

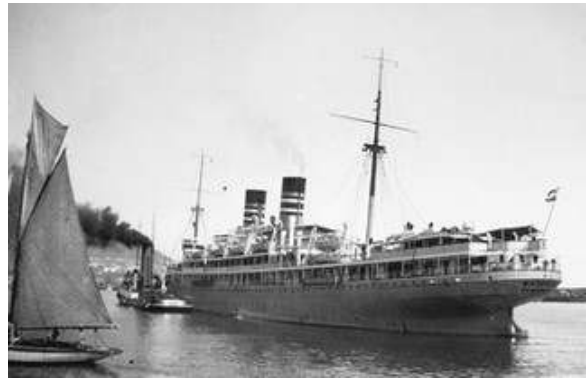
## Family-run Shipping Line set to expand its Services *DAL to trade to Australasia*



**Left: DAL Kalahari**, the only containership on the South African trade to carry passengers.

**Bottom Left: DAL East London**, one of two DAL chartered ships on the SAECS second loop that includes calls at East London to discharge vehicle parts for the Daimler-Chrysler assembly plant adjacent to the Buffalo River. SAECS will loose the northbound containerised shipments of right-hand drive Mercedes C-class cars for the UK market as the factory will be remodelled to manufacture left-hand drive cars for North America. They will be transported by ro-ro vessels, rather than in containers.

**Bottom: Watussi**, one of DOAL's smart passenger ships that provided an elegant service between South Africa and Europe in the pre-war years. She was scuttled by her crew off Cape Point while trying to run the blockade back to Germany during the war.



A beautiful Camps Bay garden with the craggy Lion's Head as a backdrop was the setting for a most interesting meeting and lunch with Dr Eberhart von Rantzau, chairman and - with his brother - joint owner of the Hamburg-based Essberger shipping group whose history stretches back three generations.

Intercepting a Danish merchant ship off Jutland in 1916 was the German light destroyer **B109**, capable of over 30 knots, and commanded by John T Essberger, a career naval officer. That action drew the attention of a large British fleet in the area, and led, indirectly, to the Battle of Jutland that exacted a terrible toll on both the German and British fleets.

In the period after World War 1, Essberger noted Europe's insatiable thirst for liquid fuels in the wake of the growth of road transport. Reasoning that this would create opportunities for shipowners to move oil and refined products, Essberger formed a tanker company in 1924.

His growing fleet contained mainly small tankers, some of which brought African vegetable oils to Europe, and Essberger later diversified by building dry cargoships.

The prelude to World War 2 and the war itself were difficult years for Essberger whose name appeared on a Gestapo hit-list, but later was removed from the list mainly because his shipping expertise would prove useful for the war effort.

With his ships destroyed or taken as war-prizes, John Essberger began to revive his tanker operations amidst positive signs. The war had stimulated advances in vehicle design, while the growing commercial use of aircraft and the irrevocable advent of the motorship added to the demand for liquid fuel. And the Essberger fleet grew.

Apart from calls by Essberger tankers, the South African connection to the family business is via the Deutsche Afrika Linien (DAL) and once known as DOAL as its services included East African ports. From one of their steamers, **Tanganyika**, a passenger wrote on a postcard of the ship in 1930, "I am at Tanga - not much here. Zanzibar I found interesting...Narrow streets and old buildings..." That was the essence of memorable experiences aboard such vessels at the time.

Woermann Line, operated by the same family as DOAL, had traded to German West African colonies from 1849 until 1914, and after losing their fleets in that war, DOAL and Woermann were taken over by Hamburg-America Line.

By 1938 when their largest passengerships **Pretoria** and **Windhuk**, came out, DOAL had 27 ships on the African trades. Although it was difficult to predict the future at the zenith of hostilities in World War 2, Essberger invested in DOAL in 1941 and shortly after the war, he became the sole owner of the company whose fleet had been destroyed, or taken as war prizes.

In the 1950s, six new ships joined the fleet and others came out later.

Learning the shipping ropes indirectly his assistant for several years before his death was Essberger's daughter Liselotte who had married Cuno von Rantzau. She introduced her sons to the shipping world of their grandfather by taking them to East Africa via Suez aboard the DOAL 1955-built freighter **Ubena**.

After her father's death, she took the helm of the company, and made a great impact on the traditionally male-dominated shipping world. As her father had done earlier, she sought niche markets for growth of the company, and focused on the carriage of liquid chemicals for which the demand was rising, especially among industries producing paints, plastics and artificial fibres. Thus she advanced the chemical tanker fleet.

During her visits to South Africa, Mrs von Rantzau-Essberger also impressed the local shipping sector and, despite the country's pariah state at the time, this go-getter forged links between various governments and trade organisations, often across official political barriers.

The Essberger baton has now passed to her sons who have announced plans to expand the DAL brand into new waters. Their containership **DAL Kalahari** with her multi-striped funnel is a regular caller here on the South Africa-Europe Container Service. She has established a fine reputation for a leisurely voyage for up to seven passengers between South Africa and Europe, or for the coastal passage to Durban.

Also bearing the distinctive DAL colours, two smaller chartered vessels operate on SAECS's second loop that includes calls at East London to discharge Mercedes parts for the assembly plant adjacent to the Buffalo River.

The company also has a two-ship share in a service between Europe and Indian Ocean islands, an operation that will be expanded considerably both in the size of vessel - they will be using a 2800-TEU ship - and in the ports of call. From May, the DAL flag will be seen for the first time in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane as well as in Auckland and Port Lyttleton in New Zealand. South African cargoes bound for Australia can be trans-shipped at Mauritius.

The northbound schedule to Europe reads like that of a cruiseliner : Jakarta, Port Kelang, Colombo, Cochin, Jeddah and several Mediterranean ports, all of which will probably enjoy Australasian meat and fruit imports that should provide satisfactory returns to DAL and its French partner, CMA CGM.

My conversation with the amiable and hospitable Dr von Rantzau ranged from chemical tankers to containerships and beyond. Crowning the visit to that remarkable Camps Bay residence was meeting the delightful fourth generation to whom the Essberger-Von Rantzau shipping baton will probably be passed some years hence.

A true family business.