

PORT POURRI



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.

3 SEPTEMBER 2008

BULKERS STRUGGLE OFF CAPE OF STORMS
Smit Amandla kept Busy



TOP: The heavy seas and spring high tide delivered six logs to the coast near Scarborough, Cape Town. The logs had fallen overboard from the logger **Lola** off Robben Island a few weeks ago. Remarkable is the fact that some drifted northwards and came ashore at Saldanha Bay while others went southwards, fetching up at Scarborough.



TOP: Anchored in False Bay, the Capesize ore carrier **Ocean Queen** awaits repairs to a crack in her number one hold, a product of the severe weather over the past few days. Many Capesize vessels of this vintage are being kept in service amidst soaring freight and charter rates. Some observers believe that it is only a matter of time before another serious incident involving such a ship occurs off the Cape coast, with tragic consequences for the crew and the environment.



TOP: Lykes Winner sailing from Simon's Town a few years ago after undergoing emergency repairs in the naval drydock.

The week-end's north-wester whipped the sea into a seething mass, bringing thousands of sight-seers to various vantage points along the Atlantic coast.

Those at the lighthouse on Sunday morning would have seen the Saudi-bound chemical tanker **Chembulk Shanghai** battling her way southbound past Robben Island and almost directly into the heavy sea,

With swell heights greater than seven metres at the pilot station, even the most intrepid pilots had difficulty in boarding ships in the open roadstead, and much incoming shipping was delayed. Most sailings and shiftings occurred as planned, although some delays were weather-inflicted.

Such has been the ferocity of the depression, that, during the past few days, more merchant ships lay at anchor in False Bay than many can remember, and a seasoned naval officer told me that he cannot recall greater surge in Simon's Town harbour than that experienced on Monday.

Probably to check that the lashings on her containers were still intact, a containership came into the bay for shelter - possibly the first containership to enter the bay. Some years ago, the multi-purpose ship **Lykes Winner** put into Simon's Town for urgent engineering work. Around the same time, the Safbank vessel **Olivebank** lost all power and the severe weather threatened to drive ashore near Cape Point, or overwhelm

her completely. As the appalling conditions prevented the salvage tug from putting up a line, mainly because no one could possibly have got to the fo'c's'le to make it fast, it was fortuitous that her engineers managed to restart the engine.

The tug escorted her to Simon's Town for temporary repairs, and she sailed a few days later for Cape Town where local engineers made permanent repairs. When I visited **Olivebank** some months later, I saw several photographs on the bulkhead, depicting those dramatic and angst-filled hours as she wallowed helplessly in 10-metre swells.

Similar conditions prevailed on Saturday when the 43230-deadweight **Nene J**, loaded with pipes and en route from Mundra, India, to Chile, headed for False Bay with engine trouble. Off a lee shore near Gansbaai, she became immobilised with the prospect of grounding ahead of the gale-force wind and heavy seas.

From False Bay, the salvage tug **Smit Amandla** hastened down the coast in response. While being streamed, her towing line parted after snagging on an uncharted object on the seabed. Since that object moved when the line snagged, it may have been a wreck.

The tug sheltered in False Bay while her crew prepared a second line, before she returned to the ship and, at the time of writing, she had taken **Nene J** in tow.

Conspicuous is the red hull of the 187864-deadweight ore carrier **Ocean Queen** that anchored off Murdoch Valley on Saturday. She was en route from Ponto de Madeira, Brazil, when a crack developed in her number one hold, and an ingress of water followed.

I understand that repairs to the 21-year-old vessel will not take too long, but following a similar incident two years ago that brought the even older **Setsuyo Star** to the same anchorage, a report by the flag state control in the Bahamas should set alarm bells ringing.

Capesize ships of 1980s vintage were built at a time when owners were trying to economise in the face of very low freight rates. Thus many opted for their ships to be built extensively from high tensile steel, as opposed to the more robust mild steel. With generally thinner steel, inferior coatings, and poor maintenance in their early years, a number of these Capesizes have suffered from severe corrosion that, if not detected during surveys, can lead to structural failure.

Where steel has been replaced, the new steel is sometimes of different thickness to that of the ship's existing plates, a factor that may weaken the ship's overall structure.

While not blaming the terminals, the report also notes what this column has mentioned several times previously the fast rate of loading at Brazilian ore terminals, some of which claim rates of up to 16000 tons per hour. (It is interesting that, except for **Apollo Sea** that loaded at Saldanha Bay before her sinking with all hands off Dassen Island in the 1990s, all ore carriers that have suffered structural failure off the South African coast - some sinking in minutes with major loss of life - had loaded in Brazil.)

The woes of this troubled generation of ships are unlikely to cease. High freight rates encourage owners to keep their ships operating for as long as possible, delaying both surveys and routine drydocking, while the pressure on large drydocks is such that some owners have difficulty in finding an appropriate slot for their ships. Scrap dates pass as owners seek to squeeze as much revenue from their older ships as possible.

Forecasters have predicted two more depressions passing the Cape this week, and with literally a convoy of ore carriers crossing the turbulent South Atlantic, there is every chance of another ageing Capesize ore carrier putting into False Bay for running repairs - or worse.

The weather forecasts will not please those agents whose tankers have been delayed by heavy seas at Saldanha. One agent told me that he had two waiting to discharge crude oil destined for the Killarney refinery, and with demurrage running at about \$150000 a day, storm delays are proving a very expensive exercise.

Billed as the introduction of the new naval fleet to President Mbeki and the people of South Africa, a Naval Review will occur in False Bay at 10:00 on Friday.



Megan Harris (FICS)

Marketing & Sales Consultant

Mobile +27 83 7971980

website www.shipscene.com

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**EXCELLENT FLEET REVIEW
INTERNATIONAL ROLE FOR LOCAL FRIGATES?**



TOP: In view of refitting schedules, the Fleet Review was probably the last time the four frigates **Mendi**, **Spioenkop**, **Isandlwana** and **Amatola** will be at sea together.



TOP: **SAS Isandlwana** leaving Simon's Town.

LEFT: **SAS Amatola**, the first of the German-built frigates sails from Simon's Town.

Last Friday's Fleet Review involving 14 naval ships and that afternoon's parade were most impressive. The products of considerable planning, such events are always well-executed, and embody great naval traditions that stretch back over the years.

Besides showcasing the ships and hoping that the recruiting office receives a few more forms from aspirant combat officers and engineers - rather than from those who only wish to lounge around the barracks - such an event provides excellent training in navigation and bridge teamwork as the ships maneuver at close-quarters.

Because of the need to refit ships periodically, with one of the frigates out of service at any time, it could be the last time that all four frigates will be seen at sea together for a while, giving the review a historic ring. (The same applied to the President-class frigates and the three Daphne-class submarines of a previous era, with few occasions when all three went to sea simultaneously.)

Some wondered why the merchant navy was not represented, the closest merchant ship being the Korean-flagged ore carrier **Ocean Queen**, anchored off Froggy Pond to repair a crack in number one hold. If memory serves me correctly, one of Safmarine's big whites, the salvage tug **John Ross**, a local stern trawler, the

fisheries research ship **Africana**, and **SA Agulhas** were in Table Bay on that morning in 1997 when President Mandela reviewed the fleet amidst quite a heavy swell.

The closest port of call to South Africa for only locally-flagged containership is about 5500 nautical miles away, thus explaining why no South African commercial vessel was around to elicit the gaze of our President.

Now that his watch is coming to an end and other hands have grabbed the helm, he probably would not have noted the absence of merchant ships, as his government has largely ignored shipping over the past 14 years - in similar fashion to those in the previous regime who also cared little about the maritime sector despite the country's dependence on shipping to move almost all imports and exports, and the sector being a major employer.

Another inquirer wondered whether the navy would have got more mileage had the review been held on a Saturday when thousands would have flocked to watch from various vantage points between Fish Hoek and Simon's Town.

Since much hullabaloo has surrounded the upgrade of the navy, I shall also put my oar in. Given that a form of maritime defence is necessary and considering the violent seas that frequently prevail along the southern African coast - particularly evident over the past fortnight - the frigate is perhaps the most suitable vessel for local conditions.

As alluded to previously in this column, I would sell the new submarines to purchase long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft that can be scrambled at a moment's notice for rescue missions and for surveillance of shipping.

Besides countering the spiraling deepsea poaching of fish stocks and a distressing upward trend in the dumping of slops at sea, aerial reconnaissance can combat piracy that is now a major threat to shipping, and may soon not be confined to the Horn of Africa or the Nigerian delta region.

Indeed, I wish well-meaning mums would dispense with kiddie pirate parties. Despite its Hollywood image, piracy has always been conducted by vicious, violent thugs, preying on innocent merchant ships. Caribbean pirates of former times were as ruthless as their modern Somali or Nigerian counterparts, hardly an image associated with children's parties.

At present the crews of five ships - four large vessels and a tug hijacked while passing the coast - are being held to ransom by Somali warlords (a euphemism for ruthless scum) while earlier this week, one seaman was killed when Nigerian pirates attacked a rig tender near Bonny.

Imagine the outcry - nay, the call to arms - that would follow if five airliners were hijacked over Europe or North America, and a pilot died in the attack.

Unlike airline crews who meet and greet millions of people on the world's passenger aircraft, seafarers are out of the public eye and are conveniently forgotten when the proverbial hits the fan. Judging from the lack of public response to piracy, it appears that seafarers are disposable in the eyes of many.

Despite the sophisticated "international patrol" currently operating off Somalia and the UN authorisation for warships to enter Somali waters on hot pursuit missions, rocket-toting gangsters still manage to nab five ships on the high seas. Why have two trawlers and a tug - alleged motherships for the attacks off Somalia - not been arrested, or better still, sunk? Perhaps a no-go zone should be declared along the entire Somali coast and tightly controlled by the international patrol.

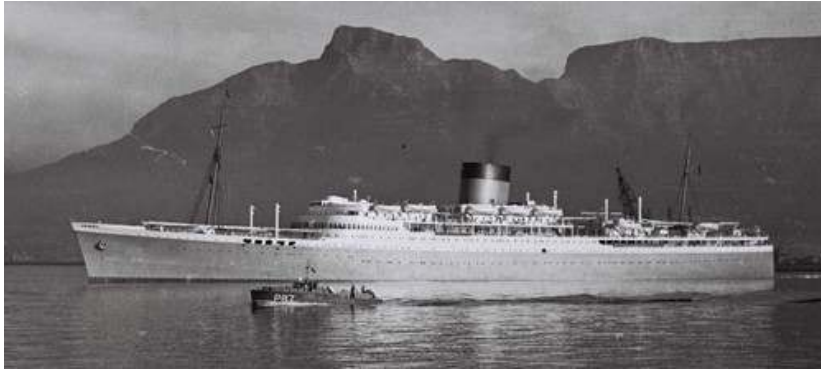
Here is a role for the South African navy, the only significant African navy, apart from Egypt. Local taxpayers might object to a distant operation, but vessels bound to or from South Africa could become victims, and it is only a matter of time before the gangsters of East Africa - or even closer to home - take up the idea.

A sophisticated South African frigate off the Somali coast would signal support to friendly parties; her armaments would send another signal to the pirates.

- Vessels associated with the West African oil industry continue to call. The offshore supply vessel **Maersk Challenger** (bunkers), the pipelayers, **Seven Oceans** (bunkers) and **Acergy Polaris** (extensive refit involving two spells in the drydock), and the tug **Salvaliant** (bunkers) towing **BOABarge 7** have each contributed to the local coffers in recent days.

- **Queen Mary 2** will make her maiden call in Durban and Cape Town in March 2010.

**UNION-CASTLE'S COMMODORE A REMARKABLE MAN
.....as is his Soulmate**



TOP: Pretoria Castle sailing from Cape Town in 1948 with the motor defence launch P87 in the foreground.



TOP: Commodore George Mayhew, one of the most approachable men to occupy Union-Castle's top sea-going rank.

A winter shopping trip to Manchester from her home in Cheshire in 1932 proved to be a date with destiny for young Betty Cardwell. A Manchester street billboard announcing cheap fares to sunny South Africa enticed her mother and her to book a passage from Southampton to Cape Town aboard Kenilworth Castle, the two-funnelled Union-Castle mailship. During that voyage, Betty met the liner's third officer in the ship's lift, the prelude to a long and very happy marriage.

I learnt this one rainy afternoon last week when I chatted to 98-year-old Betty Mayhew, widow of Union-Castle's legendary Commodore George Mayhew, who had been Kenilworth Castle's young third officer.

What a delightfully bright and positive person she is, with a store of equally bright tales about the only man to rise from cadet to director on the British & Commonwealth board, the owners of Union-Castle.

Her husband, she told me, had gone to sea in 1917 as a 16-year-old cadet aboard Norman, a former Union Line vessel that had been absorbed into the Union-Castle fleet when the two companies merged in 1900. Before his nineteenth birthday, he had been torpedoed twice - in the English Channel and again in the North Atlantic.

Early in World War 2, Mayhew took command of Roxburgh Castle. Designed to carry South African fruit to Britain as quickly as possible, these reefer ships could bowl along at 16 knots, quite a speed for cargoships of that vintage and, with urgently needed fruit or meat for wartime UK, they often sailed solo rather than in the slower convoys.

Leaving Durban with several other ships bound for Aden, Roxburgh Castle was routed east of Madagascar, while the others went via the Mozambique Channel. The Union-Castle ship was the only one to reach Aden, and during the voyage had rescued the crew of an American vessel, whose 70-year-old master had come out of retirement to do "his bit" for the Allied cause.

In February 1943, Roxburgh Castle sailed from Glasgow, and Mayhew set course for Buenos Aires to load meat for the UK. Off the Azores, she was torpedoed by U107. As the crew pulled away from the sinking ship, the submarine surfaced next to the lifeboats. "Where's the captain?" the uboat commander inquired of the fourth mate.

"Last time I saw him," replied the young officer, "he was on the bridge." His response satisfied the German who, before leaving, gave them the course to the nearest land, and masses of chocolate.

Next to the fourth mate in the lifeboat was Captain Mayhew, who, in civilian clothing, looked more like an engineroom wiper than the master, a practice among shipmasters who were often singled out for capture by uboats.

George Mayhew became Union-Castle's commodore in 1953, flying his pennant in Pretoria Castle which he took to the Coronation Fleet Review that year.

A gregarious man - the product of having six sisters and two brothers, Betty Mayhew told me - he enjoyed the passenger ships, and, dressed in his full uniform, contrived to be pushed into the swimming pool by the children during the crossing-the-line ceremony.

During her husband's sea-going career, Mrs Mayhew travelled with him only twice. "The board believed," she said, her eye twinkling, "that ships should have only one captain at a time." On one of those trips, she had sailed from the UK in Arundel Castle to Port Elizabeth where, since the upcoast and downcoast mailships crossed there, she transferred to Pretoria Castle to join her husband for the voyage to Cape Town. "After all," she added, " it was Christmas."

On the other occasion, the commodore was hospitalised for surgery while Pretoria Castle was in Cape Town. Such was the company's pecking order that Captain Jackie Fisher, the master of Warwick Castle, also in port at the time, was transferred to Pretoria Castle; he was replaced by the master of Roslin Castle, loading at Cape Town's fruit terminal, while the chief officer of Pretoria Castle was promoted to acting master of the fruitship! Accompanied by Betty who had flown from the UK to be with her husband, George Mayhew returned to the UK as a passenger in Winchester Castle.

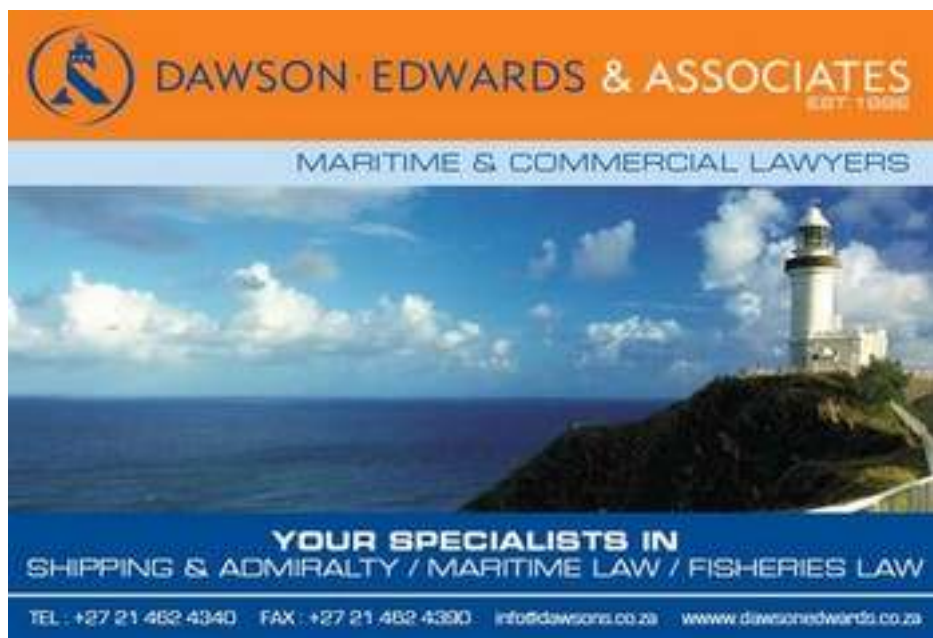
For their respective maiden voyages, the commodore moved his pennant to Pendennis Castle - he was awarded the CBE prior to the vessel's maiden departure from Southampton - and a year later to Windsor Castle. Soon after the maiden voyage of the latter vessel he was appointed Group Marine Superintendent and ultimately, joined the board until his retirement in 1963.

During retirement, the Mayhews often travelled by sea, usually on the mailship to the UK. However, when he saw a Shaw Savill advertisement that, during her round-the-world voyage, their beautiful Northern Star would divert to Japan for the World Expo, Mayhew hastened to book. The daunting length of the queues to the various exhibition halls put him off - and although they didn't see much at the Expo, the voyage was most enjoyable.

"The previous time I had been through Panama," said Betty Mayhew, "was in New Zealand Shipping's Rangitiki, and there were alligators on the sandbanks. This time, instead of alligators, there were dozens of waterski-ers!"

I am sure that Commodore Mayhew's remarkable career was enhanced by Betty whose visit to Manchester 76 years ago had a wonderful sequel for both the commodore and his equally wonderful soulmate.

· HMS Liverpool will be in Cape Town and the RFA Black Rover in Simon's Town for about 10 days.



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TOP: USS Theodore Roosevelt and her escort cruiser **USS Monterey** are due in Cape Town on Saturday.
Photograph : US Navy



TOP: HMS Liverpool sailing from Cape Town this week. **RFA Black Rover** sailed from Simon's Town at the same time.



TOP: The 300-metre **MSC Messina** sailing from Cape Town.

RIGHT: A crane lifting the upper part of the leg of the jack-up rig in Cape Town harbour. The rig is aboard the barge **BOA Barge 7**. While under tow from Galveston to Malaysia by the tug **Salvaliant**, the rig's legs were damaged during a storm a fortnight ago. Apparently the heavy rolling during the storm caused the legs to flex so much that they were damaged, necessitating the upper parts of all three legs to be removed. The entire stay of the tug and the rig has brought about \$2 million to the local economy. The tug and tow will resume the voyage to the east this week.



AIRCRAFT CARRIER TO ANCHOR OFF CAPE TOWN

Concerns regarding weather

Interest in maritime matters will be whetted next week when the 333-metre aircraft carrier **USS Theodore Roosevelt** arrives off the Cape with over 5000 personnel aboard.

Planned visits by these mega-ships have been cancelled on several previous occasions. In 2001, **USS Enterprise** was due, but when the Iraq War broke out, she was ordered back to the Middle East. Bureaucratic bungling meant that **USS Harry S Truman** did not call in 2005.

I am told that **Theodore Roosevelt** will not enter harbour. Since her cooling intakes need to be well clear of the seabed at low tide, sources tell me that for even the Eastern Mole, the deepest berth in the Duncan Dock, her draught is too great, and she will anchor in the roadstead.

She could perhaps have come alongside the container terminal, but, because of dredging and other operations to upgrade that facility, the remaining berths at the terminal are under such pressure that space cannot be allocated to the aircraft carrier for a relatively long stay. Her escort cruiser, **USS Monterey**, of the same class as **USS Normandy** that took part in the NATO exercises off the Cape last year, will berth at the Eastern Mole.

My dockland ears hear that local ferryboats will be chartered to convey the carrier's crew ashore, and that a barge will be alongside her as a landing stage. It's one thing taking tourists around the harbour or to Clifton for sundowners, but considerable expertise will be required to come alongside the barge with a swell running - without incurring damage to the launches. Ask the seasoned skippers of the sturdy, well-fendered pilot boats and off-limits supply launches.

It's probably too late to change arrangements - and I will probably incur the wrath of Waterfront folks for making the suggestion - but would Simon's Bay not be a better anchorage for such a large vessel, particularly if libertymen are being ferried ashore? Although the south-easter could dampen things in Simon's Bay, it can affect shipping equally in Table Bay, but there is little chance of a significant swell in the area adjacent to the naval port.

It would be easier for the navy's Namakurras to maintain an exclusion zone around her in the calmer waters off Simon's Town than in Table Bay, especially if a wild sea is running off the Atlantic coast.

The logistics of moving the American sailors to the brighter lights of Cape Town from the dimmer lights of Simon's Town will involve some smart planning, but it is possible.

At various times during World War 2, the three largest Cunarders **Queen Elizabeth**, **Queen Mary** and **Aquitania** called at Simon's Town, anchoring off the harbour close to the training ship **General Botha**. A clear photograph shows **Queen Mary** and **Aquitania** together in 1940, having crossed the Indian Ocean from Australia under escort of the cruiser **HMAS Australia**.

When **Queen Elizabeth** anchored in Simon's Bay in May 1942, she embarked hundreds of prisoners of war, captured in North Africa and brought to South Africa in smaller ships. A contemporary newspaper report told of some of those unfortunates trying to escape by jumping overboard from the tugs that were ferrying them to the huge liner.

On other occasions, these large ships anchored in Table Bay to take on fresh water from tugs that had towed out lighters down to the gunwhales with fresh produce for the ships. Photographs recording those visits show a mirror-like Table Bay that will be on the prayerlist of those arranging the forthcoming visit by **Theodore Roosevelt**. Nevertheless, their calls at Cape Town did not involve shore leave for thousands of crewmembers.

Speaking of Simon's Town, a stern trawler and small reefer vessel arrived on Monday for drydocking, while local residents can watch the **RFA Black Rover** sailing tomorrow to join **HMS Liverpool** that will sail from the Waterfront.

More naval news relates to the frigate **SAS Spioenkop** currently heading for a protracted visit to the Far East, and **SAS Isandlwana** for Reunion Island. I also understand that one of the frigates will join the anti-piracy force off Somalia where several large ships and their crews are being held hostage. One of these, the chemical tanker **Stolt Valor**, has called here several times. Of the more than 30 ships captured by pirates in that region this year, most have been released on payment of huge ransoms by the shipowners. As I wrote a fortnight ago, imagine the instantaneous response if 30 jumbo jets had been hijacked by the same crowd of thugs!

Late last week came the good news that a Danish warship operating off Somalia had captured two pirate boats and their crews armed with sophisticated weapons and boarding equipment.

Keeping the world's trade routes open to shipping is vital to the global economy. Yet operating close to many of the maritime chokepoints are either pirates - Somali and Yemeni pirates are good examples - or irrational politico-fundamentalists whose stance threatens free trade, a scenario embodied in the Iranian threat to block the Straits of Hormuz, the vital artery through which flows most of the world's oil.

Even the Suez Canal could be closed through the actions of some crazed group with an axe to grind either with the west or with the Egyptian government whose main source of revenue comes from canal transits.

The importance of the Cape route will be underscored by the carrier's presence here. She should be warmly welcomed.

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