



**CAPE TIMES**

**Brian Ingpen** hosts a weekly column in the **Cape Times**, called **Port Pourri**, where he shares with his readers the news about happenings in the Western Cape ports. He lives with his ear to the ground and his insights into the port vibes make for excellent reading. On this site, he shares his column and adds some photos as a bonus for an insider's view on the port life.

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5 March 2008

### OCEANIC II A PLEASURE TO VISIT *Rigs still around and Gasser evokes memories*



**TOP: Atlantic Venture**, currently in Cape Town, has been sold for US\$67 million.



**TOP: Back in port after sea trials, Pride South Seas** will undergo final preparations prior to her being towed to a local site.



**TOP: Safmarine Mulanje** steams past the Cape Town breakwater.

Being herded - even most gently and politely - is a pet hate; yet I thoroughly enjoyed last week's visit with other media folk and a few academics to the floating university ship **Oceanic II** that was due to sail late yesterday afternoon.

Although she is an elderly lady, her accommodation remains a pleasure to behold with much genuine brasswork, beautiful wooden panelling and teak decks, while her alleyways reminded me of those on C deck aboard the Union-Castle ships.

On our rare sorties up the coast aboard those ships, our family's cabin was always as far aft as possible, and a kid could get up quite a speed sprinting down the long fore-and-aft alleyways that reflected the sheer of the ship. A few minutes' racing ended when a steward, laden with a pile of clean linen, had the misfortune to emerge from one of the short alleyways leading from the main alleyway to the cabins, and copped one of us dead amidships! With a howl of pain, the poor man crumpled to the deck, the alleyway clearing of kids in a twinkling.

International regulations prohibiting flammable timber structures aboard ships will force **Oceanic II** from the seas within a few years.

Another ageing vessel, the rig **Atlantic Venture** is reported to have been sold. The news release reads :

*"As a part of the Company Strategy, Neptune Marine Oil & Gas Limited continue to capitalize on a strong and growing market and expand its portfolio with a new offshore drilling unit. Neptune Marine Oil & Gas Limited has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with Zelig Industrial Limited, a Cypriot incorporated company, to acquire a drilling rig, the **Atlantic Venture** originally known as the **Sedco 708** for a purchase price of US\$67 million. The **Sedco 708** is a second generation semi-submersible drilling rig originally built by Kaiser Steel*

*Shipyard in California in 1977 and is part of the **Sedco 700** series drilling rigs. The Company plans to upgrade the **Sedco 708** to an intermediate deepwater drilling unit, operable up to 5,000 ft."*

After a long period of idleness at the Repair Quay, there will be much frenetic activity to ensure that **Atlantic Venture** is ready for sea before the end of March, the departure deadline apparently set by the port.

**Pride South Seas**, the rig that has been refitting at A berth for the last few months, sailed a week ago for sea trials under tow by the tug **Eems** before returning to port last Sunday morning for final preparations prior to sailing under tow to the local oil fields.

As reported last week, another refitted rig **Sedco 702** arrived off port limits last Thursday to change crew while Carrier Marine's launches worked overtime to take out stores and equipment to the rig. When the escorting tug came into port for bunkers, she lay further seawards. Ron Caris, the agent for the rig and a highly respected figure in shipping circles, tells me that all went according to plan as 120 crewmembers were taken out to the rig, and 65 were brought ashore. The logistics involved in such a large crew change are highly complex, especially in respect of the punctual movement of stores and personnel, most of whom would have required air bookings abroad, as well as local transfer arrangements.

Also off Sea Point, the resident gasser **Celestine River** will undertake a crew change today, and, depending on the charterer, may sail soon, leaving a large gap in conversation topics at residents' dinner tables and among pub pals. There is a suggestion that she might come into port for bunkers before sailing. I can't think of another vessel that has aroused such sustained public interest, apart from those stranding along that coast.

Her lengthy sojourn in the lee of Signal Hill has led several seafarers to recall weeks aboard vessels at anchor off Beira or Lourenco Marques (Maputo) during the 1960s when severe congestion at those ports generated queues of ships. Even fishing competitions became boring, despite someone landing the odd large shark or other exciting catches.

A lad who went to sea the hard way by doing time on trawlers before moving to Unicorn told me that, during a strike by dockers, his ship was anchored off Mahe in the Seychelles for a couple of weeks. To alleviate their boredom, the crew members frequently putt-putted around the beautiful islands under the pretext of lifeboat drill. In a secluded part, they came across a magnificent yacht and, when invited aboard by the yachtie, they found that their host was novelist Wilbur Smith.

If portents are correct, more opportunities may arise for local youngsters to go to sea as two Asian-based companies have expressed interest in employing and training South Africans on their vessels. This welcome news comes at a time when two traditional employers of South African seafarers are reducing recruitment of locals and one plans to use Filipino crews on some of their vessels.

Before larger numbers of South Africans can be employed, several practicalities need to be addressed, notably devising strategies to attract youngsters of the right calibre and aptitude for a sea-going career.

Local maritime training institutions will have to increase their enrolments and therefore the numbers of teaching staff. This is not an easy proposition with the current salaries that would-be lecturers can earn at sea, and, since the central government pays scant attention to the maritime industry, most training establishments are cash-strapped.

Yet in a country with high unemployment rates, such opportunities should not be missed, and knowing the parties involved, I am sure that their considerable experience and energy will ensure that all stops are pulled out to derive the greatest advantage from foreign interest in creating employment.

Many readers responded to my call a few weeks ago for a public ship-viewing site at the harbour. In the wake of that article, several radio talk-shows also led with the story. In following up readers' interest in the matter, I had most cordial discussions with Transnet National Port Authority last week, and, if folks are patient, we may have some good news to report in the near future.

Among the several responses to this article was one by John Coles that made particularly interesting reading :

*Your piece this week evoked memories of my first trip as a 16-year-old apprentice on Ellerman Lines City of Portsmouth in 1952. From the UK, we went straight to the Persian Gulf (as it was in those days) and spent the 3 hottest months of June, July & August visiting 5 ports and the rest of the time at anchor. We also spent time "testing the lifeboats" and fishing for sharks, occasionally actually catching one. These days we would have been arrested by the Iranian navy! The ship was an old Liberty ship with no mod cons such as air conditioning and our lecky spent most of his time rewinding the fan motors. I think this was my worst trip, it lasted a year all told. Luckily, I was able to get quite a few trips to these parts [South Africa] on vessels such as **City of Pretoria** and **City of Johannesburg**, developing such a love for this Country that my wife and I now spend 6 months every year at our flat....*

## SHIPS LEAVING AND ARRIVING – AND A BULKER IS IN FALSE BAY *Agents concerned over situation at Customs House*



**Top:** **Celestine River** sailing from Cape Town en route to Nigeria after a two-month spell at anchor off the port.



**Right:** The 1983-built ore carrier **Sealink Majesty** in False Bay.  
*Photograph : Captain Kevin Tate, Master, Smit Amandla*

**Celestine River**, the gasser that spent two months anchored off Sea Point, berthed on Friday evening and sailed for Nigeria on Saturday afternoon. A reader emailed to relate that Aaron, his five-year-old, had taken a particular fancy to the vessel, and scores of others have inquired about her during her protracted stay. With her departure, many will experience a lull in conversation as she attracted widespread interest.

The laden Capesize bulker **Sealink Majesty** (296 metres) limped into False Bay on Monday afternoon to immobilise for engine repairs. As a precaution, the salvage tug **Smit Amandla** was ordered to stand by in False Bay. At the time of writing, the length of the ore carrier's stay was not known.

Locals casting their eyes seaward in Table Bay will note the number of tankers in the roadstead awaiting berths. Earlier this week, three of the Wappen tankers and three others had been at anchor for a while, most clocking up demurrage that eventually will be paid from public pockets. One wonders why the oil majors allow such accumulation of tonnage, while the upgrade of local tanker facilities is long overdue and dockside tanks are preferable to the current practice whereby ships have to pump their cargoes to distant storage tanks. Over the next month, fender replacement at Tanker Berth 2 will impact tanker traffic further.

Sea fever will be at its height over the week-end when thousands flock to the Naval Festival in Simon's Town. South African and German ships will be open to the public, naval tugs will take youngsters of all ages for rides, there will be numerous displays, parades, boerewors, slap tjips and Coke - if there is enough gas.

Perhaps there will be another simulated air raid on Simon's Town at the conclusion of Saturday's proceedings. One year, a most realistic mock aerial attack gave dockyard visitors a tiny glimpse of Pearl Harbour.

In Cape Town, two French warships, the helicopter carrier **Jeanne D'Arc** and frigate **Georges Leygues** are due to berth at the Waterfront this morning, while Indian and South American naval ships, including the magnificent sail-training vessel **Libertad**, will come this way late in April and early May. No doubt they too will be open to the public.

As a member of the short-pants brigade back in the 1950s, I boarded the previous **Jeanne D'Arc** at J Berth. While much of the visit has faded over time, I do recall enduring clouds of coal dust emanating from the old SARship **Dalia**. Although the collier normally berthed at L Berth, on that occasion she was just ahead of the warship, discharging her cargo of Witbank coal that had been railed to Lourenco Marques (Maputo) for onward shipment to Cape Town.

Although the French matelots had their work cut out keeping their warship clean, the current crew need not worry as the colliers have long since gone, and the worst they will need to clean up is the product of overfed seagulls.

Visiting naval ships are generally most accommodating by allowing folks aboard, and it is particularly delightful to watch the expressions on the faces of the youngsters as they board, often with dad in tow, his demeanour a reflection on the length of the queue he has endured prior to boarding.

The Navy readily invite thousands of total strangers into their dockyard, usually regarded as a restricted area, and in return, they will receive applications from some school-leavers, excited about what they saw when boarding the ships or what they read in one of the pamphlets offered on the day.

I wonder why the merchant navy is reticent to emulate their grey-funnelled oppos. There are higher security risks in allowing the general public aboard a naval vessel than a merchant ship, especially when the warship flies the ensign of a country engaged in one of the various conflicts around the world.

Perhaps that reticence among merchant ships relates to the pressure of time in port and the fewer crewmembers aboard, but a shipowner may find that the skinny lad who raced up the gangway in eager anticipation of his visit to the vessel becomes a master or chief engineer in later years.

It's just a thought from someone whose own interest in shipping developed like that. Sea fever, once contracted, is terminal!

Several ships' agents have voiced their serious concern relating to the hordes of so-called asylum-seekers who have established their own form of permanent residence outside the Customs House on the Foreshore, the building that houses the immigration office. Agents - some of them are female - who have to visit the building at all hours of the day and night understandably feel nervous about their safety, bearing in mind that they invariably carry important documents or valuable equipment, not to mention that their cars are left unattended.

The safety of the immigration officials themselves could also be in jeopardy.

Crewmembers joining or disembarking from their ships are often obliged to go to the building, and leave with a most unsavoury impression of Cape Town.

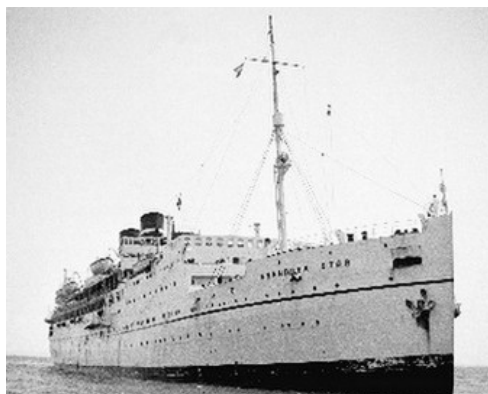
"*I feel intimidated*," responded a seasoned agent who had just cleared a number of seafarers through immigration, adding that the mess is simply atrocious.

Until the authorities clear this sad tsunami of humanity from the area, the immigration department should use another building in the harbour where the agents can deliver their documents and clear their seafarers away from the waiting masses.

Will we have to wait for a serious incident to occur before anything is done?

19 March 2008

## A MODERN WONDER BOOK OF SHIPS WILL BE DIFFERENT



**TOP: Arandora Star**, built in 1927 for Blue Star Line as **Arandora**, and modified for cruising in 1929 when she was renamed **Arandora Star**. When she was torpedoed by U47 on 2 July 1940, she was carrying internees and prisoners of war from Britain to Canada. 805 people were lost.



**TOP: Imperial Star**, built in 1934. In March 1941, she was badly damaged during a bombing raid on Liverpool. A bomb penetrated through three decks and exploded. She was repaired, but soon after re-entering service, she was torpedoed by Italian aircraft while on a voyage from Liverpool to Malta. When efforts to salvage her failed, she was blown up by the British to prevent her from falling into enemy hands.

"*The Wonder Book of Ships*," remarked someone the other day, "*was a real treasure!*" And it was.

As a lad, I had a copy of the book - the 19th edition - that, as it contained a photograph of United States, the Blue Riband holder of the early 1950s, must have been published around 1953. Although it was geared for British schoolboys, some photographs and text related to **Dominion Monarch**, **Port Brisbane** with her streamlined bridge area that had drawn much comment when she called in South Africa on her maiden voyage, **Imperial Star**, and a few Union-Castle liners, all familiar to me.

I got the book about 50 years ago from our elderly widowed neighbour who simply wanted to dump it and several other shipping volumes.

She found a particularly happy home for those books, as, tucked between their leaves, were yellowed clippings from wartime newspapers, reporting the losses of several ships well-known to South African readers : the intermediate liner **Dunvegan Castle**, torpedoed off Ireland while on patrol as an armed merchant cruiser; Blue Funnel's **Ulysses**, sunk in the western Atlantic in 1942; **Arandora Star**, the two-funnelled liner that Blue Star Line had sent this way on pre-war cruises, but lost in 1940 while carrying internees from Britain to Canada; an account of how the aircraft carrier **HMS Illustrious** survived a sustained aerial attack, and others.

When an elderly soul arrived the other day to offer me yet another box of shipping books, I was delighted. I found Captain Percy Sharp's books recalling his days aboard the old SARships, then as a tugmaster, and later as a pilot in Cape Town.

I dipped further into the box, and, among a number of other fascinating reads, I came upon *Valiant Voyaging*, an account of the wartime exploits of British India Line ships. As I paged through this 60-year-old book, my eye caught a photograph of the 1926-vintage liner **Rhona**. She and her sistership **Rajula** were specially designed for the India-Singapore trade on which there was not only cargo, but thousands of passengers in three classes. The so-called "*deck passengers*" (Indian migrant workers who moved in great numbers between their homeland and Malaya) were accommodated in very Spartan tweendecks where special cooks prepared food according to the various dietary requirements of the Hindus and Muslims aboard.

The sisterships' initial passenger capacity of around 5000 was the largest for peacetime service, and well above even that of the Cunarder **Queen Elizabeth**.

"So what?" you ask, forcing me to become personal.

My father spent time on **Rhona** during World War 2 at the expense of the South African Army, and fortunately, disembarked somewhere in North Africa before a fateful day in November 1943 when she earned the unenviable distinction of being the first merchant ship to be sunk by a radio-controlled glider bomb, launched from an aircraft.

Her master, a Captain Murphy, reportedly could not find a tin hat to fit him. When Murphy appeared on the bridge bare-headed during an earlier scrape with the Luftwaffe, his "*tiger*" - the captain's steward - rushed below and from the galley, brought a silver soup tureen which he thrust onto the old man's head.

The glider bomb struck **Rhona** ahead of the engineroom, causing a massive conflagration in the tweendecks, where about 2000 American troops had been accommodated, and she sank in 15 minutes. Over 1150 troops and 120 crewmembers were killed.

Rescued by the third mate who hauled him onto an upturned lifeboat, Captain Murphy was badly injured, and although he survived, his injuries plagued him for the rest of his life.

After the war, **Rajula** continued on the India-Malaya trade and her 48-year career elevated her to one of the longest-serving passenger ships.

Returning from this ramble into shipping history, I wonder what a modern *Wonder Book of Ships* would contain. Certainly, ships have evolved greatly over the last 50 years. Mammoth hi-tech containerships, tankers, ore carriers, rigs and semi-submersibles would have pride of place, displacing the passenger liner themes of yesterday's books. Evocative views of crowded Thames docklands or of a cargoship discharging barrels of coconut oil would give way to images of vast concrete container terminals and a straddle carrier trundling along with a container hoisted high.

The modern book would show huge stern trawlers rather than the side trawlers depicted in my ancient tome that reflects the I&J fleet as I once knew it. Green matters must be included as legislators have found a host of issues with which to plague shipowners.

With updated text, the salvage section should stay but rather than a small coaster ashore on the Cornish coast, our modern shipping book would show a 4500-teu containership beached off the southern UK coast, and instead of wreckers rushing off with barrels of French liquor, yobs pushing BMW motorbikes off the sandy beach would be featured. Included would be a paragraph recalling the jailing of Captain X because an errant tug and tow had hit his anchored vlcc, holing her, and causing her to spill some cargo into Korean waters.

Major revisions await the section on training, for distant archipelagos now supply most of the world's seafarers, not **HMS Conway** and her ilk, while the colour plate showing merchant naval uniforms requires updating as t-shirts, jeans and baseball caps now seem acceptable rig in some quarters.

And we must show modern pirates with their AK47s, missile launchers and all...

But even the book is outdated. Our readership will need an electronic version.

## ORANIA DUE - BUT COULD BERTH IN A BACKWATER Urgent steps to find more appropriate berth



**Top:** *Oriana* whose forthcoming visit is clouded in controversy.



**Top Right:** Contiship's *Suez Express* alongside in Cape Town. She is registered in Belgium.

**Bottom Right:** *IVS Kanda* arriving in Cape Town.

**Bottom:** *Wolraad Woltemade* towing the barge *Al Baraka*. The photograph was taken by Captain Kevin Tate, Master, *Smit Amandia* while passing her sistership.



Easter Sunday brought glorious weather. Against the world's most spectacular backdrop, a crystal clear Table Mountain, the Unicorn tanker **Southern Unity** berthed at the tanker basin, followed by the laden handysize bulker **IVS Kanda** that arrived for bunkers en route from Port Elizabeth to Venezuela.

The 177-metre Hong Kong-registered bulker is among about 60 vessels that Island View Shipping operates, some jointly with Lauritzen.

Grindrod, the parent company of both Unicorn and IVS, has benefited from the buoyant shipping markets that, while dropping slightly from the unprecedented levels experienced late last year, continue to provide owners with excellent returns.

At anchor off Sea Point on Monday evening, the sailingship **Concordia** presented photographers with the opportunity to capture her against the brilliant sunset.

Another interesting vessel in port over the week-end was the almost new heavylift vessel **Combi Dock 1**, that discharged three barges in the harbour for use in the dredging operations in the container basin. The 162-metre vessel has two cranes, each with a 350-ton lift and working in tandem, can handle lifts of 700 tons. The third crane has a capacity of 200 tons, while her semi-submersible and ro-ro capabilities widen her versatility in handling heavylifts and other out-of-gauge cargoes.

In former years, conventional cargoships - some with large Stulcken derricks - carried heavylifts, but the advent of containerships created a niche market for heavylift specialists that handle anything from wind-powered generators to superyachts, or even oil rigs.

With a range of huge construction projects underway in South Africa, as well as the prospect of upgrading the country's power generation capacity, and the insatiable thirst of the West African oil industry for heavy equipment, the demand for heavylift ships is increasing and they will be frequent visitors to Cape Town. It is not surprising that Beluga Shipping, a heavylift and project cargo specialist, have opened a South African office in Johannesburg and were prominent participants in the recent Oil and Gas Convention in Cape Town. Perhaps we shall see one of their vessels that use the so-called skysails to reduce conventional fuel consumption.

**BBC Shanghai**, a unit of BBC Chartering & Logistics, another heavylift and project cargo operator, called here last week en route from Brazil to Australia, a further indication of the worldwide use of these specialist vessels.

Those watching for other interesting callers should be at their windows on Sunday when the magnificent cruiseliner **Oriana** berths. The pilot who will be charged with bringing in the 260-metre liner will hope for similar weather conditions to that prevailing last week-end, as will her passengers for there is no sight as glorious as Cape Town from the sea in fair weather.

Curiously, she is scheduled to berth at the Eastern Mole as E-F Berths (*the usual berth for liners that are too large for the Waterfront*) are under pressure from geared containerships diverted from the container terminal where a mega-million-rand upgrade is underway. However, in a strongly worded email addressed to many in high places, including the mayor, Philip Naylor, General Manager - Fleet, Marine & Shore Operations of Carnival UK, slams the move, rightly pointing out the economic value of a cruise liner visit to Cape Town and the inconvenience to the ship's passengers should the port berth the liner at the Eastern Mole.

In vain, this column and other media have long proposed a proper multi-functional reception facility for large cruise liners. Unless the authorities relent and provide a more convenient berth for **Oriana**, it could be the last time that any of the company's ships calls at Cape Town - and word gets around in cruise circles! Cape Town would be the loser!

**Oriana** bears the name of Orient Line's last passenger ship, built in 1960, that on trials had worked up to 30 knots, and her maiden voyage from the UK to Australia took only 27 days.

Seasoned ship watchers will recall that Orient liners, including **Otranto** and **Orontes**, the two oldest ships in the fleet at the time, were regular callers when the Suez Canal closed for six months from October 1956. During that time when so many unusual ships arrived, I wandered past **Otranto** alongside C Berth on one of her calls here, and from A berth one afternoon, I watched **Orion** sail. As school unfortunately hindered my ship spotting, I cannot recall seeing any of the line's post-war ships: **Orcades** - the third to bear the name - **Oronsay** and **Orsova** that sported "*Welsh hats*", an extension atop the funnel to enhance the updraught, expelling smoke away from the passengers who did not fancy a rain of soot disturbing their sun-worship on the afterdeck.

P&O purchased the shares of Orient Line in 1960 and the full merger of the fleets occurred five years later.

I did see all of the Orient ships still in service when Suez closed again in 1967, but by the time it re-opened in 1975, virtually all had been scrapped, the result of jet aircraft that could wing passengers between the UK and Australia in a matter of hours, as opposed to the long voyage via the Cape that had taken its toll on most east-west passenger ship operations.

Surviving that purge, **Oriana** (1960) continued operating until her sale in 1986 to Japanese interests who used her as a floating cultural centre. The Chinese bought her a few years later and she ended her days after a storm damaged her alongside at Dalian.

The call by the present **Oriana** could be watershed for local cruise operations.

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