight was the mighty Queen Elizabeth outward bound for New

York, the only time I ever saw her. It had become much colder too and just as we had encountered fog soon after leaving Liverpool that too was to be our lot off the south coast. Speed was reduced to dead slow and the air became full of the eerie sounds of ship's bells, whistles and hooters. For hours we coasted through this clammy soup until gradually it dispersed, as did our impatience with the delay.

It was a bitterly cold Friday afternoon when we made our way up the Thames. What a wonderful river this was to come home to after a long voyage. In spite of the industrial wastelands of the lower reaches there was so much activity on the water with great ships coming and going, hooting tugs shepherding their charges or towing strings of barges. Coasters and colliers battling against the strong tidal flows. Then there were the ubiquitous Thames sailing barges, their red sails adding a splash of colour to the drab scene, a reminder of days past but still doing useful work.

The river pilot and customs officials boarded at Gravesend while on the north shore I noted the familiar outline of the Tilbury Landing Stage. It brought back to mind the December afternoon in 1947 when standing on that same pier I'd watched in awe as the four-masted barque Pamir approached Gravesend under topsails and attended by the tug Zealandia. There she stayed overnight before proceeding up to London. I realised too that Tilbury was only a sixpenny bus ride from home.

From Barking Reach the last bend leads into Galleons Reach and the entrance locks to the Royal Albert Dock. Part of the 'Royal Group' of docks, the others being the King George V. and the Victoria together forming the largest area of enclosed dock in the world. Moving down the length of the Royal Albert to our berth we passed many great ships, their decks busy with the business of loading and unloading their cargoes from every corner of the world. Royal Mail, Shaw Savill, Cunard, Port Line, Brocklebanks, Ellermans and many other companies were represented. I took only a passing interest in all this as I was looking forward to getting home. Once we were secured along side, the bosun told us that as soon as we got the OK from customs those of us who lived locally could go home for the weekend. He made it very plain though that the ship would be sailing at eight a.m. on Monday and we must be back on board by seven. Packing as much gear as I could manage I struggled down to the Connaught Tavern gates and caught a bus to Stratford Station, then on to Brentwood.

From the time we'd left Adelaide I had not shaved, thinking that I'd arrive home at least looking like an old salt. Being dark I did indeed have a reasonable show of face fungus. So arriving at the front door I secreted my gear out of sight (thinking that I wouldn't be recognised) then knocked on the door. Mum opened it and without hesitation said "Hello my darling, when are you going back?"

It was good to be home again and I enjoyed the weekend, my two-year-old brother had grown so much in the six months that I had been away and was chatting away excitedly. That Saturday evening just like every sailor home from the sea I headed for a pub in the High Street. There holding up the bar of the 'White Hart' was Mike Metcalf, an old mate from cadet days. He too was on leave, from an Elder Dempster ship where he was in his third year as an apprentice. We got pleasantly pleasant but my parents were not very impressed when I staggered through the front door that night with my back teeth awash!

I received a shock on Monday morning on returning to the ship. She'd gone! In fact she was just clearing the locks and moving out into the river. Frank had said be back by seven and here I was at six-forty-five! There was only one thing to do and that was to go to the Company's dock office and wait for 'Ginger' Moxley to appear. When he arrived he put on his 'holier than thou' attitude, threatening me with all sorts of dire consequences for missing my ship. I was ushered into the inner sanctum; the office of Mr. Harboard (The head man!) who showed his displeasure at my "inconsiderate carelessness." Eventually, after making me hang around for a couple of hours I was issued with a rail voucher for the trip to Cardiff. Before leaving I paid a visit to my old friend and 'mentor' Ernie Lagden whose office was in the next building along the dock. One of Ernie's responsibilities (perks) was to hold the keys to the P.L.A's. smallbore shooting range, this was housed in an old air raid bunker nearby. A dock policeman had recently confiscated a Beretta automatic pistol from a seaman in the Connaught Tavern and placed it in Ernie's care together with a handful of bullets. As I had at one time been the unit shooting champion (with a 'stuffed up' .303) Ernie invited me to go to the range and we fired off a few rounds each. I'm afraid I wasn't a very good pistol shot! But it was great fun.

I caught an early train from Paddington the next morning, arriving at the dockside in Cardiff about the same time as the Hororata. Feeling slightly abashed I slunk up the gangway to be greeted with some sly remarks from some of my 'mates.' Frank Newell gave me a bollicking

and said I should have returned the night before as everybody else had! He couldn't deny though that I'd been given seven a.m. as the deadline.

I had decided some time before, that I wouldn't do another trip on the Hororata. Nor did I consider staying with the New Zealand Shipping Company at that time. Fresh fields called so there was no disappointment when I was not asked the question "Are you coming back next trip?" The usual indication that you were wanted. Missing the ship at London must have 'blotted my copybook.'

For seventeen months Hororata had been my life and my home. I'd come to know her well. To love her and sometimes to hate her. To defend her and at times berate her. A mans first ship is like his first love, exciting, fascinating and frustrating. Above all unforgettable. During this time I'd learned a lot about life and about seamanship, sailed with some fine shipmates as well as some ratbags and as is the way with the sea would never meet most of them again. This second voyage had lasted six and a half months and I paid off in the same port where I'd first joined her. With just under a hundred pounds in crisp white fivers in my 'kick'; the world was my oyster!

THE END.

POSTSCRIPT

After completing my first two voyages on the Hororata I did a trip to South American and Caribbean ports on an old motor ship the Gascony, owned by the Royal Mail Steamship Co. Then re-joining the New Zealand Shipping Co. and serving on various vessels in the fleet I found myself back on the Hororata in 1954 for another voyage to New Zealand this time as an Able Seaman.

By then Frank Newell had been forced to retire and the new bosun was an Australian named George Muncaster (ex Shaw Savill) Paddy Nolan was now Lamptrimmer and the skipper was Capt. W.H.M.Smith or as he preferred to be called Montgomery-Smythe, hyphenating his last given name with his surname and pronouncing it *Smythe*. There was a story concerning this bit of vanity. An American canal pilot coming onto the bridge at Colon greeted the captain with a cheery “Good morning Captain Smith” Whereupon the portly skipper, drawing himself up to his full height replied “Smythe!” to which the pilot retorted. “Smith, Smythe, Shit or Shite! It’s all the same to me Cap’n!”



This photograph was taken during the 1954 voyage and includes some that had been on the earlier trips. They are from L to R rear, Jack Barman, Alec Murray, George Muncaster (bosun) then the ‘chippy’ he was there in 1950. The last chap is from Stornaway, can’t remember his name. In front from the left is myself then Paddy Nolan and “Duke” Telfer.

In 1967 Hororata paid her final visit to Wellington. I took the opportunity to take my six-year old son Alistair on board. It was for me a sad experience to see my old ship in such a dilapidated state. Frankie Newell would be turning over in his grave if he had seen her like that but she had given twenty-five years of useful service. She went to the ship-breakers at Kaohsiung later that year.