

Log of a Midshipman's First Trip

- Peter Martin

MV Calchas Voyage 57 -1968/9

Master	HK Timbrell
Mate	Phil Carr
Snr 2 nd Mate	N Moon
Jnr 2 nd Mate	Jim Morgan
3 rd Mate	Kenny Vick
Snr Midshipman	Oh Eng Hoe
Midshipman	Bill Catterall
Midshipman	Brian Dooley
Midshipman	Peter Martin

Thursday 17th October - Joined the Calchas at Vittoria Dock, Birkenhead with other cadets, Brian Dooley, Bill Catterall & O Eng Ho. Moved into the Halfdeck and stowed gear. The afternoon was spent walking about the ship and finding my way about. Talled specials into No1 Hold.

Friday 18th October - Started my correspondence course and was able to complete lesson 2 in navigation and lesson 1 in maths. On the bridge for engine trials standing by the telegraph. Given the weekend off so went home.

Sunday 20th October - Returned on board at 11pm

Monday 21st October - After breakfast into the chart room with the Snr 2nd Mate to muster all the charts required for the voyage. On the bridge for the marine superintendent's inspection. Boat and fire drill at 11am. Went with 3rd Mate to check all emergency equipment. Mate notified me of my watch. We were all sent ashore by the Mate to have haircuts! After tea went to check steering gear. Standby out of Birkenhead was at 20.15. Dropped Pilot at 22.30.

Tuesday 22nd October - On 12 - 4 watch with 2nd Mate

Wednesday 23rd October - Watches 'doubled' due to fog. Standby into Rotterdam at 22.30 Picked up the river pilot at 23.15 and berthed in Maashafen by midnight.

Thursday 24th October - Cargo watch this afternoon. Standby station on poop. Departed Rotterdam 20.00 cleared river by 22.00. Loaded 250 tons tinned milk.

Friday 25th October - Double watches due to fog on 12-4. Played chess with 7th Engineer

Saturday 26th October - Good visibility. Mate showed me how to use differential hygrometer to check humidity of holds. Saw film in the evening "Operation Bullshine".

Sunday 27th October - 12 – 4 watch this morning rest of the day off so did some 'office work'. Weather bright and clear. Overcast later wind SW 5.

Monday 28th October - Did 'pegging' in the morning, inspection at 0930. Spent rest of the day checking blocks and shackles with register. Weather cloudy, moderate sea occasional rain showers.

Tuesday 29th October - After cleaning Halfdeck spent the day on blocks & shackles. Sighted Canary Islands in the early afternoon. Was told to go and collect mail from everybody and to wait on poop for helicopter to take off mail! Fell for it!

Wednesday 30th October - Cleaning as normal, then blocks and shackles but this time allowed to apply grease and to move them to rightful places! Talk by Mate in afternoon on bridge etiquette. Played darts in the evening.

Thursday 31st October - Similar to the past few days. Caught an excess of sun and passed out. Went to bed after a cold shower! Weather getting very much hotter!

Friday 1st November - Cleaning and doing blocks. Helped to erect the pool on deck stb'd side no2 hatch. Enjoyed a swim later on.

Saturday 2nd November - Day off today, did some dhobi and in the evening watched a film on deck 'Texas Across The River'. Sea calm occasional shower which we altered course to avoid as Chinese sailors painting.

Sunday 3rd November - On 4-8 watches for this week. Did some steering to get my steering certificate.

Monday 4th November - On watch and then boat & fire drill at 10.00. Given huge smoke helmet and told to descend into the engine room through aft tunnel into prop shaft area. Not easy! Was shown how to take compass error with azimuth mirror using sun.

Tuesday 5th November - On watch; saw school of whales and exchanged signals with 'Glenalmond'. A game of chess with 7th in the evening followed by Bingo in the saloon.

Wednesday 6th November - Did compass error on watch and shown how to use radar (Kelvin Hughes 2C) and Mercury barometer. Did weather obs for met office.

Thursday 7th November - On watch, did some corrections to light lists and took compass error etc.

Friday 8th November - Last day on watch. 2nd Mate showed me how to take morning sight and worked it out, with help, using Longitude by Chronometer. Weather becoming poor. Heavy seas, much movement.

Saturday 9th November - Cleaned out Halfdeck and then 3rd mate gave us an hour on Morse. Rest of the day off. Film in the evening; "Strange bedfellows". Weather still poor wind force 7/8.

Sunday 10th November - Day off and so read etc. Reduced speed as forecastle taking a severe battering from the seas.

Monday 11th November - Sighted Capetown today. Spent the morning pumping water from the chain locker and forepeak. In the afternoon did chipping on the aft mast house. Weather moderated a little and launch came off Capetown with mail and fruit & vegetables. Weather deteriorated in the evening.

Tuesday 12th November - Chipping, scraping and applying 'red-lead' today on the aft mast house. Weather moderating all the time.

Wednesday 13th November - Yet more chipping in the morning. Did the rounds with 'Chippy' doing soundings in the afternoon. Some more signalling with the Snr 2nd mate in the early evening. Weather wind $\frac{3}{4}$, less swell and dry.

Thursday 14th November - Standby into Durban at 07.30. Rigged pilot-ladder. Brian Dooley left the ship due to a family problem – his father very ill. Helped with loading fresh water and caught a strange looking fish on a hand line. Chinese down aft took it off my hands. Left Durban and my first taste of Africa at 20.00. On pilot ladder again.

Friday 15th November - On day work. Did some painting and scraping on No1 foremast house. Helped to re-erect the pool.

Saturday 16th November - Day off today so did some of my correspondence course. Watched a film in the evening – "Warning Shot". Long low southerly swell.

Sunday 17th November - On 4-8 watch today. Had a try at meridian altitude at noon. Exchanged signals with Esso Cumbria before going of watch.

Monday 18th November - Day work; chipping aft contactor house followed by liberal dose of red lead paint.

Tuesday 19th November - Blocks and shackles with 2nd Mate in the morning; chipping in the afternoon. Very warm and still.

Wednesday 20th November - Checked rear position steering gear on the flat. Telemotor operated by two hand pumps. Very hard to keep steady resulting in wild yawing 20deg either side of the course! I can see why it's only used in an emergency. Did correspondence course in the afternoon.

Thursday 21st November - Chipped and scraped in the morning and painted in the afternoon. Very hot with light breezes. Saw swordfish jumping and found 12 flying fish on deck – passed to Chinese down aft – a delicacy.

Friday 22nd November - Cleaned out the Halfdeck. Did some signalling with 3rd Mate. In the afternoon examined by the Mate on Regulation 18 – got it right. Had a swim and participated in horseracing in the evening. Showed a small profit of 4 pounds 18 shillings. Once again very hot and airless. Slept on deck in homemade hammock.

Saturday 23rd November - Day off. Cleaned out Halfdeck, did some signalling and sat with R/O and tried to decipher traffic list from Portishead. Disastrous!!

Sunday 24th November - On 4-8 watch so had a try at some stars using Marc St Hilaire – very slow and despite being in the Indian Ocean was able to fix our position somewhere in Death Valley, Arizona. Still much to learn.

Monday 25th November - On 4 – 8. Fire alarm at 11.15 Scavenge space fire. Quickly brought under control. Repairs took until 17.30 so hoisted "Not Under Command" balls and threw a fishing line over the side.

Tuesday 26th November - On watch. When off watch had a swim, read a book and listened to the wireless. Had another go at a sight and was improved being only 6 miles away from everybody else. Took humidity readings.

Wednesday 27th November - Entered Malacca Straits and saw quite a lot of traffic including Chinese Junks and small fishing craft. Off Penang during my watch.

Thursday 28th November - Picked up pilot at Raffles Light about 21.00. Was told that no berth was available and so anchored in the Roads.

Friday 29th November - Alongside at 05.30 finished watch at 08.00 and went ashore to see an old school friend at RAF Tengah. Standby out of Singapore was at 18.00. Was in the engine room attending to the movement book. Weather very hot and humid.

Saturday 30th November - Last day on watch. Interesting time avoiding fishing boats in the Taiwan Strait. On radar there are many hundreds of them. None of them show any lights until the last possible minute and then a torch is switched on! Didn't hit any and 2nd Mate tells me he has never known of one being run down. An absolute miracle.

Sunday 1st December - Large US aircraft (An Orion) flew over us several times at low altitude. They use us for interception practice although I'm sure they also want to make sure that we aren't a Chinese ship loaded with supplies for the North!

Monday 2nd December - Day work, painting in the morning and sanding teak rails in the afternoon. Captain told me I was lucky and that in his day it was done with sand and canvas. I had sandpaper. How fortunate I feel!!

Tuesday 3rd December - On 8 – 12 watch. Arrived in Hong Kong at 18.30, tied up at Holt's Wharf by 20.00. Went ashore for a walk about and was back on board shortly after midnight.

Wednesday 4th December - Cargo watch 0600 – 1300. Afterwards went to Seaman's Club in Kowloon for a swim and bowling

Thursday 5th December - In the morning went on the Star Ferry to Hong Kong Side and up on the Peak Tramway. Cargo watch in the afternoon. No3 deep tank now empty and being prepared for palm oil on return trip. Shoreside labour cleaning sides wit wire brushes on very suspect scaffolding made from bamboo.

Friday 6th December - Cleaning strum boxes and checking bilge lines in empty holds. In the afternoon an organised trip for all midshipmen and 2nd Mate to Royal Observatory, Kai Tak and up into the New Territories. Watched a radio-sonde being released.

Saturday 7th December - Standby from Hong Kong at 11.00. On deck battening down hatches and tidying up. After that on watch. Did two tricks at the wheel.

Sunday 8th December - Rigged bosun's chairs and painted Sampson posts at no 4 hatch. In afternoon did office work. Weather overcast, slight swell and oily sea.

Monday 9th December - Rest day today so cleaned out Halfdeck, did some correspondence work and read a book.

Tuesday 10th December - On 4-8 watch so was able to take a sight and work out. Getting better, only 7 miles difference from 2nd Mate. Weather - Getting colder, dull & overcast.

Wednesday 11th December - On watch. Arrived in Yokohama at 10.00. On bridge for standby. Anchored off for the night as no berth available. Went ashore by launch with the R.O. Stood anchor watch until midnight. Finished 'Animal Farm'.

Thursday 12th December - Moved to buoys in the morning and watched as cable was 'broken' and shackled to buoy. After this cargo watch until lunchtime. In the afternoon went with others to a bath-house. Very relaxing and clean. Stood buoy watch in the evening.

Friday 13th December - Cleaned Halfdeck in the morning. After this did some washing. On cargo duty with 3rd Mate in afternoon. Supervised discharge of octel drums from forward well deck.

Saturday 14th December - Left Yokohama at 0800. Nasty moment when we encountered a Japanese tanker on the way out. End on; we altered to starboard, he altered to port. Hard-a-port & full astern - Missed him by 2 cables. Saw the USS Enterprise and dipped our ensign to it. Weather - Cold, drizzle SW wind and slight sea.

Sunday 15th December - Arrived at Kobe 08.30. Rigged gangway. Made fast to buoy. Went ashore in afternoon. Cargo watch 18.00 - midnight.

Monday 16th December - Given a day off so Bill & I took train up Mt Roko and did a 6 mile hike in the hills. Quite cold up there and snow about. As we were working cargo all night did deck watch midnight to 07.00.

Tuesday 17th December - Caught up on sleep in the morning and deck watch in the afternoon. Discharged machinery from No5.

Wednesday 18th December - Cargo in the morning. Helped rig 'Jumbo' derrick and lift heavy items from No2. On watch again at 20.00 and worked through until 02.00.

Thursday 19th December - Discharge almost completed and so went alongside to commence loading in the afternoon. Trip ashore in evening to Mission with 3rd Engineer.

Friday 20th December - Continued loading, tallied specials into strong rooms. Standby for leaving Kobe 17.00. On the bridge until relieved at 20.00. Weather Clear and cold in the morning. Fog later in day.

Saturday 21st December - Arrived in Nagoya early hours. Tied up and started cargo immediately. Loading into 1,2 & 5. Cargo watch until 0800. Left Nagoya afternoon

Sunday 22nd December - Arrived Shimizu very early. Very congested but quite beautiful. Wonderful view of 'Fujisan' at sunrise Sun reflected of snow covered peak. Cargo work started straight away. Docker hurt in No1 – he was caught between coving and a sling of canned pineapple. Taken ashore for treatment. OM had to visit him with flowers later in the day and to 'apologise' for the incident?!? Left 18.00. On bridge for standby.

Monday 23rd December - On 4 – 8 watch through Inland Sea. Very pretty but quite congested.
Weather quite cold but very clear.

Tuesday 24th December - On 4 – 8 again. Continued through Inland Sea with assistance of pilot.

Wednesday 25th December - Arrived Moji at 08.00 started cargo loading at once. All gathered in Lounge at noon. After several glasses of beer, to the Saloon for a really good Christmas Lunch. Returned to Lounge after. Standby to leave Moji 19.30. On 8-12 watch.

Thursday 26th December - Arrived at Pusan 09.30. Started unloading last of outward cargo – china clay from No2 and general from No6. Loaded 2000 sewing machines into No4. Received some mail from home including Christmas cards. Spent an hour writing back.

Friday 27th December - Sailed for Hong Kong 09.30. Put on 4-8 watch
Weather slightly warmer with good visibility and calm sea.

Saturday 28th December - On watch. Did morning stars with 2nd mate. Took me ages to work them out and found that I had made a bit of a mess of the calculations. To be expected.

Sunday 29th December - After coming off watch did some of my correspondence course. Took sight in the afternoon and obtained a decent position line. 2nd Mate very encouraging! Weather becoming much warmer with light s'ly breezes.

Monday 30th December - Arrived in Hong Kong ahead of schedule and moored at buoy A1 by 08.30. Went ashore in the morning to meet up with a pal and back in time to stand deck watch at 16.00.
Weather overcast sky, warm, light s'ly breeze.

Tuesday 31st December - Cargo watch in the morning until noon. Tallied specials into No1 strong room. Went ashore in the evening. Ended up seeing in the New Year at the Mariners Club in Nathan Road.

Wednesday 1st January 1969 - Cargo watch 0400 – noon. Ashore to buy bits and pieces. Back at 16.30

Thursday 2nd January - Left Hong Kong 07.00. On 4 – 8 watch. Did dhobi & office work. Weather Very warm Light s'ly breeze. Slight e'ly swell.

Friday 3rd January - On watch. Did star sight, compass error and kept lookout. Continued with reading off watch. Allen Villiers – Down Easters.

Saturday 4th January - Practised plotting on the radar during the morning watch; no shortage of targets as we're back in Taiwanese fishing boat alley again.

Sunday 5th January - Sighted coast of Malaya in the late afternoon. Signalled by US Navy and made response. Vietnam coast patrol. Did an hour on the wheel. Weather Very hot & humid. Some rain showers.

Monday 6th January - Tied up in Keppel Harbour at godowns by 08.00. Went ashore to see friends; hacked my way through 9 holes of golf never really having done this before! Back aboard by 22.00 then immediately on cargo watch.

Tuesday 7th January - Loading palm oil into No3 Deep tanks. Engineers finished installing heating coils and testing them beforehand. Moved berth afterward from HPKO loading area. Invited out to dinner by other friends at HMS Terror. Jolly evening. Delivered back to ship at midnight.

Wednesday 8th January - As no night work tonight, on daywork cargo watch. More general cargo loaded and No4 hold deep tank being waxed in preparation for loading latex in Penang. Curious process. Every inch of the steelwork must be covered by wax as the ammonia in the latex will do nasty things to it. Lloyd's surveyor will come and inspect in Penang prior to loading. As there is gas involved, pressure valves must be fitted to deck vents. Mate says that a full load of palm oil or latex pays for a voyage.

Thursday 9th January - Cargo work this morning, spent afternoon readying for sea. Sailed at 18.30 for Penang.

Friday 10th January - As we were ahead of schedule we hove to in the Malacca Straits and sent away the motor lifeboat. Rowed, motored and hoisted a small sail. I was given ship's hand cranked radio to test. Sent ships call sign, GMSS, three times and recd a very loud reply on 500kc/s. Did same on 2182 r/t and got powerful response. Back aboard with no injuries and continued to Penang. 2nd Mate told me later that piracy was still quite common in these waters, thankfully 'jolly roger' not sighted! Arrived in Penang 20.30. Started loading at once

Saturday 11th January - On cargo watch whilst latex was loaded. Smell of ammonia is dreadful. All done by 1500 and sailed 15.30. Rigged pilot ladder. Did 4 – 8 watch.

Sunday 12th January - Day off today so set about tackling correspondence course backlog. In the afternoon helped to rig the swimming pool and enjoyed a swim.

Monday 13th January - Day work so spent the morning checking chain stoppers, chain slings & cargo hooks. Helped to stow mooring ropes and wires with the lamptrimmer in the afternoon. Knocked off at 15.00, had a swim. Weather quite hot. Wind ssw; ship rolling easily.

Tuesday 14th January - Checked all vent plugs and covers then started on all guy derrick deck shackles. Caught up with some reading in the evening. Seafarer's Education Library running a bit low, almost reduced to reading Louis L'Amour and Harold Robbins.

Wednesday 15th January - Spent day refilling wooden casks in all 4 lifeboats. Checked all supplies and added some tinned milk the boxes of which had been sewn up in canvas.

Thursday 16th January - Checked all runner shackles and hooks in the morning. Mate told me to spray paint complete prom deck with new airless sprayer. Bosun and men ahead of me masking of windows, doors etc with paper and tape and me following behind with compressor, gun, tank etc. Messy process but quite fun. Noon position 10° 00'S 73°24'E - Days run 410 miles.

Friday 17th January - More spray painting with bosun today. Noon position 40° 02'S 68° 01'E. Days run 398 miles

Saturday 18th January - As on daywork no work today so free to swim, sunbathe and relax. Played deck tennis with R/O and got thrashed. Did some more office work in the evening; only 7 lessons to complete before home. Noon 18°05'S 62°21'E. Days run 407 miles

Sunday 19th January - Another rest day. More correspondence course, swimming. Took noon sight but difficult to find a spot on the bridge wing as there were 7 of us trying to take an altitude! Noon 21° 47'S 56° 24'E Days run 403 miles

Monday 20th January - ON 12 - 4 watch with Snr 2nd Mate. Took morning sight and noon fix. 25°01'N 50°13'E Days run 391miles. Weather Warm SE'ly breeze.

Tuesday 21st January - On Watch, several compass errors, morning sight & noon. Saw 'green flash' for first time after sunset. Mate showed me section in Admiralty Sailing Directions about. Also observed 12deg halo around the moon. Had a try at compass error using moon. More difficult to work out but got it right in the end. Noon position 28°00'S 44°08'E Days Run 372 miles.

Wednesday 22nd January - Had a swim after coming off watch in the morning, followed by boat & fire drill. (B.O.T.Sports?). Given load of Light Lists to correct in the chartroom, cutting up and sticking in. Like being back at infant's school. Noon Position 30°30'S 37°39'E Days run 371 miles.

Thursday 23rd January - Had a play with the Marconi DF. Using Port Elizabeth, Lorenzo Marques & East London got a fix which was within about 5 miles of a celestial one. Had a swim and did some more correspondence work. Tidied up the library in a desperate attempt to find something I hadn't read. Found Micky Spillane 'Stone for Danny Fisher' - Absolute crap! Noon 32°29'S 30° 57'E. Run 367 miles. Weather Cloudy, clear low NNE swell

Friday 24th January - Off Capetown and took on mail, fresh vegetables etc, Read mail. Helped dismantle swimming pool. Rough weather forecast ahead. Noon 32°48'S 27°18'E. Run 377 miles.

Saturday 25th January - Day off today. Cleaned out Halfdeck and practised Morse & useful knots with the Bosun. Film in the evening Carry on Regardless.

Sunday 26th January - Back on watch. Went round at end of watch checking palm oil temperatures in all deep tanks. Small ullage hole with very long chain carrying three thermometers; top, middle & bottom. Steam coils will need to be turned on when we are a week away from discharge so it can be pumped out in liquid form otherwise it'll be buckets & spades for all. Noon 22° 04'S 8° 04'E Run 395miles. Back on GMT.

Tuesday 28th January - Did cleaning in morning then sent to paint hatch covings on No3. Finished that by 4 and so did hatch locking bars. Noon 16° 49'S 3°49'E. Run 396 miles. Weather ESE wind, cloudy & clear becoming warmer

Wednesday 29th January - Painted & sprayed all day in an attempt to have the ship looking smart for arrival in Liverpool....Soon! Noon 11°40'S 0°22'W. Run 393 miles. Had a talk with the 2nd Engineer about 'slip'. He explained to me the theory and also said that according to his calculations the engines would arrive back home before the ship!

Thursday 30th January - Worked with Bosun touching up paintwork on centrecastle. In the evening final push with office work. Noon 6°25'S 4°31'W Run 400 miles.

Friday 31st January - Painted roof of forward contactor house and lamptrimmer's stores. Boat and fire drill at 1600. Noon 1° 13'S 8° 38'W. Day's run 398 miles.

Saturday 1st February - Day off so all turned to and scrubbed out Halfdeck. After lunch played deck tennis & deck cricket. In the evening did some signal coding & decoding and attended horse racing evening. Noon 4° 03'N 12° 47'W Days run 402 miles. Weather Flat calm, very warm several rain showers which we altered course for.

Sunday 2nd February - Day off but called to watch in the afternoon due to sudden bad visibility. Noon 9° 04'N 16° 44'W Weather Calm, slight sea very hazy

Monday 3rd February - On 12 - 4 watch due to continued reduced visibility and a broken down radar. Dhobi in the morning and ironing in the evening. Noon 15°11'N 17° 47'W Run 378 miles Weather hazy in the morning but clearing at noon, light NW wind & low swell

Tuesday 4th February - Worked with Mate typing, very slowly, list of defects for repair when home. Coloured in cargo plans (like being at school again). Noon 21° 34'N 17° 39'W Run 378 miles.

Wednesday 5th February - Arrived at Las Palmas 15.00. Anchored off until 16.30 when pilot took us alongside. Took on fuel and loaded 60 tons of boxed tomatoes. Bought a tablecloth from bumboat man. Noon 27° 22'N 15° 27'W Weather Light ESE wind, low swell, cloudy & clear.

Thursday 6th February - Left Las Palmas 01.30. Did some Morse signalling in the early morning and managed to understand most of it. On the wheel for 2 hours.

Noon 30° 30'N 14° 33'W Run 153 miles. Weather Low SW'ly swell Sw'ly wind force 3. Cooler, cloudy & clear.

Friday 7th February - On watch. After got out suitcases and sorted my gear. Did washing and packed tropical gear. Final session of office work in the evening.
Noon 36° 26'N 12°26'W Run 371 miles

Saturday 8th February - Everybody appears to be suffering from the 'Channels' – Even the skipper smiled when I tripped over with a mug of cocoa! Saw a film in the evening; 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. Noon 42°28'N 9°53'W Run 390 miles

Sunday 9th February - On the 4 – 8 and sighted Bishop Rock at 18.15. Cleared out the Halfdeck and packed rest of gear. Noon 48° 05'N 7° 42'W Run 341 miles

Monday 10th February - Standby into Liverpool was 14.30 after taking on pilot at Pt Lynas. Tied up in East Brocklebank Dock at 16.45. Signed off (ENG2) in lounge and said goodbye to all. Caught taxi home and arrived at 19.00

16th October 2005 --- Reflections

Seems like an age ago, it has certainly brought back many memories and 'layed' a few ghosts! To be able to do the same thing again with the benefit of hindsight would be wonderful.

Some people say that you rarely made friends at sea you merely had a succession of what were described as 'Board of Trade acquaintances'. This is partly true, but as I was to find out on many subsequent trips, occasionally one did meet a kindred spirit who would remain a friend for life!