

# MV AUREOL VOYAGE 166 + 'MINICRUISE'



***A personal log from Peter Martin***

Master	Captain RG Williams	Call Sign	GMGJ
Chief Officer	Roy Tier	Net Tonnage	7689
Snr 2nd Officer	Alistair Wilkinson	GRT	14,083
Jnr 2nd Officer	Peter Lloyd-Jones	Length OA	538 ft
3rd Officer	Brian Noble	Beam	70 ft
Cadet	Peter Martin	Speed	15.5 kts
Cadet	Malcolm Knight	Engines	2 x 4 cylinder Doxfords

## **Wednesday 9th December 1970**

Signed on Articles at India Buildings and went back to Aulis for pre-sailing interview with Jim Turner. Was given work to do including an essay about the voyage, - thought I'd left that behind at school several years ago! By bus & taxi to join at Brocklebank Dock. Found 1st Mate and told him I was aboard. I spent the next few hours wandering about trying to familiarise myself with the ship.

## **Thursday 10th December**

Called at 0600 and helped prepare for 'locking' out into the Mersey and berthing at Princess Landing Stage. Before this, boat & fire drill. Sent away in motorboat. Bit of a shambles really! Left dock and berthed a Landing Stage by 14.00. In chartroom with Snr 2nd sorting out charts etc. Pilot aboard 1700 and away by 17.30. Early night as on 12-4 in the morning. Weather - Cold, misty SE wind force 3 Temperature 5degC.

## **Friday 11th December**

On 12 - 4 with Snr 2nd. Uneventful trip down through Irish Sea. Two compass errors, one on gyro repeater & one on standard compass on monkey island. Bed at 04.10! Called at 08.00 for breakfast. We have tables in the 1st Class Dining Room. Food is very good and the choice large. Nigerian stewards wedge the menu in a fork and wave it in front of you momentarily so you can choose. 10.00, Muster for all hands and passengers. I'm in charge of No 6 Boat - the responsibility is huge! Showed passengers correct use of lifebelts paying particular attention to

very pretty young lady called Patricia who is travelling to Lagos with her parents! On watch again at noon. Into the Bay of Biscay and rolling seas. I distinct lack of passengers at dinner tonight. Had a beer in the Officers Bar and then turned in.  
Weather – Slightly warmer at 9.6deg SW wind at 7 moderating to 6. Visibility good.

### **Saturday 12th December**

On watch at midnight. Lookout on wing of the bridge as old man about. Called into wheelhouse by Snr 2nd at 01.30 and told to make some cocoa. Spent next hour or so correcting Admiralty Light Lists. Sent below at 03.40 to do accommodation rounds etc.

Before lunch went to the ship's shop and bought a decent pair of Zeiss sunglasses. Good thing about this is you can buy on 'tick' and settle up at the end of the trip! Careful not to get carried away. Had an assignation with certain young lady after I came off watch at 16.00 and explained to her how derricks were rigged. I was amazed to find we could send clothing to the ship's laundry free of charge except for a 'dash' to my cabin steward at the end of the trip. Went to cinema after dinner and saw 'Carry on Up The Khyber' – hilarious!

Penned a few lines to Ma & Papa ready for posting at Las Palmas. Glass of beer in bar before bed.  
Weather - Even warmer 12C, clear slight sea.

### **Sunday 13th December**

On watch and after hand-over etc spent an hour with Senior 2nd learning star identification using an American device which consisted of a base plate and a plastic disc overlaid, the edge of which was set to the LHA. This should make picking of stars for sights a great deal easier. Took two compass errors. Turned in at 04.20 having completed accommodation rounds. Late morning took a sight and worked out using longitude by chronometer. Listened to World Service. Noon sight. After coming off watch at 16.00 had a short nap. Opened the bar at 17.00. Went to dinner and then turned in at 20.00.

Weather - Improving daily. Much warmer, gentle SW wind clear blue sky.

### **Monday 14th December**

On watch normal time and carried on with star identification. Managed to take a latitude using Polaris. Turned in at 04.15 usual duties completed. Up in time for boat drill at 09.00. Watch in the afternoon and took two sights. Worked each of these twice, once using Long by Chronometer and once using Marc St Hilaire. Results quite satisfactory but MSH a quicker and easier calculation. Game of deck cricket against a team of passengers at 16.30.

Weather – Temperature 65F. Warm S'y breeze and blue skies.

### **Tuesday 15th December**

On watch as normal. Did a spell steering using hand electric system; very different to telemotor system with a great tendency to 'over steer' at first. Soon got the hang of it.

Standby into Las Palmas 08.20. The VHF radio operator at Las Palmas Radio has the most alluring voice. I asked Jnr 2nd Mate about her and he told me not to be fooled as she was about 25 stone and looked like the back end of a bus! Cargo watch noon – 16.00. Had a chance to set foot on dry land when I went to read the draught. Took in bunkers and fresh water. Some cargo including mailbags loaded. Sailed at 16.30. Turned in at 20.00.

Weather – Hot at 75degF, slight heat haze and calm seas. (Swimming Pool filled)

### **Wednesday 16th December**

Called at 23.45 for watch at midnight. Some exercises given to me in star identification and Morse code. Took a latitude using Polaris at 03.00. Did met observations at 03.30. Rounds before turning in at 04.15. Up at 08.00 for breakfast. Morning sight. Worked up morning sight to noon position. Best result ever! Within 1 mile of my DR position. Went for a swim after coming off watch. Boat & fire drill at 10.00. Simulation of fire in No2 hold.

In the evening 'Horse Racing' by the swimming pool.

Weather - Very warm, 80degF, Calm sea low SW'ly swell.

### **Thursday 17th December**

During the 12 - 4 watch kept close observations on the radar as we were in and out of rain squalls. Took several compass errors and checked chronometers with time signal from Rugby. After breakfast took a morning sight and ran it up to Meridian altitude at noon. In afternoon watch 2nd Mate showed me how to take and work out an ex-meridian sight. Kept the watch while the 2nd was in the chartroom sorting out charts for arrival at Freetown & Monrovia. Passed close to Windsor Castle and exchanged signals with them by aldis. Had a swim before dinner and then turned in.

Weather - Rain showers, warm cloudy but bright.

### **Friday 18th December**

On the morning watch signalled over 5 ships by Morse and received answers from all. Spoke to two of them on the VHF. Had a chat with 2nd regarding 'buoyage'. During the afternoon watch had a rare treat! Was sent down aft with an AB to rig and test Patent Sounding Machine. Interesting device invented by Lord Kelvin (of Kelvin Hughes fame). Consists of a deck mounted machine with a dial on the top and a drum mounted vertically between the uprights. An arm is lowered over the side and the wire reeved through a pulley. A very heavy weight is fixed to the end of the wire and a glass tube harnessed, open end down, to the wire. The whole weighted line is suspended over the water and at a given moment the brake is released. The wire runs out rapidly and the weight falls to the bottom. It is then wound back aboard and the glass tube is unfastened from the line and set against a wooden scale. The approximate sounding is read off the scale. A note is taken of the amount of wire released from the dial on top. We were able to read 160 fathoms from the scale on the glass tube.

Had a swim after coming off watch and then a few beers. Turned in at 20.45.

Weather - Clear sky, very warm, 80degF, and hazy.

### **Saturday 19th December**

Standby into Freetown was at 0900. Alongside quay by 21.15 and commenced passenger disembarkation and discharge of mail & small amount of cargo and passenger's baggage. Left Freetown at 14.30 after embarking 100+ deck passengers and a Master at Arms. He is an ex-NCO in King's African Rifles and very smart! He seems to salute everybody white in a uniform that moves. Most un-nerving!

Went to cinema in the early evening and saw 'Doctor in Trouble'.

Weather - Overcast, very humid, becoming brighter later. Calm sea.

### **Sunday 20th December**

Arrived in Monrovia at 10.00. Stationed down aft for mooring. Straight to cargo watch until departure at 15.00. About 30 passengers left here along with mail and some 'specials' from the strong rooms. Early evening a birthday party in our bar for Reg, one of our junior engineers. Good time had by all! To bed at 21.00 ready for 12 - 4 watch.

Weather - Very hot, slightly hazy and flat calm sea.

### **Monday 21st December**

Observed a 'halo' around the moon when on watch. Was able to measure it with a sextant and found it to be 22deg across. 2nd Mate told me this was quite normal and was due to dust in upper atmosphere, possibly from the Sahara. Sometimes they can measure 15 degrees.

Morning sight and lunchtime 'noon'. Sorted some stowage plans for 1st Officer during afternoon watch, ready for Lagos. Boat drill for all in the afternoon. Had a game of darts with 2nd Mate and a drink. Particularly good Palm Oil Stew for dinner. Turned in full up.

### **Tuesday 22nd December**

Morning watch and then to bed for a few hours. Standby into Tema 10.30. Off then until noon when back on deck watch until 16.00. Cargo finished by 15.30 and standby to leave 17.30. After dinner played in first round of table tennis championship. I soundly thrashed Dick the 3rd Engineer.

Weather - Slight breeze from the south. Slight swell, cloudy & clear.

### **Wednesday 23rd December**

Arrived at Lagos 10.00 and tied up at Apapa by 10.30. As a Mailboat we seem to have priority which is as well as there are several hundred ships at anchor off Tarkwa loaded to the brim with cement. Some have been there months! All passenger, cabin & deck, ashore almost immediately. 1st Officer gave us the day off to go ashore. Went by ferry to Lagos and did a little shopping. Back then by ferry to the Metropole Hotel in Apapa for a beer and a swim.

Weather – Very humid and overcast.

### **Thursday 24th December**

On cargo watch at midday and supervised the discharge of 30+ cars in No2 cardeck. All finished by 15.00. Embarked a full complement of passengers for our brief Christmas Mini-cruise. Left Apapa at 16.00. Muster of passengers at 17.00 for a boat drill. Usual sorting out of lifebelts and muster stations etc. Set course 180deg at slow speed heading to the Equator.

Weather – Clear, calm and very hot (over 95deg f)

### **Friday 25th December**

On watch at midnight. Very un-eventful. Invited to Passengers Christmas Dance so into a 'monkey-suit' and to the lounge. Some of us youngsters were cautioned by the Captain to 'behave in a gentlemanly fashion' and not to 'monopolise the younger lady passengers'. What cryptic comments. We were permitted to sign for drinks to entertain passengers endorsing the chit 'OCS' – on company service. A rare treat! Was able to demonstrate my knowledge of astronomy to young lady called Zena on the boatdeck.

Weather – Not quite sure.

### **Saturday 26th December**

Arrived and crossed the Equator at 16.30. King Neptune arrived in style supported by Nymphs, mermaids & merman. The court was opened and sundry malefactors were called before him for processing. Shaving was carried out and ducking in the pool. Certificates issued to all who appeared before him.

On watch at midnight; increased speed and reversed course for prompt arrival in Lagos.

Weather – Westerly wind, clear sky and temperature 90degF.

### **Sunday 27th December**

Arrived in Lagos at 0730. Off duty until noon. In the afternoon spent time 'tallying' ingots of tin. Worked through until 04.30 following day. After a sleep went to visit the 'Egori' several berths along from us.

Weather – Unchanged from yesterday, very humid.

### **Monday 28th December**

Cleaned wells & scuppers in the morning in all holds. Finished by lunchtime. Spent the evening tallying ingots of tin. Worked through until completion after midnight. Some visitors from the 'Oti' & 'Obuasi' in the afternoon.

Weather – Very humid, overcast and still

### **Tuesday 29th December**

Engine trials this morning. Sent with letters to Russian ship, 'Gregor Lanovich' & 'Oti' warning them. Talled in some more tin ingots, about 160 tons, finished at 0200 following morning. These ingots are very valuable hence the care in counting in.

Weather – Clear, dry and very hot.

### **Wednesday 30th December**

Departure from Lagos at noon, bound for Takoradi. Down aft with Snr 2nd Mate. On watch at 1600 – took an amplitude at sunset and then four stars. Visited Officer's bar after coming off watch and had a glass or two, of beer. Heated discussion with Sixth Engineer (Reg) about the Fijian Touring Team!

Weather – Slightly cooler, cooling breeze, calm sea with southerly breeze.

### **Thursday 31st December**

Arrived in Takoradi at 11.00. Was given a few hours off and so went with a small group of passengers to visit Elmina Castle, built by the Portuguese in the 16th Century. Had a good look around and back on board by 15.30. Departure from Takoradi was at 16.30. On watch from 16.00 to 20.00.

Weather – Calm, fierce sun with slight breeze.

### **Friday 1st January 1971**

Went into the bar at a few minutes before midnight and saw in the New Year. Played a very silly game called 'Pass The Haggis' (devised by Reg) but withdrew at 0045 as I was on watch at 0400. Saw the traditional 16 bells rung at midnight (8 by oldest member of crew followed by 8 from the youngest). After lunch had a swim. Boat drill was at 16.30, into my afternoon watch.

Weather – Very hot, slight southerly breeze, low westerly swell & cloudless sky.

### **Saturday 2nd January**

Arrived in Monrovia at 11.30. Loaded some rubber and mail. Left at 16.00. After coming off watch at 20.00, did some 'office work'.

Weather – Dull, overcast, very humid. Superb electrical storm away to the north.

### **Sunday 3rd January**

Arrived in Freetown at 09.30 then stood cargo watch until noon. All deck passengers ashore as well as 'Kroo' boys. Later in the afternoon felt rather unwell so went to see the doc. Was packed off to my bunk after having been dosed with the legendary 'Black Draught'.

### **Wednesday 6th January**

Well enough to stand a watch so went on the 4 – 8. Back on watch at noon. Played deck cricket against a select team of lady passengers at 1700. We 'allowed' them to win! Drinks and fraternising in the Cabin Class Bar afterwards.

Weather – A little cooler, easterly swell clear sky.

### **Thursday 7th January**

Had a busy time on watch, exchanged signals with 5 or 6 ships and received replies from all. My Morse speed is now becoming better. Took sight of Regulus & Polaris. Had a chat about buoyage. Arrived in Las Palmas at 10.00. We had to anchor off the harbour for an hour due to congestion. Tied up at 11.30. Loaded several hundred boxes of tomatoes into aft hold. Managed to write a couple of brief letters home. Went ashore to take draughts after taking on fuel. Sailed at 15.30. In the bar at 17.30, had dinner at 19.00 and turned in at 19.45.

Weather – Colder, cloudy. Strong Easterly wind with a southerly swell.

### **Friday 8th January**

Did some more signalling on watch and was asked to work out the trim /stability for arrival at Liverpool. Very complicated and only managed it with a great deal of help from Snr 2nd. During the afternoon watch completed a cargo plan for the port relief officer.

Read a little before turning in. Changed back into 'Blues' today.

Weather – Cooler, moderate westerly wind and swell. Ship rolling rather easily. Clear sky.

### **Saturday 9th January**

Had a chat with 'Esso Scotia' while on watch. First by lamp and then on VHF. Massive, 243,000 tons. Same course and speed as us about 10 miles away. We seem to have a slight edge on speed and by the end of the watch he was a little astern of us. Took a Polaris latitude at 0300. Got up at 10.00 and had a tidy up. Packed a few items. Did one or two jobs on watch which the Snr 2nd described as 'boring but essential'.

My bar duty in the evening, turned in at 20.00.

Weather – Wind south easterly 5 or 6. Clear visibility. Rolling easily.

**Sunday 10th January**

Still able to chat to Esso Scotia on watch, we will head North up to Liverpool and she will go west to Rotterdam later this evening. Abeam Cape Finisterre at 04.00. During the morning packed a few bits and received / paid my bar bill. During afternoon watch, apart from keeping a lookout, had a play with an interesting navigation system called 'Consol'. Set up during the war and requires no special equipment other than a chart. Used three stations, Bushmills, Ploenis & Lugo. Got three position lines which were surprisingly accurate.

Weather – Misty patches, confused sea with westerly wind.

**Monday 11th January**

Picked up Liverpool Pilot off Pt Lynas. And berthed in Brocklebank Dock by noon. All passengers ashore. Handed over to relief crew, packed my bags and away by taxi, a short drive to home in Birkenhead.

**Summary:-**

My first, but not last, experience of a 'Mail' boat. Hard work but great experience and fun. Some years later I did another two trips on the 'Aureol' but the die was cast and she was soon to move to Southampton as port of departure from UK. Shortly after this she was sold off and the service which had been maintained for many years ceased.

I feel privileged to have served on this route. It taught me a great deal about seafaring and life in general.