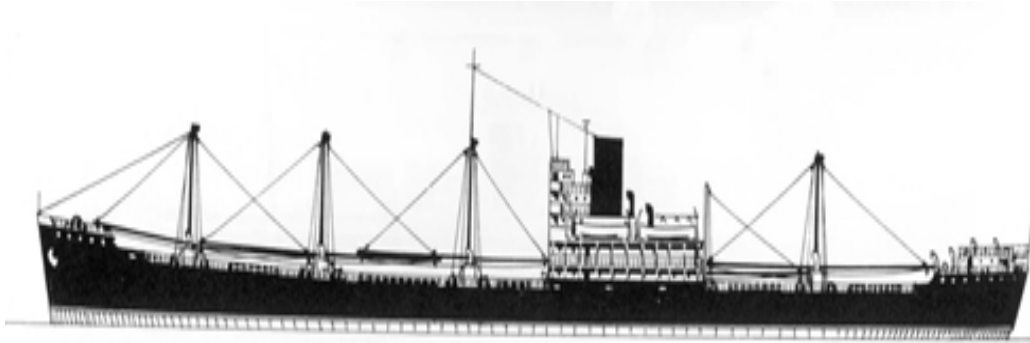


# MORE TIME ASHORE

A series of short stories about his life at sea

by Tommy Mitchell



*ELYSIA (III), EUCADIA (I)*

The 'Eucadia' returned to Liverpool in August 1957 where we were paid off. My mate and I spent much of our leave together as we shared much the same interests, 'wine women and song' though the song part was more dancing than singing. Most of our evenings were generally spent in the better quality bars in Glasgow or in one of the dance halls, sometimes a combination of both. At the rate we were spending our cash, it wasn't long before it began to run out and we had to think either of returning to sea or taking a job ashore. I was all for returning to sea, but my mate reckoned that he'd had almost enough and was going to try for a job ashore. He was a tall guy of about 6ft and felt sure that he would be accepted for the Police Force. I on the other hand, was just a half inch over 5ft 8 and I knew that the minimum height for the Glasgow Force was 5ft 9ins. Anyway I decided to give it a go and went to the police recruiting office. I didn't get very far with the interview however as the first thing that they do is measure your height. Mind you, the recruiting officer was very nice about it and really tried to get me to stretch that vital half inch, but to no avail. The only advice he could jokingly offer me, was to get some Glasgow 'hard man' to hit me on the head in the hope that it would raise a lump, in which case I should come back and get measured before it subsided. I was of course disappointed but there was nothing I could do about it, apart from his light-hearted suggestion and I wasn't about to do that.

As usual I met my mate that night and told him how I had got on. He as yet hadn't made any attempt to find a job, but within a week or so he was accepted for the force. I on the other hand found a job as a maintenance fitter with Marley Tiles, a roof tile manufacturer in Bishopbriggs. Again, I was finding it difficult to settle down to the humdrum life, and felt that I needed something else to take my mind off, or at least replace what I missed. The excitement of the sea! I managed to save enough money to buy a second hand car. It was a small car but it looked quite sporty at that time, to be exact, it was a 1939 Flying Standard Coupe and it became the love of my life for a long while. I will never forget the day I went to pick up the car from the dealer. His place was less than a quarter mile from my house and was on the same road. After the exchange of money for car and paperwork, I got into it and started the engine. "Now what do I do?" I asked. (You see I had never driven a car in my life.) Oh! Yes! I knew what pedal did what and that I had to use gears, but I had only ever seen it being done, never actually tried it. The dealer was very much taken aback and advised me not to attempt to drive the car, that he would drive it home for me. I convinced him that once the car was on the main road, I thought I could manage, not a lot of people had cars in these days, so the roads were very quiet. He gave in reluctantly but insisted that he drive it down the narrow lane from his place to the main road. After that he told me that I could do as I pleased. I don't think he was worried about the car, but more about me doing damage to his premises. Actually he could have reported me to the police since I didn't have a driving licence, not even a provisional one. Once out on the main road I took over and after a considerable number of stalls, I eventually got the car moving. I had no intention of trying to

change gear, so I went all the way home in first gear, which wasn't too bad considering that I didn't have to turn any corners or stop anywhere. I parked outside my front gate and walked proudly into the house. "My God! You're as white as a sheet and shaking like a leaf," my mother said. I only now realised that I felt very nervous and was barely able to stand, but after a cup of strong tea I felt well enough to out to the car again and practice my clutch control. It didn't take me long to get the hang of things and within a week or so I was driving myself to work and everywhere else for that matter, still without a licence.

I wasn't able to go out with my mate quite so often, as he was at the police training college during the week. When we did go out, we had some wonderful times driving around the countryside and enjoying ourselves. He was always aware that I didn't have a driving licence but by this time I was quite an experienced driver. Driving was a lot easier in these days since as I have said very few people owned a private car. Nowadays there is a car parked outside almost every house but back then, it would be unusual to see more than one car per street. There was no such thing as 'Traffic Wardens', 'Kerb Markings' or 'Car Parks' for that matter. Policemen walked their beat and didn't have radiotelephones. As I have said earlier, not many people had a car in these days, so having one meant that it was a lot easier to get a lumber from the dancing or whatever. But that's another lot of stories that I won't go into. These recollections are meant to about my sea career. In spite of all my attempts to settle down I at last gave in to the call of the sea and joined the 'Elysia' (sister ship to 'Eucadia') in February 1958.

### **SUEZ CANAL**

The next few pages are more or less a recollection of incidental experiences connected with almost all of these voyages. I can't honestly remember how often I have sailed through the 'Suez Canal', but it was numerous and in both directions. As everyone knows, the 'Suez Canal' links the Mediterranean with the 'Red Sea' and is over 100miles long, but unlike the 'Panama Canal' it has no locks. Every time our ship went through here we would first have to anchor with other ships at Port Said on the Mediterranean side to await a pilot and our turn to go through. While lying at anchor many of the enterprising locals would come out to the ships in small boats trying to sell souvenirs, jewellery, fresh fruit etc and even miracle men with cures for almost every ailment. In fact just about anything you could imagine. We called them (BumBoats) and I make no apology for the expression, for that was the name given to them by all seamen regardless of nationality. They were generally a tricky bunch and you had to make sure that your cabin was secure if they were allowed aboard. If you did deal with them you had to be careful not to get cheated into buying a (pig in a poke). They would enthusiastically try to convince you that you were buying a priceless rare Egyptian artefact when in fact there was probably thousands of them and almost worthless. Passenger ships were probably where they would do most business but we seamen liked to think that we were wise to them. In spite of this I sometimes enjoyed dealing with them, bargaining etc for something that took my fancy.

In spite of their underhand tricks, I always admired their complete command of almost every language. One of my favourites was 'Rob Roy MacGregor' he always came aboard shouting in a broad Scots accent, though he was as black as the proverbial 'Earl of hells Waistcoat', (I don't know where I heard that one). He could change his accent at will to Welsh, Irish or whatever. I know that he could also speak fluently in other languages when he visited other ships.

I mentioned the miracle man who professed to be able to cure anything. I was intrigued when he said that he could remove a rather large wart on the instep of my foot. This wart had been getting progressively larger and often I would get it caught in my sandal or shoe causing it to bleed. Not without pain I would add. Anyway I was persuaded to let him try, though I didn't know how he was going to achieve his cure. It wasn't long before I found out as he took from his leather bag, a scalpel and an array of what looked like small rubber cones with a small hole in the pointed end. I immediately stopped him, as I knew that simply cutting the top off wouldn't cure the wart. He seemed quite a nice chap and assured me that he was not going to cut it off, but remove it down to the root. That sounded even worse. There was no way I was going to let him dig it out with that knife, especially without an anaesthetic. Again, he had to gain my confidence by explaining exactly what he was going to do. Having convinced me that it was not painful or dangerous, I decided that he could go ahead.

I will attempt to enlighten you by describing the procedure as it happened. First he took the scalpel and cut the skin around the base of the wart, a completely painless operation I must say. He then took one of the rubber cones (which he said were actually dried teats from a goat) and placing it over the wart he sucked the air from the teat until a vacuum was formed. He then nipped the end of it with his teeth and left it to gradually recover its shape. This he did several times, using a different teat each time. Some twenty minutes or so later he lifted the last one off and lo and behold the wart was gone. There was a very small hole on my instep where it had been and of course it was bleeding slightly. He then took a small wad of cotton wool, which he placed in a small dish. He then lighted it where it burned quickly down to a small pile of ash. Before I could say anything he proceeded to rub the ash into the wound. The bleeding stopped immediately and I had suffered no pain. I had to pay the guy of course without really knowing if he had cured me. I was a bit concerned however that I might contract blood poisoning from the burnt cotton wool. I can honestly tell you though, that within a couple of days or so the wound had healed and there was no sign that it had ever been there. To this day the wart has never returned.

I started this by telling you about the 'Suez Canal' and so far have only mentioned 'Port Said'. The canal reaches South until you reach the 'Bitter Lakes', where it opens out into clear water. At the South end of the lakes the canal commences again and continues South until it terminates at 'Suez'. Here we drop off the pilot and sail down the 'Red Sea' to the port of 'Aden'. 'Aden' is situated in 'Yemen' and was once an important British port. It was also what was known as a bunkering port. i.e. where you could refuel. The town was a very busy place and I suppose was really a commercial crossroad to all sorts of sea traffic. Many goods could be bought cheaply and tax-free. We often went ashore to purchase such goods as radios, cameras and watches. These were all very good items; some were well known brand names that could be bought for a song and of course many could possibly be very good fakes. Our favourite purchases were probably the watches, because we could re-sell these in other ports abroad or give them to our friends when we returned home. Provided of course we could conceal them from the customs officers, who always meticulously searched the ship, whenever we arrived home.

I have already said that the 'Elysia' was a sister ship to the 'Eucadia' and was engaged in the same trade, which of course took us back to India. Sometimes we would have cargo for other parts of the world but our main ports were always Bombay, Calcutta or Karachi. I have written down most of my recollections of India so I won't dwell on it at the risk of repeating myself. I can tell you however that I sailed on the 'Elysia' for almost four months and it should be remembered, that when I say I have sailed or done a voyage on a particular ship, I of course mean that I have been abroad during that time. I have almost always started and finished all of my voyages in the U.K. You will notice that I have said almost always, the reason being that there were two exceptions to this. One was when I joined and left the 'Inverbank' in South Africa, of which I have already written. The other was when I joined the 'Calpean Star' in Gibraltar. The 'Elysia' returned to Glasgow in June 1958 where I was paid off and returned home. This time I managed to stay ashore for about ten months before I again returned to the sea.

### **NEW ZEALAND**

This is another time when I am jumping from one geographical place to another. The recollections of South Africa and Japan occurred over a two-year period and were therefore a bit easier for me to remember. I'm afraid I can't say the same with many of my other recollections, so I find myself putting things down as they spring into mind. How much easier it would have been if I had kept a diary.

I can't remember what ship I was on when visiting New Zealand, but there are a couple of stories I would like to relate. The ports we visited in this country were 'Auckland', 'Wellington', 'Lyttleton', 'Dunedin' and 'Christchurch'. We had been on our way there for about ten days or so and had encountered some very bad weather. The winds were at least hurricane force and the decks were constantly awash. For some reason our freshwater tanks became contaminated with seawater and I remember that we were issued with a special soap so that we could wash without wasting our precious freshwater. That wasn't too bad but water

for cooking and drinking was severely rationed. Not that drinking was much of a problem either; we always had our beer. We did have a distiller on board but that was really just reclamation from the steam, it was very limited and mainly for the boiler. We didn't have a water-maker aboard like most of today's ships. Conditions became so bad that we had to take extreme measures to try and get fresh water. Once the weather had abated, the deck crew managed to rig tarpaulins across the derricks, which of course were always stored and secured down while underway. All this was done in an attempt to catch rainwater and I can remember actually changing course several times as we chased the rain clouds. This chasing about probably added considerably to the length of the passage. Any rain that was caught was pumped into containers using a hand pump and taken to the galley for boiling.

As we neared 'Auckland' the Captain radioed ahead for freshwater to be available when we arrived. As soon as we were alongside the hoses were connected up and I will always remember a guy while opening the valve, shouting up to us "you'll be glad to get that, you sure must need it". Was he making a welcoming comment, or just being sarcastic? Or maybe we really did look like we needed it.

I always remember that the pubs in 'New Zealand' had rather unusual opening times. Maybe closing times would be better described. I remember that they closed at 6p.m sharp but some fifteen minutes before then a bell would be rung. This was the signal to order up as many drinks as possible and to drink them down before closing time. This I am told was commonly called the "six o'clock swill". Similar I suppose to the pubs back home, but at least they didn't close until 9p.m. I have since learned that it wasn't until 1967 that the law in 'New Zealand' was changed to allow the pubs to stay open until 10p.m. I do know that while we were in that country, much of our drinking had to be done aboard ship unless we could find a club somewhere.

Auckland' was the only place in all the ports that I visited, where I was able to visit a family friend abroad. My sister had a girl friend who, at one time stayed in a flat on the landing below us at home. When this girl got married, she and her new husband immigrated to New Zealand and had now been there some six or seven years. Through my letters home, my sister knew that I would be going to that country and sending me the address, asked me if I would visit her friend. Well of course I did, but unfortunately I left it a bit late and didn't visit until the day before we were due to leave Auckland which meant that I wasn't able to spend much time with them. The meeting was quite an emotional one as I was the only person from home that they had seen since arriving. The whole thing was all the more exciting because I had just turned up at their door. I remember it was a Saturday and they were about to go out to the local playing fields to watch one of their kids at a sports day. When I turned up unexpectedly I guess it upset their plans a bit, however I persuaded them to carry on as usual and that I would be very happy to go with them, anyway I wanted to see their family so that I could tell my sister all about them. Actually the day turned out to be really pleasant and we spent the evening at their home reminiscing old times. They had a lovely house and had obviously settled well in their adopted country. Sadly it was time for me to return to the ship but not before some photograph exchanging and a lot of tears. We all knew that it was very unlikely that any of us would ever meet again.

I recall that at one of the ports we called at was 'Dunedin'. The dockside here had nicely cared for lawns, which ran adjacent to the wharf and sheds. Often there would be people walking on these lawns as though out for a Sunday stroll. Sometimes there would be families with their children and anyone was welcome to come aboard if they wished. Now I should mention that our chief engineer could play the bagpipes and while in port would often practice on the foredeck. He was quite a good player and depending on the tune, it sometimes could be pleasant to listen to. On many occasions some of the people I mentioned would stop at the ship and listen to him. 'Dunedin' has a very high proportion of Scottish emigrant descendants and some of them would obviously be pleased to hear the bagpipes. Very often people would come aboard to talk to the chief and I sometimes wondered if he played to the public to feed his ego. Whatever it was, he would often be entertaining someone or other in his cabin. Method in his madness perhaps?

Actually these renditions shall we call them, helped yours truly to have a particularly nice adventure in this port. It was my day aboard and I happened to be standing on deck at the gangway, when two women came down from the foredeck after talking to the chief. Both women looked to be in their early thirties and were quite good-looking. One of them spoke to me and pointing along the deck at a porthole asked politely "do you know whose cabin that

is?" She was pointing at the porthole of my cabin and I enquired why she was asking. "It's just that I can see a model of a yacht lying on the desk and wondered who'd made it." Well that was true, I had started to make it several weeks ago. It was going to be a proper sailing yacht with a mast and sails over three feet high. I told the woman that it was my model and asked her why she wanted to know. She told me that she had a seven-year-old son and wanted to know if I would make a model for her. That of course was out of the question, this one had already taken me weeks to make and I certainly would not be in port long enough to make another. After explaining this to her, she then offered to buy it from me. That too was out of the question. Not that I particularly wanted to keep it. In the first place I had made it simply to pass some time and after all why would I want to carry a model yacht half way round the world. No! I just wanted to see if it sailed and anyway it still needed a few finishing touches.

She was obviously a bit disappointed so I told her that she could have the thing after I had tried it out. To cut a long story, short, she offered to come back the following day with her son and take me to a boating pond. That sounded good to me and it would get me out of the pub for a few hours, though as I have already said, the pubs were not open for long in New Zealand. She and her friend, who by the way had said very little, left giggling like a couple of schoolgirls. As promised, she arrived next day with her son and we took a taxi to a park somewhere, her son clutching the yacht tightly. I joked with his mother that we might not get it off him to sail it. Suddenly a thought struck me. What would his dad have to say about all this? I broached the subject a bit apprehensively and she told me that she had been divorced for the past three years and that her ex husband hadn't seen the kid in all that time.

The yacht sailed well enough after a few adjustments and I was a great guy as far as the kid was concerned. I wasn't such a bad guy either with his mother as we lounged on the grass just talking and watching him play. She had brought along a picnic that included among other things, a bottle of wine. Now! I don't know whether it was due to the wine or not, but she leaned across and kissed me saying, "thats for the yacht and for making my son so happy". Obviously she said the boys' name but I cannot remember what it was, even if I did, I still wouldn't repeat it. Throughout these pages I have deliberately refrained from using names where possible. I was happy that the day had gone so well and there was something in that kiss that told me I would be seeing her again. After a while it was time to go but before leaving she asked me if I would like to go to a local supper dance with her on the following evening. Of course I would love to. (Didn't I say I had a feeling that I would be seeing her again!)? She wouldn't let me see her home, so being the gentleman that I am I insisted that she take the money for a taxi. She said she would come to the ship about 7p.m. to pick me up. I made my way back feeling very pleased with myself and glad that I had made the yacht.

She arrived on board somewhat early, well before 7o'clock and to my surprise had brought along the woman who'd been with her when I first met her. I feared now that I had perhaps read too much into that kiss and dance date. However my fears were soon dispelled when she introduced her cousin to me and explained that she had come in her car. This supper dance was not a formal affair so I was glad that I didn't have to wear my uniform. They each accepted the offer of a beer, but having only one tumbler in my cabin, I went along to my mate to borrow his. Having obtained the tumbler, I asked him if he would join us for a beer. He knew that I would be going ashore but had plenty of time, so he agreed to come along. What he didn't know was that there were two women in my cabin. I suggested that he might want a lift into town, though I guessed that he wouldn't, because the pubs had long since closed. Actually I was hoping that we might make up a foursome for this supper dance. Not knowing what my friend's cousin's plans were for the evening, I obviously couldn't suggest anything to him but I held out hopes that she too was going to the dance. I further hoped that she wasn't married or at least didn't have a regular boyfriend. By now you will have guessed that my motives for thinking all this were more selfish than trying to get my mate a date. Yeah! I just didn't want her cousin to be playing gooseberry all evening, mind you she was a very attractive woman and I was sure my mate would think likewise. All of this speculation went through my mind in the time it took me to pick up the tumbler and return with my mate to my cabin.

I introduced him to the girls and after establishing that we didn't have to be at the dance exactly on time, we settled down for a couple more beers. It never occurred to me check that her cousin would be fit to drive after drinking. In fact I had no idea what the drink driving laws were in New Zealand. I had found out earlier that there would be a bar at this function. Nevertheless I would still take my usual small bottle of spirits with me. Soon I was reminded that if I didn't want to miss the supper, then we should think about going ashore.

Suddenly out of the blue, her cousin suggested to my mate that if he had nothing else on, then he might want to accompany us. She either had been reading my mind or had an ulterior motive, not that it mattered. He agreed and I felt very pleased with myself. We left the ship at about 7.30pm.

On arrival at the function, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was quite a comfortable little place. Much I suppose like a typical 'Co-op' hall back home, but large enough to have a small stage and dance floor. I forget what the supper consisted of, but I do remember that the dining tables were arranged in rows across the hall like a typical function in dare I say again, the local 'Co-op hall'. After everyone had eaten, the tables and chairs were rearranged around the edge of the hall to give that little bit more dance area. The function was apparently in aid of a local charity and it turned out that both my friend and her cousin were on the committee. My mate and I were introduced to some of the other guests and we made a big hit when they found out that we were originally from Scotland. I managed to dance a few times with some of the others, but most of the time I spent with my friend.

When we had arrived, we were obliged to purchase some raffle tickets and now half way through the evening it was time for the draw. Like anywhere else everything stops while everyone concentrates on the draw. I remember that the first prize was a bottle of Scotch Whiskey. Imagine my surprise when my number was drawn. Amid applause I made my way on stage but instead of collecting my prize I suggested that it be re-drawn so that someone else might benefit. After all I could get as much whiskey as I wanted on board ship and at a fraction of the price they had paid. Again there were cheers, which soon turned to jeers as one of my other numbers was drawn. Again I declined the prize and told the MC that if any of my numbers came up again I would simply ignore them. He agreed and next time dug deeper into the box. Believe it or not, this time it was one of my mate's numbers that came up. Unfortunately, instead of just ignoring the caller, he thought to do a good deed and handed the ticket to an elderly man at the next table, saying, "I think you dropped this". The guy, instead of just taking the ticket and accepting the bottle of whiskey, looked at my mate and said loud enough for most of the hall to hear, "I didn't buy any tickets and if that is your ticket, then the whole thing is a fix". Amid jeers and shouting, we tried to explain that we had probably bought many more tickets than anyone else had, so our chances were obviously going to be better. This didn't go down well either as it implied that they hadn't bought many tickets. We eventually managed to explain that as merchant seamen we didn't need the winnings and our tickets being drawn was purely coincidental. I'm not sure that we convinced all of them entirely. Who could really blame them! Although the whole thing was just coincidence, it must have looked like the committee members had a hand in it.

It was almost time to go and since we'd all had a good drink, I suggested that we leave the car and take a taxi back to the ship. My friend told me that she would have to return to her place, as she had left her son with a babysitter. The time was only about 11pm but for me it looked like the end of the night. I didn't want to spoil my mate's chances so I suggested that he and the cousin take a separate taxi. I, meantime being the gentleman that I am would see my friend home and then make my way back to the ship.

When we arrived she invited me in for a coffee and sent the taxi away. I was introduced to the baby-sitter, who was a woman probably in her sixties. As she got ready to leave, I offered to take her home. "No need," she said, "I just live a couple of houses down". After she had gone we sat and talked about the evening and how embarrassing it was for me to have these two winning tickets. We could laugh now also at my mate's Good Samaritan act. I hoped of course that the whole episode wouldn't be held against her as a committee member. It was now almost one o'clock in the morning and I asked her if I would be able to get a taxi. She leaned over and kissed me saying, "Sometimes you talk too much". Well that certainly shut me up, especially when she kissed me again and said, "You can stay here tonight if you want". If I want! Well! I too now thought that I'd done enough talking and yes, of course I stayed.

On arrival back at the ship the following morning, I learned that the ship was due to leave that same night. My mate and I had just about enough time to go ashore and say our goodbyes. At the same time we managed to smuggle ashore a case of beer and a couple of bottles of spirits which we gave to our new friends for them to raffle at their next event. I hoped that maybe it would make up for what their friends must have thought was a suspicious raffle. I must say that I enjoyed my visit very much and for a while afterwards wondered how they were getting on and whether my friends' son was still enjoying playing with his yacht.

### **Horseplay on a 'Raft'**

At another port in New Zealand I went to the beach with some of my shipmates. I have already said that I was not a very good swimmer but at this particular beach, several rafts were tied some 30 yards or so from the shore. I suppose you could say that it was similar to the kind of thing one used to see at the beaches at home. Well! They were common enough in the 1940's and 1950's if anyone can remember that far back. I have also said that 20 yards was about my swimming limit (10 out and 10 back). My mates decided to swim out to one of these rafts and I figured that in this instance I could probably make the extra 10 yards with them. I could rest out there before having to swim back.

It so happened that the 'Sparks' was ashore with us that day and unfortunately he could not swim a stroke, he couldn't even tread water. While the rest of us were generally having a bit of horse play, he complained that he felt rather left out because he could not go any further than chest high. He wasn't afraid of the water, so long as he could still get his feet on the bottom and keep his head up. One of my mates agreed to take him out to the raft on his back if he promised to lie still without holding on too tightly and above all, not to panic. This mate was a very powerful swimmer but he knew that if the 'Sparks' panicked he would almost certainly pull them both under. To help out, another of my mates agreed to swim alongside them in case of emergency. I of course could do nothing to help knowing that by the time I arrived at the raft, I would be completely out of breath. Surprisingly, everything went extremely well and we all boarded the raft successfully. Again, we could all play around the raft in this deeper water, by being able to climb aboard and jumping or diving off, while the sparks lay on his back sunning himself. We clowned around a bit by throwing each other off the raft, which was good enough fun, because you were always able to climb back for a brief time before being thrown back. Now our 'Sparks' wanted to get in on the fun, which was fine by us, but it was obviously only going to be fun for him throwing us off. After all we wouldn't be able to do it to him since he was unable to keep afloat, let alone swim. After a while we'd had enough but every time any of us tried to get on to the raft, the 'Sparks' would push us off again, in fact he was getting so carried away with his excitement that he wouldn't even let us hang to the edge. Now that was okay for my mates who were able to swim to the next raft or ashore for that matter. But for me it was a bit of a problem, because I was fast becoming tired and finding it difficult to keep my head above water. My mates were getting a bit fed up also and were aware that I was getting into trouble. It was decided that one of us would try to keep him busy, while the other two got onto the raft. I was nominated to try and hang on at one end and to try and grab his feet. Sounds simple enough, but I was so exhausted that I was barely able to hold on, never mind grab his feet. Anyway he kept putting his foot on my head to push me away again. Well the ploy worked long enough for the other two to get on board and pull the 'Sparks' aside, but he, in his excitement kicked one of them on the groin. I was just about to climb on board when I saw my mate lunge at the 'Sparks' sending him staggering backwards towards the edge. He was definitely now going to end up in the water. Unfortunately, he grabbed at me as he fell off and pulled me in with him. The two of us went under as he gripped me tightly round the neck, while he wrapped his legs around my middle. Not being able to get my arms free and with his weight meant that I couldn't tread water to even attempt to reach the surface. He must have been trying to climb on to my shoulders because I could now feel his legs around my neck. I don't know for how long he held on to me, but I was now utterly exhausted and it seemed like an eternity as I struggled to hold my breath. Suddenly he was off of me and as my head broke the surface I gulped for air. I was dragged aboard the raft where I lay like a fish out of water for god knows how long. Apparently my mate who had pushed him off realised after a few seconds that the 'Sparks' couldn't swim and immediately jumped in after him, but was unable to release his grip on me. My other mate had recovered sufficiently from his low kick to quickly weigh up the situation

and jump in also. Between the two of them, they managed to pull him off me. As we all sat there on the raft recovering, the 'Sparks' accused us of trying to drown him. I guess he was still suffering from shock, because he was shivering like a leaf while he ranted and raved. However we eventually managed to calm him down. I suppose I could have said the same thing about him but I knew that any non-swimmer would probably have reacted the same way and I learned a valuable lesson about being in close proximity to a non-swimmer in a panic.

When we eventually decided to head for the shore I suddenly I realised that everything wasn't quite over. We still had to get the 'Sparks' back to the beach!

### **A little more time ashore**

I had been ashore now for about ten months and was again getting fed up with the mundane life of 9 to 5. I wasn't happy in my present job and was always on the lookout for something that might involve travel. Basically I think boredom was my problem. As a marine engineer, life was full of interesting things to see and do. I was part of a team with the responsibility of looking after a vessel and machinery worth millions of pounds. So you can understand why it was so difficult for me to settle down. In fact I would say that, the longer one is engaged in that kind of occupation, the more difficult it is to settle ashore. One has to have something else to replace that wanderlust.

I was reading the 'Situations Vacant' section of my newspaper one day, when I noticed an advertisement for marine engineers. Not just any marine engineers, but ones with experience in 'Blast Injection Engines'. They were required apparently for a one off voyage to the 'Falkland Islands'. This could be just what I was looking for, even though I knew that it meant returning to sea. I did have 'Blast Engine' experience, having already sailed for almost two years on the 'Inverbank' and she was a twin screw ship, with two (Burmiester and Wain) blast injection diesel engines. I should perhaps give a brief explanation of this type of engine. You see, a conventional diesel engine is driven by fuel being injected at very high pressure into the cylinder. Whereas, a blast injection engine although working on similar principles, has the fuel atomised by compressed air and blasted into the cylinder, also at very high pressure. This is a much older type of engine and because it is so dependent on compressed air it is consequently a much more complex and difficult piece of machinery. It requires constant surveillance to ensure that the air is always at the correct pressure for injection. In the event that it is allowed to fall too low, the cylinder pressure will overcome the injection system and the fuel will ignite in the injection valve. This has the effect of burning the nozzle off so that the valve is unable to close. If this happens, the air pressure falls so quickly it is most likely that all of the other valves will suffer a similar fate with catastrophic results. The overall result of course being that the engine will stop with a series of very loud bangs as other fuel valves fail. It is equally important to ensure that the blast pressure does not go too high. In the event that it does, a soft metal plug in the fuel valve will rupture and release the pressure, thus saving the valve. However if one does not quickly isolate that valve, and take steps to control the pressure, then of course the previously described scenario would prevail. In my experience I reckon that if the blast air pressure is not checked at least every 15 minutes, then one is inviting trouble. I have been referring throughout these latter paragraphs to the main propulsion engines, so it should now be obvious to the reader that the engineer carries a large responsibility. Much of what I have said about this type of engine gives the impression that it is a dangerous piece of equipment. They were difficult, yes, but not really dangerous. With experience and understanding of the workings of the engines, they might last for many, many voyages without trouble. Certainly like anything mechanical it is subject to breakdown at any time, but these are generally outwith the control of the engineer.

The above description of the 'Blast Engine' might seem a bit unnecessary to the reader, but I am deliberately trying to instil a sense of the importance of the air pressure and the engineers' responsibility to constantly monitor it. Somewhere later in these pages I will relate a few instances where an engineer aboard the 'Calpean Star' abandoned his sense of responsibility because he couldn't be bothered walking round the engineroom every ten or fifteen minutes during his watch.

The contact address for the advert was at offices in Glasgow so I went along to check it out. The chap who interviewed me was not an engineer, but an agent acting on behalf of the

owners. Within a few minutes it was obvious to him that I knew what I was talking about, so we immediately got down to discussing pay, conditions and in what capacity I would sail. Because I did not have my second engineers' certificate of competence, I was offered the position of senior 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer. As I said earlier, I was feeling a bit unsettled with my shore job, so I decided to accept the offer. About a week or so later I was called to the office and given instructions on where and when I was to join the ship. Basically, these instructions also included rail travel vouchers, hotel accommodation in London and a plane ticket to Gibraltar. I was a bit apprehensive about the latter because I'd never flown before, but that's where the 'Calpean Star' was and they wanted me out there as soon as possible. Okay! I had faced a few frightening experiences in my career and survived, so this was just going to be another. Mind you my others were kind of unexpected but this time I would have plenty of time to worry about it. Not prepare myself! Just worry!

I checked in to the London hotel in the afternoon and was sitting down to dinner in the evening. I had confessed my fears of flying to the waiter and ordered a large whisky as a starter, also during and after my meal. After a while he came and asked me if I would mind sharing my table with a young woman. Of course I didn't mind and anyway she might take my mind off my impending journey. I could see that some of the other diners were watching the waiter leading the girl to my table, so I stood up as gentlemen do and waited until she had sat down. They would probably now assume that I was expecting her. She was very attractive and I guessed the same age as myself, about 27. This waiter certainly was trying to help. We chatted during the meal and inevitably she also had to lend an ear to my fear of flying. Later in the evening we again met in the bar and had a few drinks together. She knew that I was due at the airport for 8am and that I had ordered a taxi for 6.30am so the night was necessarily going to be short. I was also concerned that because I'd had a fair bit to drink, I wouldn't waken on time. The hotel certainly offered an early morning alarm call, but this was by telephone and since the telephone was by my bedside, I was very likely to answer it then go back to sleep. That's if I ever got to sleep! This girl was also a hotel guest and was going for a job interview the next day. Since she didn't have to be up early, she offered to loan me a small travel alarm clock that I could place where I would have to get up to switch it off. I declined the offer saying that it would be safer to stay awake all night. She insisted that I should go with her to collect the clock from her room but again I declined. I've said that she was a very attractive girl and under other circumstances I probably would have jumped at the chance. However I now had a steady girlfriend at home and I couldn't risk it all for the sake of a one-night stand. I could of course have been doing the girl an injustice; perhaps she was after all just trying to be helpful. I leave you to draw your own conclusions.

I don't even remember going to bed that night, in fact it was no longer night it must have been about 2am before I went to my room. In spite of that I still managed to get to the airport in plenty of time. At the check in I was asked where I would like to sit. Having explained that I'd never flown before and was a bit apprehensive, she suggested a seat at the rear of the plane. I boarded and made my way to my allocated window seat at the back. At least it was a smoking area and being nervous, I guessed that I would probably chain smoke all the way to 'Gibraltar'. The longer the plane sat there and I had to listen to that high pitched whine, the more nervous I became. As it taxied onto the runway a stewardess came and asked me if I felt okay, I guess I must have looked as bad as I felt. Maybe it was me emitting that high-pitched whine and not the plane's engines. The seat beside me was vacant so she sat down and fastened up as the stewardess does for take-off and landing. All the time she was talking to me trying to get me to relax. Now I knew why the girl at the check-in desk gave me the back seat. Suddenly I was travelling faster than I had ever done in my life and then we were airborne. Just as suddenly, I found that I was now enjoying the sensation and felt completely relaxed. I didn't have to chain smoke, but I did have a few drinks. Since then I have flown many times.

## MV 'CALPEAN STAR'



The 'Calpean Star' was the new name for the ex Royal Mail Lines vessel 'Highland Chieftain'. She was an old passenger ship of about 14000 tonnes, though we would only be carrying one passenger on this trip. She had fully refrigerated holds and had been bought by a newly formed company called 'Calpe Shipping'. They apparently had a contract to bring back frozen whale meat from the South Falklands Islands. The British owned whaling

stations were closing down, as were most of the others, so it would be a one off voyage. I don't know how long the ship had lain in Gibraltar, but when I arrived she was a dead ship with only shore power for basic lighting. Her original engineers had obviously shut everything down before leaving. I along with the rest of the crew, signed on for the voyage on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1959 but we had much to do before she would be ready for sea.

The new crew was a real cosmopolitan lot, having been recruited from all over Europe. The general crew was British and I seem to remember that not all of them were above the law. Not that it mattered much as they tended to keep pretty much to themselves. All that concerned us was that they could do their job and I at least, would have no problems with them. I don't remember much about the deck officers except that the Captain was an Australian, while the chief engineer was a New Zealander. Amongst the engineers were Scots, English, Hungarian and Greek. Although all of them had been to sea before, none but a junior engineer (also a Scotsman) and myself had any experience with 'blast engines'. That turned out to be a major problem, because this ship was powered twin screw. Each engine was a 10-cylinder blast injection diesel and on top of that they were double acting. She had four main electric generators, all of which were also 'blast injection' and just for good measure, there was a small emergency generator in one of her funnels' and 'wait for it!' Yes, it too was 'blast injection. You can see that when I say we had a major problem, it could be called the understatement of all time. The second engineer who was also an Australian, wasn't going to be any help, because he'd never sailed with blast injection either. Anyway, he professed to be an expert in refrigeration and would be responsible for the ships separate large refrigeration plant. This would leave only the junior and myself capable at least of keeping a watch. This was a twin screw ship and would need two engineers per watch. Obviously this was going to be a major problem as there was no way that any of the others would be competent enough to look after a watch. We needed at least three experienced engineers to cover the three watches. The junior and myself voiced our concerns to the Chief, who, fortunately did have some experience of 'Blast Injection' and he realised that if the ship were ever to sail, we would need more professional help, he contacted the owners and a couple of days later an engineer arrived.

He was actually a senior test engineer from the engine makers, J. G. Kincaid in Greenock and had been loaned under contract to the owners for the duration of the voyage. They must have made it worth his while to take on and try to train such a bunch of amateurs. The first thing he did was name himself as senior engineer, promote me to junior 2<sup>nd</sup> and the junior engineer to senior 3<sup>rd</sup>. This was a very big jump for the junior but it was necessary so that we would each be able to take charge of a watch. This didn't go down too well at first with the other engineers who obviously had to be reshuffled, but when they learned that their earnings would not be affected, they accepted to a man. This showed the calibre of this lot, they didn't want, or more likely, were incapable of responsibility but wanted the money anyway. You know the type! 'If something needs done, let someone else do it. We, on the other hand were awarded a little extra in view of our increased responsibilities. I know that I am rambling on a bit

about engineers and engines, but I still remember much of the hard work and dedication it took to run that complicated engine room with basically three engineers.

I have already said that this was a dead ship, so the first thing we had to do was get a couple of generators running to produce electricity, so that we could run the auxiliary machinery. We needed compressed air and lots of it to get them started and for the initial running of the engines. We managed to get a couple of large cylinders of high – pressure air from the R.A.F base in Gibraltar. This allowed us to get one generator running. Each generator and indeed the main engines have built – on compressors, so once started they can produce their own blast air. In fact, if they are in reasonable condition, they usually produce excess air. Bleeding off this excess to atmosphere would normally control it. However we needed all the air we could get, so the excess was channelled into the main air reservoirs for future use. It took a couple of days to get things running again and another couple of days to allow the other engineers to get the feel of the machinery. Finally we gave the main engines a dock test to make sure that they would be OK. After almost a week we were able to announce that we were now self-sufficient and ready for sea. All we had to do now was, wait for our passenger who had been standing by awaiting our readiness to sail. He, it turned out, was a Zoologist from Berlin Zoo and was taking this opportunity to collect some specimens from the Falkland Islands. Now we were ready to embark.

The outward voyage was not without some breakdown or other, generally when one of the generators would fail. I was convinced that these breakdowns were largely due to one Greek engineer failing to monitor the air pressure. It always happened while he was on watch and his attitude seemed to be 'If it is running okay then leave it'. I have already gone into great detail on these engines and the last thing you want to do is 'leave it'. I'm afraid he would have made a poor ambassador for his country. I'm not saying that all Greeks are bad engineers, but that country has had more than its share of marine disasters over the years. I would hope that none of them were due to their crew having a similar philosophy to my shipmate. The other engineers were able to accept their responsibility willingly and after a while became quite competent, particularly the Hungarian who was always anxious to learn. He was hoping to carve a position for himself with the company, so that he would not have to return home. Apparently, he was deeply involved in the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and claimed to have shot, perhaps killed at least four men. He claimed that he had been on the move since then and was convinced that if he returned home, he would be caught and jailed, maybe worse. Many Hungarians had rebelled at that time and were now seeking asylum in other countries. He was about 23 years old and although there was nothing menacing looking about him, he did tend to be a loner except when anyone was willing to listen to his experiences. I had no reason to doubt him, though the Greek engineer often made fun of his exploits in a disbelieving way. Needless to say they never got on, but were at least sensible enough not to let things get out of hand while sailing together. Things did come to a head however at the end of the voyage, but more about that later.

'South Georgia Island' lies just Southeast of the 'Falkland Islands' in the treacherous South Atlantic Ocean and could be considered one of the most remote locations on earth. The island had quite a few whaling stations scattered around its coast many of them were now closing down and we were there to load up the stored frozen whale meat to take back to the UK. I can't remember exactly what stations we visited, but the names of Husvik, Grytviken and Leith Harbour come to mind. It was probably at the latter where we loaded most of our cargo or perhaps I just find it easier to recall that name. In these sub-Antarctic temperatures the island was an ideal breeding place for various birds and seals and it was to these breeding grounds that our German passenger was heading. A couple of days after our arrival he called a meeting of the crew. He was looking for volunteers to help catch his specimens. They were of course to be live specimens and in order that he got a good selection, he showed pictures and the names of the Penguins that he wanted. He would pay a given price for each one brought back to the ship. I remember that the prices ranged from £5 to £25 depending on the species. I don't know which price was for which bird but the species included such names as 'Chinstrap', 'Rockhopper', 'Macaroni' and of course the 'King Penguin'. The only one that I might have recognised was the King Penguin, that seems to be the species best known to people because of its use in many advertisements. None of this really mattered to me anyway, since I did not volunteer for his mission. Many of the crew did however and later, told of daring exploits on the pack ice catching these birds. I think some of them made quite a bit

of money, because we eventually had about 30 or 40 Penguins on board. These were all put into the boxes we had brought while he went off to make arrangements for his larger animals. Apparently some people ashore were going to help him in this task, so the two larger crates that we had brought, were lowered onto the dock for him. A tractor presumably from the whaling station towed these off. The next day he turned up with an Elephant Seal in one of them. All the deck crew had to do was get it aboard. These animals can weigh as much as 2 tons, so the heavy lift derricks would have to be used. Once aboard, it had to be manhandled into a position on deck where it could be safely secured. The crate was not much bigger than the animal. It had room enough to perhaps roll over, but it was not able to turn around. At least, the crate's structure was such that it could get plenty of air and could be frequently doused with sea water from a hose. Nevertheless most of us felt sorry for the animal because it now faced a very long journey in that box back to the UK and eventually Berlin. The zoologist was not now as popular as he was when paying out for the Penguins. He became even less popular when he brought aboard a young Albatross chick, his prize specimen. This chick was about the size of a full grown hen, but regardless of size, it was an Albatross and many of the crew refused to sail with it on board. If it had been a Royal Navy vessel, the action of the crew would be classed as mutiny. On this ship however I guess it was just called a 'Strike'. Many people will have heard the superstition that Albatross are the souls of dead mariners and if one lands on the ship, it is considered an omen of bad luck. I don't think any of the deck or engineer officers believed in such superstitions myself included. However the rest of the crew were adamant that the bird would have to go. There was no way that the zoologist was going to give it up, so he tried to reason that since it was already aboard, putting it off now would be unlikely to change the outcome of the omen, if there was such a thing. Anyway, he went on, the bird hadn't come aboard voluntarily like one at sea, so their fears were unfounded. I can't remember how the situation was eventually resolved, but it was probably by monetary bribing after negotiations with the captain and presumably the owners. Anyway we managed to finish loading the cargo and set sail for home.

We had been at sea for three or four days, when the Seal started to give this German guy a major problem. Apparently it was a pregnant cow and had gone into labour, he was unable to get it out of its crate and the restricted space wasn't helping the poor thing. Whether the stress of capture had caused premature labour, we'll never know, but both seal and calf died during the ordeal, which must have lasted over an hour. He maintained that he was unaware that the animal was pregnant, but most of us found that hard to believe. He was a zoologist and should have been able to tell. Maybe he did but was now trying to get himself out of trouble with the crew, who were all too eager to blame the Albatross. I can tell you that he was not a happy man. Basically, he had gone all that way just for a bunch of Penguins and an Abatross chick that looked like it might be more bother than it was worth.

Certainly, if he could get this chick back to the UK alive, he would be making history. In fact if he even got it out of the Southern Hemisphere he would be doing well! As far as I am aware, no Albatross has ever been recorded above the Tropic of Capricorn. Now! That would be a feather in his cap, if you'll pardon the pun. We had a dead Elephant Seal and an unborn calf to dispose of, so the captain assigned some of the crew to help. However the guy didn't want to just throw it over the side. For some reason, he wanted to carry out a post-mortem on it and at the same time, remove the calf. As soon as he cut it open, a strong pungent smell permeated the whole of the ship. The smell was so bad that the companionway doors and portholes had to be kept closed. Now we had a good idea what the smell must have been like at those whaling stations when they were fully operational. It must have been much worse on board the old time whalers in the days before factory ships. Enough was enough for the captain, who gave him just 24 hours to get his data and to dispose of the carcass.

As the ship approached warmer climes, it was decided to build some sort of pool for the penguins, which, up until now, were still in their boxes and only being doused with seawater from a hose. A frame about 20 Feet Square and 4 Feet high was constructed from timber that held a hatch tarpaulin. This was filled to a depth of about 18 inches so as to leave a couple of feet high sheer sides, to help prevent them escape. In the wild, they would have been able to leap that far, but there they have depth to let them get speed up to do so. Here we wouldn't have that problem, but the large penguins almost just had to lean over to be out. Since he didn't have many of these, it was reasonably easy to keep an eye on them and anyway, he always had help from some of the crew in their spare time. All of these birds had to be force

fed with fish that had been brought on board in Gibraltar. How he made sure that each one got a fair share, I'll never know. When we passed through the tropical latitudes the heat was as usual almost unbearable and I must admit the makeshift pool looked almost inviting, except that it smelled terrible. The Albatross chick also had to be forced fed and kept cool by spraying with water and giving it lots of shade. It, of course was not allowed to roam free, but was kept in a box about the same size as a large dog kennel with a wire mesh in front. So far so good, the animals were healthy and the zoologist had made history.

While all of this was going on of course, we still had an engineroom to run. Each of us senior engineers also had two juniors on watch with us. I was fortunate to have two juniors who were capable of understanding the machinery and carrying out the necessary tasks to ensure their safe running. I'm afraid this wasn't the case with the senior 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer. He had the Greek engineer as one of his juniors and I was convinced that it was he who'd been primarily responsible for all of the breakdowns so far. Surely it could only be a matter of time before we had a major one. We did suffer a couple of stoppages due to failed bursting caps in some of the fuel valves, but were able to shut down the engine in time to save the others. You will notice that I used the word 'engine' singularly, but of course I have already said that the ship had two 10 cylinder double acting engines which meant that there were 40 valves in total. I suppose that statistically, we should have expected a valve to fail sooner or later. Having said that! I recall that these failures again occurred during the junior 3<sup>rd</sup> engineers' watch but I would be reluctant to blame him. The Greek engineer on the other hand seemed unable to appreciate the importance of keeping a close check on things and of taking steps to rectify any potential problems. The rest of the voyage was more or less plain sailing.

When we arrived in Liverpool, the Press and other organisations met the ship. The news that our zoologist had brought back an Albatross had preceded our arrival and we had no sooner tied up than they clambered aboard. There were a lot of photo calls and interviews for the guy who obviously now strutted about as proud as a peacock. The following day the ship was inundated with visitors who had apparently read all about our ship in their morning paper. Scores of families came, mostly to see this rather bedraggled looking Albatross chick. It was big yes! But it had a lot more months to go yet before it would look anything like a majestic adult Albatross. As with any place where animals are on display, people were asked not to feed them. As usual of course some people try to feed them anyway, especially the children. The only thing that these animals eat is fish, preferably whole, but people were trying to feed them crisps, bits of bread or biscuits and like many other animals they will sometimes get a liking for these tit-bits. The German guy didn't want anything to happen to his precious cargo before he could get them to Berlin. So he was kept busy chasing around the visitors, trying to warn them off feeding.

On the afternoon of the next day, the guy informed us that the Albatross was dead. He was naturally very upset and emotional about it. After all, he had nursed it all the way from the Falkland Islands and it seemed to be healthy enough when we arrived in Liverpool. He was so cut up about the loss of the chick that he arranged for Liverpool University to carry out a post-mortem. Meanwhile, he banned everyone from going near his Penguins. Maybe it was just as well that he did that, because the result from the post-mortem showed that the young bird had died as a result of swallowing a spicy sausage roll. It wasn't long before the Penguins were put into their crates and taken ashore. The zoologist guy said his goodbyes to the crew and thanked them for all their help. As the guy went down the gangway, one of the seamen shouted after him "We told you that f\*\*\*\*\* Albatross was a jinx". These parting words might have given him food for thought, but one thing for sure; it didn't make him feel any happier.

Meanwhile, the cargo of frozen whale meat was being discharged into refrigerated containers for despatch we presumed to a pet food factory. While on the subject of food, I remember on one occasion, that we were served up whale steaks. This was by choice of course and not because we had to take it. I recall that it didn't taste too bad, a bit strong and fishy perhaps but definitely not bad. Shall we say that once was sufficient for me if one did not have to eat it! Most of the crew had been paid off, leaving only a skeleton crew to maintain the ship. These comprised three or four deck officers to oversee discharge of the cargo, myself and six other engineers to maintain the power supply and a few ordinary hands for day to day shipboard chores. Naturally there was also enough catering staff to feed us. Since we were

only running the diesel generators and essential pumps, we only needed two engineers per watch. Normally sea watches would be broken when in port, but because these machines had to be monitored 24 hours a day it was necessary to keep watches. The B&W engineer from Greenock, having completed his contract had returned home knowing that we were all now experienced enough to look after things ourselves. We would all be paid off within a few days anyway because no one was sure what was going to happen to the ship or where it was going. Amongst the engineers with me were the Greek and the Hungarian, not on the same watch but each following one another.

I was sitting with some of the crew in the mess-room having a beer and updating the logbook, when I suddenly realised that the other engineers were also in the mess-room. I checked my watch and noted that it was just after 4pm. I knew that the watches had changed and that the Greek engineer should now be down below. I waited for about 5 minutes then asked the Greek why he and his mate were not in the engine room looking after the generators. He shrugged his shoulders saying that everything was running fine. About 20 minutes or so later they were still sitting there. Eventually I suggested that at least one of them go below and to relieve each other if necessary. His mate got up to leave but was stopped by the Greek who said to him "I am the senior engineer on this watch and I will decide when we go below". He stared defiantly at me, obviously waiting for some sort of reaction. I wasn't going to spend time arguing with him when I knew there was a possibility of generator failure at any time. I said "We will sort this out later, meantime I will do your job for you." I left the mess-room followed by the Hungarian engineer who obviously was going to come with me.

We had no sooner got to the engine room door, than the Greek came charging after us shouting and swearing in his own language. The swear words were unmistakable, but everything else was Greek to me! We tried to ignore him but just as we entered the engine room there was a loud bang and the place was plunged into darkness. I knew that one or both generators had indeed failed and that we had to get them going again. The three of us worked quickly and within 15 minutes managed to get the remaining two generators running. By this time his watch mate had joined us and we started to repair at least one of the failed units for use as standby. The Greek wasn't very co-operative about it, insisting that the Hungarian must have handed over the watch knowing that the generators were about to fail. This time I'd had enough and told him that it was now almost an hour since hand over and if he had carried out his duties in the first place, the units would not have failed. I was quite angry and foolishly brought up the fact that on the other occasions during the voyage when they had failed, it had always been while he was on watch. As soon as I said it I knew that I shouldn't have, he started screaming at me again though I couldn't understand a word. Frankly I was quite frightened that he might attack me. Thankfully he didn't, but he did turn on the Hungarian, blaming him for the problem. For someone who claimed to have done so much fighting the Hungarian calmly stared at him for a few seconds, then turned and walked away. Anyway, on the assumption that things were now reasonably calmed down, I returned to the mess-room but was in no mood now to continue with the logbook. Instead I went along to my cabin, had a stiff peg and opened a bottle of beer. I was sitting there trying to relax, when the Greek suddenly barged through the door brandishing a large knife. I didn't wait for him to speak! All I saw was the knife. I was on my feet immediately and grabbing the bottle, I hit him across the head with it. He dropped the knife and staggered back into the alleyway where he was helped away by a couple of his friends.

The incident was reported to the 'Chief Engineer' by both by myself and the Greek, who incidentally had to have, stitches put in a cut close to his eye. I had originally agreed to stay with the vessel until a new crew was found but I told the Chief and Captain that so long as we both remained aboard the ship my life would be in danger. The Greek had by now apologised for his behaviour, saying that he was angry and had been drinking. I accepted his apology but there was no way now that I was going to stay. Booze and anger can be a lethal combination and quite frankly, I didn't trust the man. I was eventually paid off in Liverpool on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1959.