



BRIAN
INGPEN

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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BOE GIVES LIFE TO CHAVONNES BATTERY



TOP: Ocean Africa's chartered ship **Border** arriving in Cape Town during her feeder service between Durban, Cape Town, Walvis Bay and Angolan ports. The company, in which the Grindrod Group has a 50 percent share, has revitalised names from the old African Coasters and Unicorn fleets. This vessel is the fifth to bear the name. Histories of previous ships of that name operating along the Southern African coast are given.

Border (1) General cargo ship
Motorship; length 31.2 m; beam 6.2 m; grt 205

- 1927 Built by North Netherlands Shipbuilding Company, Gronigen, as **Albion** for Motorship 'Albion' Company, Rotterdam; later brought to South Africa
- 1934 Bought by Albion Shipping Company, Durban; re-engined
- 1935 Bought by SS Frontier (1922) Steamship Company; renamed **Border (1)**
- 1938 Transferred to African Coasters, Durban
- 1946 Sold to Coastal Steamships, Cape Town; name retained
- 1947 1 April: wrecked at Elands Klip, south of Port Nolloth

Border (2) General cargo ship
Steamship; length 64.3 m; beam 10.2 m; dwt 1 000

- 1923 Built by New Waterway Shipbuilding Company, Schiedam, Netherlands, as **Holland** for United Netherlands Shipping Company (Holland-Afrika Lijn) Rotterdam
- 1950 Bought by African Coasters
- 1951 Renamed **Border (2)**
- 1964 Sold to K. Nathan, Durban
- 1965 Renamed MN; scrapped

Border (3) General cargo ship
Similar ship: **Barrier (2)**
Motorship; length 90.2 m; beam 12.6 m; dwt 3 346

- 1957 Built by Chantiers Navale de la Pallice, La Rochelle-Pallice, France, as **Casamance** for NV Nederlands-France Scheepvaart Maatschappij, Rotterdam
- 1964 Bought by African Coasters, Durban
- 1965 Renamed **Border (3)**
- 1975 Sold to Mediterranean Investment Company, Panama; renamed **Axios**
- 1981 Laid up
- 1984 Class withdrawn; scrapped

Border (4) Ro-ro ship
Similar ship: **Barrier (3)**
Motorship; length 170.5 m; beam 25.1 m; dwt 10 208

- 1980 Built by Societe Metallurgique & Navale Dunkerque-Normandie, Dunkerque as **Ro-Ro Genova** for Societe Dunkerque d'Armement, France
- 1987 Bought by Unicorn Lines, Durban; renamed **Border (4)**
- 1993 Sold to Seaboard Ship Management Inc., Panama; renamed **Seaboard Intrepid**; chartered back for two South African coastal voyages before sailing for USA



TOP: **Dubai Faith** bunkering in Cape Town. Her sistership **Dubai Galactic** also called this week to bunker en route from India to Rio dela Plata in ballast.

Amid glorious weather, there was plenty to see in the harbour. After her protracted tow, **Biz** is still with us, berthed at the Landing Wall, and without a rudder, she will be going nowhere for a while.

Further along the quay, was the Panamanian-flagged **Dubai Faith**, a five-hatch bulker that called for bunkers and victuals, en route from Tanjung Priok (Jakarta, Indonesia) to Takoradi. Her sistership, **Dubai Galactic** arrived in ballast yesterday, also on a bunker call during a voyage from India to Rio dela Plata to load grain.

Typical of such vessels - known as handysizes in the trade - she is 186 metres long with a deadweight of around 45000, and loaded draught of 10 to 11 metres. These bulkers carry a variety of cargoes ranging from steel to animal feed, and rice to ferro-chrome. While you will see them in the busiest of harbours, or steaming through the most congested sea-lanes, the ships also call at obscure ports that perhaps have a single jetty jutting out into the sea at which they load nitrates, bauxite, grain, timber or some other cargo.

Many discharge their cargoes via hi-tech shoreside equipment in places like Rotterdam, Shanghai or Sydney, but some will anchor in quieter waters to discharge over the side into lighters.

The names of the two sister bulkers symbolise parts of the Gulf known for their soaring economic growth and flamboyance, epitomised in fabulous buildings and shopping malls,

artificial islands, and folks dripping in gold. It also has connotations with an emirate that has determined the importance of shipping, not only in conducting its trade, but also as a vibrant hub around which compatible sectors will gather, benefiting from the diversity of the maritime industry.

And now there is a connection with the Waterfront via the owning consortium in which Dubai World has a stake. I shall leave the legal beagles to sort out the conundrum of how much of Cape Town and Table Bay is actually owned by the consortium, while engineers and the green lobby can argue forever about the merits of building islands off Milnerton.

But could some of that vision, vitality and wealth - so obvious in Dubai itself - not spin off to develop Cape Town as a global maritime city, located on a very important trade route and maritime choke-point? The country's trade patterns depend on shipping to move over 90 percent of cargoes; the city is relatively close to one of the world's leading offshore oil and gas producing regions; our time-zone is favourable to co-operation with Europe; the banking system is compatible with most others, and in the mountain, we even have a ready-made icon.

Singapore has succeeded in wresting much of the focus of Asian shipping from other centres; Panama City seems to be developing in that direction for much of Latin America, while Dubai is doing likewise for the Middle East and extending its influence to an even larger constituency.

All we need for Cape Town to develop similarly is the vision and the vitality, as well as the political will - and there's the rub!

But I came across those characteristics when I visited a unique museum in the heart of the Waterfront. Many times had I rambled past the remnants of the Chavonnes Battery near the Clock Tower, especially when watching vessels moving through The Cut. However, until it was drawn to my attention, I confess ignorance of the existence of an extensive indoor museum that incorporates the rest of the ruins of the gun battery that, dating back to 1726, is the Cape's second oldest fortification.

Chavonnes Battery was part of the defensive plan to deter attacks on the Cape by sea-borne aggressors, and continued its function until 1860 when the construction of the Alfred Basin began. Part of the wall of the battery was demolished and the rubble used in the construction of the new wharves. The rest vanished beneath warehouses and later, a rather smelly fish-processing plant occupied the site.

And this is where those noble characteristics were displayed. As the Waterfront expanded, the Board of Executors secured the site for their new head office, and before sending cohorts of engineers in, they had the site excavated by archeologists who discovered and restored the hitherto buried ruins of the battery.

Planning of the BoE's fine building was revised as management set aside a large section for a museum to retain the battery for posterity.

I met Willem Steenkamp when he was a cub reporter on the Cape Times's court beat, and I was a schoolboy employed during the Christmas holidays to compile the Harbour Log that accompanied George Young's famous daily shipping column.

Now, with a distinguished career as a defence correspondent, a respected authority on military affairs and an author, Steenkamp is the kingpin of the Chavonnes Museum. Wandering through the museum with me, he related stories, demonstrated how they loaded and fired the old cannons, pointed out fascinating details among the well-displayed exhibits, and shared his vision for the museum.

Space abounds for additional exhibits, thanks to the foresight of BoE. Sixty metres from the museum door stands the Clock Tower whose role as a kitchen will end shortly. With vision and vitality, a future museum hub in that area is possible.

And should the Dubai folks expand their empire this way, one hopes they will follow the BoE's example in promoting our maritime heritage.

- Smit salvors secured a Lloyd's Open Form when their **Pentow Servicer** towed the disabled bulker **Kuiseb** into Richards Bay last week. They also refloated the laden 50000-deadweight tanker **Gulf Nomad** that had stranded in Maputo. Good days for the salvage sector!

WELL-MAINTAINED SHIPS AND RISING FUEL PRICES



TOP: Gulf African Line's **Blue Master** discharging in Cape Town



TOP: Discharging a cargo of soda ash from **Blue Master**.



TOP: Captain Htin Kyaw Jaw, Master of **Blue Master**.

The closest to a heaving deck beneath one's feet, is a deck that is not heaving. Hence my visit to Gulf Africa Lines' vessel **Blue Master** in port last week was an enjoyable experience, enhanced by the warm hospitality extended by Felix Scheder-Bieschin, director of GAL and its sister company MACS, as well as by the vessel's Burmese master, Captain Htin Kyaw Jaw, Chief Engineer Hla Khine and Chief Steward Tin Aung.

The chief steward's Burmese lunch menu was excellent : steak, chicken and prawns, each served with an agreeable blend of mildly spiced gravies, with perfectly-cooked rice and vegetables. A nut-filled two-tone ice cream - I suspect supplied by the chandler in Houston, Texas - capped a most delicious meal that was also an opportunity to meet the friendly officers.

A wander around the 179-metre multi-purpose ship revealed that she is in excellent condition, despite her completion 37 years ago, as evidenced by her well-maintained decks, immaculate teak finishes in the wheelhouse, saloon and various officers' quarters, as well as shining brass; even the brass strips on the stairways were shining. Two deckhands were aloft painting the twin funnels, part of the on-going maintenance programme that has kept the old girl in shipshape condition for all these years.

With a container capacity of around 1200 teu, this modified 31500-deadweight bulk carrier and her two sisterships, **Silverfjord** and **Viborg** that are also on GAL's US Gulf-South Africa service, are versatile vessels. Their large bale space and two 12.5-ton cranes per hatch that can operate in tandem to give a lift of 25 tons enable her to carry a variety of cargo, ranging from heavy machinery to bulk products. When I leaned over the hatch-coamings, I was not surprised to see agricultural machinery and large earth-moving equipment, while she was discharging hundreds of tons of soda ash into road trucks.

Tightly stowed on the hatchcovers were huge truck cabs, and other heavy vehicles, some of which had been discharged temporarily while the Cape Town cargo was unloaded. They would be restowed atop the hatchcovers for the voyage to Durban.

In layman's language, her friendly chief engineer told me that, at a leisurely 12.5 knots for the voyage from Houston to Cape Town, she had used 26 tons of 180-centistokes fuel a day. At current prices, that translates into about \$20410 per day for fuel.

As fuel consumption increases exponentially according to speed, a vessel using 50 tons a day when steaming at 18 knots might use 90 tons with only a four-knot increase in speed. At the current fuel prices, it could be cheaper for a liner company to reduce the speed of all their vessels, yet they could maintain a regular schedule by putting an extra ship on the run.

This practice of adding extra ships to compensate for slower passage times is combining with severe port congestion in various parts of the world to absorb some of the new tonnage, currently under construction, that otherwise might have flooded the market, and reduced freight rates.

However, soaring fuel prices will continue to push shipping costs upwards, especially on the longer hauls. This may assist South African bulk exporters wishing to challenge their Brazilian competitors for additional market share in Asia, as bulkers plodding their way from Brazilian ports take an additional ten to twelve days on a voyage to China or India, costing an extra \$500000. That is without taking account of the high daily charter rates! Similar principles of economics apply when it comes to South African exporters competing with the Australians in the European markets.

Because of the highly competitive nature of shipping and exporting, companies will be seeking every opportunity to save. Is this not the right time for the local port authorities to reduce port charges for vessels calling only to refuel?

As the current charter of the bunker tanker **Sophie Theresa** is ending, the maiden voyage arrival of UniCal's bunker tanker **Southern Valour** over the week-end is most fortuitous because it enables ships to refuel while they are working cargo, thus saving time and expense in shifting from the cargo berth to a bunker berth.

On the voyage from Durban to Cape Town, **Southern Valour's** master, Captain Gus Mostert, had to keep a wary eye on the synoptic weather charts, and decided to enter False Bay last Saturday to avoid the worst of the heavy weather that threw the sea into a turmoil.

That the 69-metre vessel with no raised forecastle or bilge keels arrived without damage - especially to the many pipes and fittings on deck - is a credit to the seamanship of those aboard and her sturdy design that took into account that for most of her operations, she will be coming alongside ships or the loading terminal, sometimes with a bit of a bump.

There are parallels between the immaculate condition of **Blue Master** and the damage-free arrival of **Southern Valour** after that uncomfortable passage from Durban. Successful ship management revolves around skilled and experienced people - ashore and at sea - who take a pride in what they do, the human qualities that keep vessels going for long periods.

Union-Castle also kept their ships in good condition. Among their fleet that spanned 77 years from the time of the amalgamation of Union and Castle Lines, the longest-serving ship was **Llanstephan Castle** that was operational for just over 38 years. **Blue Master** and her two sisters should surpass that amazing record.

16 JULY 2008

TARGET YOUNGSTERS IF FUTURE OFFICER SHORTAGES ARE TO BE REDUCED

Anxious times lie ahead for the shipping industry. Within a matter of days, two prominent organisations in the local shipping sector have convened meetings to discuss the growing crewing crisis, a global phenomenon that is starting to bite.

There was a time when folks believed that cheaper Asian crews would be the answer, and to an extent, they were right. However, the anticipated wave of Chinese officers has not materialised, and while countries such as Philippines, Korea, Vietnam and Burma - as well as eastern Europe - are providing thousands of qualified personnel, worldwide figures for the number of vacancies for qualified officers is around 16000.



TOP: Hamburg-Sud's **Bahia Grande** heading for Durban's container terminal.

Imagine the scenario of a ship unable to sail because of a shortage of navigating officers or because no certificated chief engineer is available, and the maritime safety officials will not grant an exemption to any of the engineers on board to act as chief engineer. Imagine the safety implications if a ship sailed with a complement of inexperienced officers bearing half-baked qualifications - still possible despite the safeguards of the International Maritime Organisation's standards of training and certification of watchkeepers, and more international vigilance.



TOP: The buoy at Mossel Bay has seen several vessels over the last week. **Jag Panna** is shown at the buoy with **Rita Knutsen** an almost permanent resident since September last year, in the background. **H C Dalla**, **Bow Sky**, **Bow Clipper** and **Bow Pride** have also called during in the past few months.

Photograph and information supplied by Mike Taylor.

Shipowners do not provide the number of training berths for cadets as was the case a few years ago when most large ships carried at least four cadets. A modern containership might have space for two youngsters, but should the master and chief engineer have their wives aboard or should additional engineers be tending the lucrative reefer cargo, the lifeboat capacity would be exceeded and the lads might be told to take some leave!

Old timers will tell of their three or four years at sea as a cadet before they could study for their second mate's ticket. Seetime for cadets has been reduced to 12 months, a questionable move that, apart from causing old salts to choke on their beer, many companies are countering by demanding that their cadets do at least 18 months at sea before the lads or lasses can attempt

their oral examinations to qualify as a watchkeeping officer. Others contend that the quality of the training and the calibre of the cadet are the real factors to be considered.

At the highly specialised end of sea-going structure, the scarcity of competent officers is more pronounced, resulting in exorbitant pay packages on offer, often with a view to poaching officers from other fleets, rather than incurring the expense and effort to train them. Masters aboard some large gassers are reported to be earning around \$22000 a month, and, contrary to a common practice, many companies are now continuing to top up the bank accounts of their officers even during spells of leave!

It's not only about poaching qualified personnel. The retention of competent seafarers is also a major factor in determining the salaries paid.



TOP: Bulker **Goodfaith** moving down Maydon Channel, Durban.

Now away from this gloom! An email from Iain McIntosh. MOL's general manager for trade and marketing, tells of the fun side of shipping - and, hidden in his tales of life aboard British India's **Uganda** and **Nevasa** as a schoolboy, might be part of the solution to the crewing crisis.

Once on the company's service from Britain to East Africa, **Uganda** became redundant when the former British colonies became independent, and hundreds of expatriate civil servants and their families returned to Britain for good. Completed in 1957 with a capacity to carry over 1000 troops as well as regular passengers, **Nevasa** also became redundant as the role of British forces had shrunk - and larger aircraft could move troops should the need arise.

The ships were fitted out to carry hundreds of children on educational cruises, and some general passenger accommodation was retained for those brave souls prepared to share the ship with all those youngsters.

McIntosh tells of exciting voyages to the Norwegian fjords, laced with geography lessons, deck games and good meals. The sleepy Norwegian villages at the head of the fjords were invaded by nearly 1000 children, brought ashore in the ship's lifeboats, to wander through the beautiful countryside or to play soccer amidst the cow-pats in those pristine meadows.

A burly quartermaster on the ship would pipe "*Wake up, or else!*" at 0600 and then would assume a "DJ" role as the tannoy system blared out the music of the Rolling Stones, Beatles and other idols of the time.

Discos enabled the genders to mix - and a few shipboard romances began, but as the ship arrived back in the UK and the youngsters returned home, distance usually put an end to these seaborne encounters.

Although they were good while they lasted, sheer economics ended the era of the school cruises. The oil crisis of 1975 led the thirsty **Nevasa** to the scrapyards of Taiwan. Despite her much-publicised service as a hospitalship during the Falklands war and a save-**Uganda** campaign, the bean-counters decided that she had come to the end of her useful life.

En route to a Taiwanese scrapyard in 1986, **Uganda** was blown ashore near Kaohsiung, she capsized, and was wrecked. Although such cruises are an economic impossibility these days, could the principle of exposing young people to ships not be revived? Since there is such anxiety over the future supply of officers, every avenue needs to be explored to showcase the reclusive shipping industry.

Somehow, the rottweilers and razorwire now protecting the harbours have to give way to a more pragmatic approach to publicising the industry. A laudable start has been made via a local website focusing on careers at sea (www.careers-at-sea.co.za), but other hands-on initiatives must follow.

ATTRACT, TRAIN AND RETAIN **Another plea to target schoolboys (and girls)**

With competition from land-based careers - often glamorised by television soaps - shipowners have to work hard to entice school leavers to go to sea, particularly when the average youngster has no contact with ships.

To expose him to shipping is a daunting task with harbours off-limits and much unreasonable legwork is required to get young people close to ships, let alone board them. Security hawks who do not apply their minds to providing reasonable harbour access for young people - especially those hawks who are aggressive towards legitimate harbour visitors - should bear much of the blame for the shortage of officers in the years ahead.

But assuming a lad decides to go to sea, he will be bombarded with many reasons why he should change his mind, not least when his peers talk excitedly about their own career prospects in IT, or elsewhere. And frequent chatter about Clifton or JayBay does not help.

In their selection process, some companies employ cadets who, in the longer term, will also make good shoreside fleet managers and superintendents. However, since superhumans usually have a short sea-going career, other owners target equally industrious, honest, oomph-filled lads and lasses who, while not being rocket scientists, seek a worthwhile and unique career.

Once a cadet is at sea, more hard work lies ahead to keep him there, away from the lure of shoreside employment, and to train him to the required standards.

Among some sectors of society, the attitude of elders who demand that their offspring be close to home often douses enthusiasm for a sea-going career, and even if the lad has made it up the gangway, there could be pressure on him to return home for the most trivial of reasons. Although email access at sea has its blessings, it also exposes the seafarer to domestic woes when he is too distant to assist.

While most established companies monitor the full spectrum of training well, the human side of the cadet might be overlooked. He might find himself amidst competent and courteous shipmates all of whom speak a foreign language, leaving him with little opportunity to interact socially with them, a factor that is increasing in importance as shipowners employ more Asian crews. Does he do his work, keep his training book up to date, and then draw a DVD from the ship's library to watch on his own?

To counter the negatives, the maritime sector needs to go on the offensive, emerging from behind the self-erected razor wire barricades where it has languished for several decades, to announce itself emphatically to young people.

Maritime awareness is a hackneyed phrase, and many ill-planned campaigns have wasted money to pursue it with little to show for the effort. Yet, the industry must alert young people not only to its important role in global and local economics, but also that it is a dynamic industry, with so many positives, with so many sectors and therefore so many career possibilities. It can brag about the salaries, the modern, hi-tech ships in which the youngsters will serve - plenty of IT there - the lengthy periods of leave, the broadening of horizons - in both senses of that phrase - and it can invite those willing to work hard and those with real initiative to join up.

It need not exhort everyone to rise to the highest rank at sea, but should also trumpet the opportunities ashore for qualified and competent people - marine superintendents, in liner companies, in ships' agencies, in training institutions, in the ports, in shiprepair yards, in marine survey work, and more - for those vital spheres would be the poorer without input from experienced seafarers.

And the shipping line itself will have benefited from the energy of those young officers for perhaps five or ten years before they go ashore.

23 JULY 2008

ICONS PROVIDE ROLE-MODELS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SHACKLETON REMEMBERED DURING VISIT TO HMS ENDURANCE



Images taken by the Naval photographer when a small group of students from Simon's Town School's Maritime Studies Department visited **HMS Endurance** in Simon's Town harbour.

Tributes by the hundred have rightly honoured Nelson Mandela on his 90th birthday. Simon's Town last Friday was particularly colourful as the naval ships - including the Uruguayan frigate still repairing after a collision at sea - were dressed overall to mark the birthday of the grand man whose iconic stature is as great as his ability to reach out to the youngest child or the poorest person.

I recall Safmarine's golden jubilee celebrations in a city hotel when Madiba - then president - arrived to a guard of honour of the hotel's waiters, each of whom he greeted, unlike the treatment given by the royals to the Wimbledon ball-kids, some of whom get a cursory greeting by the Duke. Others are ignored.

A children's choir performed that night and, after doing his characteristic jive, Madiba spoke to each child and the ladies in charge. A great man indeed, from whom the younger generation of leaders can learn much by way of humility, dignity and positive thought!

An icon of the shipping world, the remarkable Mr Maersk McKinney Moller, is also a nonagenarian who still has his hand on the helm of the family shipping business. He was a teenager in 1928 when **Leise Maersk** sailed from Baltimore, USA, to the Far East via Panama, the first liner sailing by a Maersk ship. (The history of the AP Moller Group - of which Maersk Line is a major part - actually began in 1904 when AP Moller and his father, Captain Peter Maersk Moller, bought the second-hand 2200-deadweight steamer, **Svendborg** for general trading.)

In the holds of **Leise Maersk** when she left Baltimore were Ford car parts and general cargo totalling 3600 tons, the equivalent of 200 twenty-foot containers (TEU). After a 59-day voyage, she reached Japan and continued to the Philippines. On her return voyage, she carried sugar, silk, and oil products.

Maersk's mushrooming services included South African ports, where the ships' distinctive blue hulls became a regular sight.

In 1973, Maersk Line ordered its first dedicated container vessels and two years later, the 1400-TEU containership Adrian Maersk undertook the group's first containerised sailing. This step also led to container terminal operations and logistics.

Through rapid growth and by absorbing other containership companies such as Sealand, P&O Nedlloyd and Safmarine, the group has become the largest liner operator and it owns extensive oil and other business interests.

Among the Maersk fleet are the biggest containerships, **Emma Maersk** and her sisters that carry about 65 times the cargo of **Leise Maersk** on that first liner voyage 80 years ago, and about nine times the container capacity of **Adrian Maersk**.

As conspicuous as the Maersk ships are in local harbours, is the red hull of the British Antarctic vessel **HMS Endurance**, now nearing the end of an extensive refit in Simon's Town. A party from Simon's Town's Maritime Studies Department were given a most interesting tour of the ship on Madiba's birthday by the genial Lt-Cdr Lachlan Mackay Brown, the ship's surgeon.

The original **Endurance** was a three-masted steamer with considerable sail area to assist her passage in latitudes where there is never a shortage of wind. To carry Sir Ernest Shackleton's party who would try to cross Antarctica on foot, **Endurance (1)** was due to sail from Britain in August 1914 when war clouds were gathering. To his offer to place his ship and crew at the disposal of the Admiralty, he received a one-word answer - "*Proceed.*"

It was a perilous voyage. **Endurance** became ice-bound in January 1915, and ultimately the ice crushed her timbers, forcing the entire expedition to abandon ship amidst the harshness of Antarctica. The rescue of her crew and those of the other vessel in the expedition, **Aurora**, is an epic that should be compulsory reading for every young person, especially those who believe that life owes them something.

Originally named **Polar Circle**, the Norwegian-built **HMS Endurance (3)** - aptly renamed in 1992 to enshrine the original expedition whose members displayed such incredible physical and mental fortitude under the most exacting conditions - undertakes important research and patrol duties in Antarctic waters, and is a frequent caller at the Falklands Islands. In her officers' saloon and carefully protected with a thick covering is the table at which the surrender of the Argentine forces was signed aboard the earlier ice patrol vessel **HMS Endurance (2)** at the end of the Falklands war in 1982.

After delicious refreshments in what is the Royal Navy's most comfortable and attractive wardroom - it extends across the full beam of the ship with a clear view forward and to both sides - an officer gave an outline of the role of the vessel, illustrated by some excellent BBC-style video clips that showed her hydrographical and meteorological survey work. This role has become vitally important, given the current interest in global warming, and the increasing number of cruise liners venturing into those inhospitable southern waters.

This latter trend is worrying, particularly in view of the narrow escape by those forced to abandon a sinking cruiseliner in the Antarctic earlier this year. Serious loss of life was avoided only by the presence of another ship in the vicinity, and reasonable weather.

Another incident like this may not have such a fortunate conclusion.

Woven into this written ramble are references to three remarkable men - Mandela, Moller and Shackleton - with their respective indefatigable characteristics and significant achievements.

Each is an inspiring role model - especially to the wannabe leaders in our land.

30 JULY 2008

INTERESTING SHIPS IN CAPE TOWN, AND AN AIR OF NOSTALGIA NileDutch Singapore and Southern Venture impress



TOP: **Alwyn Vincent** before the refit by volunteers.



TOP and TOP RIGHT: The old tug after the volunteers had finished.



TOP: Atlantic Coast readers have inquired about the small laden vessel that regularly heads out to sea, and returns empty about an hour later. She is **Munin R**, the hopper that carries mud dredged from the container basin to a dumping site south-west of Robben Island.



TOP: A slightly smaller unit of the Nile Dutch fleet, **NileDutch Brazil**, working cargo in Cape Town.



TOP: UniCal's **Southern Valour** leaving No 2 Jetty after her naming ceremony.

The smart containership **NileDutch Singapore** berthed in the wee wintry hours last Sunday morning, carrying a full load of containers from the Far East. Most of her cargo - in the attractive blue Nile Dutch containers - was bound for West Africa.

Forty years ago, a handful of Portuguese liners called at Angolan ports, Messagerie Maritimes and Chargeurs Reunis freighters served francophonic West Africa, while Royal InterOcean Line, a few Japanese lines and an East Asiatic Line vessel also went that way. More recently, Unicorn had a West African service that was dogged by congestion and politics. Most of those ships - then on monthly as opposed to more regular sailings these days - carried about a quarter of the cargo of the present vessels engaged on the trade.

A recently-published directory of shipping services reveals that six lines currently run from South Africa to Luanda, nine to Lagos and eleven to Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. Adding trans-shipment opportunities, the number of services to these West African ports increases further. That most of these services originate in the Far East is indicative of Chinese activity in the oil-rich region.

Although an increasing number of vessels are now trading to West Africa via South Africa, operators note wryly that freight rates could be better!

Not much dry cargo moves from that region, making it an imbalanced trade, as evidenced by the lightly laden ships on the return passage.

Factor in the congestion in some ports along that coast where ships may have to wait for a fortnight before berthing and you will understand that while the ships might be down to their marks heading north, profits are not as great as one may have expected.

Hidden costs in certain ports often include liquor, cartons of cigarettes, frozen chickens and a few green-backs that need to be provided before the wheels of officialdom start to turn. A master told me that in one port, officialdom's brothers also required some frozen chickens and fags!

But away from the grey side of shipping! In glorious weather - the next day would provide a typical Cape winter blow - a friendly crowd gathered in the so-called passenger terminal on No 2 Jetty last Wednesday to witness the naming of UniCal's bunker tanker now operating in Cape Town.

Some seasoned shipping folks were amazed at the size of the Chinese-built **Southern Valour** whose deadweight is greater than that of the regular coasters operating on the Durban-Cape Town haul in the 1970s. She and her Durban-based sistership **Southern Venture** are sophisticated double-skinned vessels with 11 cargo tanks that can provide a variety of fuel at a rate of about 1000 tons an hour. As they will spend most of their lives coming alongside loading terminals and other ships to deliver bunkers, they are particularly robustly constructed.

When I heard that, I thought of the old Smiths coaster **Nahoon**, built in 1935 for the Durban-Cape Town sugar run, a vessel whose deadweight was less than a quarter of that of **Southern Valour**. With a straight stem, a partially open bridge amidships, Spartan accommodation, and a tall, thin funnel down aft, she was a functional vessel that had been built to the typical British steam coaster design.

As **Nahoon** neared her 25th year, Smiths superintendent, with a penchant for long sentences, wrote an epistle to the board, outlining the condition of the old steamer. (*Amidst his emotive description of the old lady, he gave a glimpse of cargowork in the pre-computer era, when hatches were truly battened down, when union-purchase operations handled cargo at a rapid rate, and when much ingenuity was required to lug heavier cargoes from the wings of the hold.*)

*"While other ships of her age and more are still engaged upon their trades without showing anything like the stresses and bruises sustained by **Nahoon**," he wrote, "it is because they do not leave and enter port four times weekly, lie alongside often inadequately-fendered wharves for four or five days per week, loading and discharging cargo four or five times per week with the necessary daily shipping and unshipping of hatch beams, hatch boards, battens, wedges and tarpaulins; not to mention the continual use of winches, derricks, blocks, and running rigging, and the constant wear and tear on permanent dunnage, as well as the frequent stresses and strains placed on the vessel's hull with each load of cargo. It is not the action of seaway and weather alone which wears out a ship - indeed, long voyages are of great value for purposes of maintenance - but rather the constant grinding wear of laying alongside a wharf, bumping and surging to the action of tides, passing ships and weather, and continuously shifting cargo in and out..."*

As Smiths had purchased several modern German motorships, the superintendent's report confirmed the board's suspicions, and the old ship was laid up prior to scrapping in Durban.

Escaping a similar fate is the old tug **Alwyn Vintcent**. Guano and cormorants' nests have been cleared from her decks, she has been repainted, and fitters are preparing her for her piggy-back voyage to Australia, where to South Africa's lasting shame, she will be a working museum-piece.

Where are the South African equivalents of those generous and maritime-minded Australians who have ensured that the tug is preserved?

