

**PORT POURRI**



BRIAN  
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**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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**7 JANUARY 2009**

**VARIETY OF SHIPS MAKES DOCKLAND INTERESTING**



**TOP: Safmarine Nyassa** arriving in Cape Town. Perhaps her less-than-full cargo is a sign of the times.



**TOP: Assimina II** arriving in Cape Town for bunkers en route from Rosario to Durban.



**TOP: Salveritas** in Cape Town.



**RIGHT:** Captain Graham Douglas, one of several South Africans now serving in POSH-SEMCO vessels, is the master of **Salveritas**.

**LEFT:** **Maersk Battler**, one of seven tugs in Cape Town recently.



The magnificent five-star cruiseliner **Deutschland** called just after Christmas and returned last Sunday to provide a spectacle for Waterfront visitors before sailing for Namibian ports.

Many of her passengers fly in from Europe for the cruise that also includes east coast ports and she will return here on 16 January.

Aboard the small project cargo vessel **CEC Faith** were two patrol launches being shipped from Asia to Luanda, while bunkering across the Duncan Dock from her was the blue-hulled ro-ro **Shuttle**, carrying equipment for the Nigerian oil industry. Built as the passenger ferry **Sunflower Oarai** in 1987, and, as **Shuttle Oita**, she was recently converted in China to a ro-ro freighter.

**Assimina II**, a smart fully-laden bulker registered in Montego Bay, Jamaica, arrived the other day from the grain port of Rossario on the River Plate bound for Durban. She bunkered here because of the scarcity of bunkers in Durban following the recent fire at the Engen refinery.

The semi-submersible heavylift ship **Black Marlin** arrived yesterday for bunkers en route from Cabinda to load in Malaysia. A few years ago, I boarded her anchored off Glencairn. At the time, she was carrying two oil platforms that would be floated off the ship in False Bay whence tugs would tow them to Cape Town for modifications prior to going to Angola. A freshening south-easter forced the operation to be moved to Saldanha.

You cannot miss the FPSO **Glas Dowr** that, having been de-mobbed after five years on the Sable Oilfield off the southern Cape coast, was towed to Cape Town by the tugs **Salveritas** and **De Hong**. These two tugs, Svitzer's tug **Battelaxe** that had also been involved with the **Glas Dowr**, and **OMS Resolution**, taking stores before sailing for West Africa, formed a veritable tugboat alley at Quays 501 and 502.

Any ship requiring assistance during the past few days could have had a choice of seven tugs, as, besides the four at 501-502, **Fairmount Glacier** and **Maersk Battler** were also in port, while another was at anchor.

I enjoyed a visit to the meticulously maintained **Salveritas** belonging to the recently rebranded POSH SEMCO, a Singapore-based company with a sizeable fleet of deepsea tugs, anchor-handling and supply vessels, as well as semi-submersible barges. Catering mainly for the offshore oil industry, the expanding fleet specialises in long-distance towage and positioning of FPSOs.

As part of the rebranding programme, the black hulls will be painted green and the tugs' sides will bear the company's logo POSH, the livery already on some of the tugs.

Aboard, I met the friendly Captain Graham Douglas, one of several South African officers now serving in the fleet. Among the Unicorn ships in which he learnt the ways of the sea was **Umfolozi**, built for the Iranian national fleet, but at the time of her delivery, the Shah of Iran was deposed, and, since the fundamentalists focused on their religious and political agendas rather than on shipping, she went to Dutch owners.

After her purchase by the South Africans, Unicorn officers enjoyed her well-appointed accommodation, while her two 50-ton Stulken derricks were useful to handle a variety of heavylift cargoes. Among her more interesting assignments, **Umfolozi** made two voyages to Niigata, Japan, on a Safmarine charter to load parts of an aluminium smelter that was being moved piece by piece to Richards Bay, an operation known as the *Richigata Project*. The construction programme required pieces of the smelter to be shipped in a specific order, a logistical nightmare that both the charterer and ship's officers managed very well - apart from the first piece that fell between the ship and the quay during discharge in Richards Bay!

Other charter voyages took her from Europe to North America, and to the west coast of South America via Panama. For her homeward voyage to South Africa, again on a Safmarine charter, she called at the Virginian port of Richmond, located far up the narrow James River. Her Stulkens had to be lowered to allow her to pass beneath some of the bridges, and the pilot kept muttering about those who had stemmed the ship up such a narrow waterway. At the time, she was the largest vessel to berth at that jetty.

She traded mainly on Unicorn's South Africa-Israel service and also to South America, but as containerisation was making inroads into these services, she was transferred initially to the Griffin fleet - an offshore extension of the Grindrod operation - and later went to Panamanian interests.

From Cape Town, **Salveritas** will cross the South Atlantic later this month for the positioning of a new FPSO off the Brazilian coast where extensive oilfields are being developed.

Three vessels will capture the interest of Capetonians over the next few days. The Russian nuclear-powered battlecruiser **Pyotr Velikhiy** (aka **Peter the Great**) was scheduled to arrive on Friday, but at time of writing, bureaucracy was interfering with her visit. These gremlins must be addressed to avoid last-minute uncertainties that also plagued the American aircraft carrier's call last year. What will the Russians say if they can't come, but the Americans did?

The self-propelled FPSO **Knock Allen** is slated for next Tuesday. Built as a tanker, she has been converted in Dubai to an FPSO for the Olowi oilfield off Gabon. She will spend about a fortnight at anchor while final modifications are made.

The rig **Aban Abraham** should berth next Wednesday for a fortnight's stay.

Ship-spotters are having a great time!

## BUREAUCRACY NEARLY TORPEDOES RUSSIAN VISIT



TOP: The Russian battlecruiser **Pyotr Velikhiy** arriving in Cape Town.



TOP: Captain Clive Parton, Master of **Hebridean Spirit**, whose career is both unusual and most interesting.



TOP: One of the larger containerships on the South African trade, **MSC Michaela**, off Cape Town.



LEFT: Third Mate Roberto Maquesias on the bridge of **Hebridean Spirit**. He began as a deckhand aboard the freighter **Maritime Baku**, and when he served initially in **Hebridean Spirit**, he was earmarked for promotion. After the required seetime and having passed his Second Mate's ticket, he was promoted to Third Mate aboard the cruiseliner.

When bureaucracy obstructs the implementation of a fine idea, some will cease to dream. What a pity that the visit by the Russian nuclear-powered battlecruiser **Pyotr Velikhiy** was afflicted - even threatened with a refusal of permission to enter Cape Town - by bureaucratic demands!

Initial calls for public comment on her visit appeared in the week-end press more than a month ago and someone must have been a bit lethargic prior to the festive spirit not to have placed a similar *call-for-comment* in the Government Gazette. An earlier visit by an American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier was also fouled up, and uncertainty also plagued **USS Theodore Roosevelt's** visit in October last year. Sanity prevailed in the end, and she anchored off the port.

But why do these glitches arise every time a nuclear-powered vessel is due when arrangements have been made months before? While the anti-nuke lobby argue that such a vessel poses a serious danger, others will point to the nuclear power station - and its "*bolt*" problems - ironically located across the bay. Many wonder why public comment is needed anyway for a visit by a nuclear-powered vessel when the nuclear science backing the operation of these ships is more advanced than anything here.

Even if this magnificent warship was denied permission to berth in South Africa, what would have prevented her from passing close to the coast as she steamed from Venezuela to India? She - like all ships ranging from carriers to ageing colliers - has the right of innocent passage through our territorial waters.

As I wrote last week, would the Russians not be miffed if the pride of their navy was refused entry to Cape Town, while the red carpet had been rolled out for the American carrier last October? The political repercussions could have been interesting, especially since the struggle brigade have always cosied up to the Russians.

A few years ago, local bureaucrats also suffered a bout of paranoia when a vessel carrying nuclear waste from France to Japan was due to round the Cape. They duly consigned her to more southerly latitudes where the worst of weather conditions prevail. On her return voyage in ballast, her owners berthed her at the Waterfront and, to counter the negative hype surrounding such vessels, opened her to the public.

Scheduled to berth at the Waterfront today is the small cruiseliner **Hebridean Spirit** whose passengers enjoy considerable luxury and fine service. During her earlier visit shortly before Christmas, I met her master, Captain Clive Parton, a most pleasant gent who has served in some unusual vessels.

The young cadet Parton first ventured to sea aboard the 22303-deadweight bulker **Baron Maclay**, operated by Hogarths of Ardrossan. Her main charters involved moving various bulk cargoes between Australia and Asia, and he remembers calls at quaint Indonesian ports to discharge Australian wheat.

At that time, Hogarths ran seven ships, a far cry from earlier years when around 20 steamers, bearing the characteristic Hogarth buff and black funnel, tramped worldwide loading a variety of cargoes.

Captain Parton's interest in a seafaring career was kindled when, as a lad, he sailed with his family from the UK to New Zealand aboard the P&O liner **Stratheden**. They returned in the emigrant vessel **Fairsky** that once

had been the aircraft carrier **HMS Attacker**. After the war, she was converted to a passenger ship and Sitmar Line bought her in 1958 for the Australasian emigrant service on which she called here several times during the Suez closure from 1967 to 1975.

Happy memories of that earlier voyage flooded back when, from his bulker, Cadet Parton saw her once in Greece. Later, the passengership hit a wreck, and after a lay-up, she became a floating hotel in Manila until fire destroyed her in 1979.

Clive Parton later moved to the Sail Training Association and gained his first command aboard the sailing vessel **Sir Winston Churchill**, experience that he valued when a few years later, he commanded the three-masted, mahogany dhow belonging to the Sultan of Oman. Her traditional appearance belied the modern, luxurious royal apartments down below.

The Sultan then entrusted him with the command of his 102-metre royal motor-yacht that accommodated 30 guests and a crew of between 150 and 200, depending on how many passengers were on board.

Accompanying the royal yacht, he told me, was a 15000-ton supplyship to carry vehicles for the Sultan's runs ashore, a helicopter, a full orchestra and a jazz band. I am sure a few commando-types also lurked aboard that vessel.

Captain Parton's present command, **Hebridean Spirit**, and her consort **Hebridean Princess** cater for a niche market among British travellers. Dark wooden panelling, plush carpets and attractive lounges convey one into an elegant world, and I understand that both ships provide an excellent cuisine.

Such is the standard aboard that the latter vessel was chartered by Queen Elizabeth and other members of the royal family for a few weeks last summer.

After voyages up the west and east coasts, **Hebridean Spirit** will make three further calls in Cape Town before heading to the Indian Ocean islands, and sans passengers, she will transit the pirate-infested Gulf of Aden, probably with a warship escort, for passengers to embark in Egypt.

Captain Parton's career is as interesting as the voyages undertaken by his current command.

21 JANUARY 2009

## ANCHORED GASSERS FUEL QUESTIONS



TOP: **Aurora** off Cape Town on her first visit.



TOP: **LNG Cross River**, another with the Kvaerner-Moss system that makes these gassers so conspicuous.



RIGHT: **Grand Aniva**, an example of the Kvaerner-Moss Containment System



LEFT: **LNG Enugu** with the GTT system.

With the Russian battlecruiser having had the limelight last week, eyes will be on the cruiseliner **Astor** berthing at the Waterfront this morning, weather permitting. Built by Safmarine in 1987, she was their second vessel bearing the name and did not come to South African ports during their two-year period of ownership.

The magnificent **Aurora** is scheduled to berth at Eastern Mole on Monday, and those involved will be watching the weather as a strong south-easter will not be kind to marquees erected for the shoreside movement of passengers.

When **Oriana** called last year, she also berthed at Eastern Mole, and the weather held for her stay. However, the berth is not ideal for a passengershhip despite a fleet of buses on hand to ferry passengers to the Waterfront.

Unusual ship silhouettes against the setting sun continue to attract attention. Fitters are installing equipment aboard FPSO **Knock Allen** at anchor off Sea Point, and adjacent to her is the umpteenth gasser to fascinate Atlantic seaboard residents who, over last week-end, would have seen two other gassers taking stores off port limits.

Reflecting a refreshing interest in ships, numerous readers have inquired about the gassers, many of which have spherical aluminium tanks, covered in insulation as their cargo of liquefied gas is carried at around -160 degrees Celsius, and the entire tank is protected by a steel outer covering.

Developed in 1971 and currently used in more than half of the 300-strong global gasser fleet, this method of carrying liquefied gas is known in shipping-speak as the Kvaerner-Moss containment system.

Providing greater capacity than in similar-sized ships using the Kvaerner-Moss system, are the so-called GTT membrane containment system and the IHI prismatic containment system. Although their housing protrudes above the main deck, the gas tanks are not spherical, making this class of gasser less conspicuous than Kvaerner-Moss ships.

Although the first water-borne shipment of bulk gas occurred in 1914, the first gasser - **Methane Pioneer**, a converted cargoship - moved a cargo from the US Gulf to Britain in 1959.

Initial growth in the gasser fleet was slow, but in recent years, dozens have entered service and about 90 large vessels are on order to meet the growing demand for gas, thought to be a "clean" fuel. (*My schoolboy experience when using a Bunsen burner to heat iron filings and sulphur in the science laboratory showed a heavy layer of soot on the test-tube!*)

The largest gasser, the 345-metre **Mozah**, is the first of 14 similar ships being built to move massive volumes of Qatar gas exports. Vessels of her size will be known as Q-Max gassers, as they are the largest ships that can berth at the Qatari gas terminals. Some idle soul allegedly calculated that you can fit three jumbo jets in each of her five tanks, one of those weirdly useless statistics that only spin doctors would dare to use. More appropriate is the fact that one shipment by **Mozah** will supply Britain's gas and electricity requirements for 24 hours.

Given the recent spat between Russia and Ukraine that resulted in gas supplies to much of Europe being shut off - and perhaps more importantly inflating Russian influence in Europe - some analysts foresee several European countries rushing to secure seaborne gas imports, thereby boosting the gasser market. Poland, Greece, Turkey and Italy are among those hardest hit by the recent Russian intervention and have ordered several additional gas shipments to be brought in by ship.

To replace the Russian supply, says a US report, Europe would need about four extra LNG import cargoes per day, an impossibility with the size of the current gasser fleet and the number of existing gas import terminals.

If European countries were to expand their seaborne imports, fewer gassers would lie at anchor for protracted periods, a scenario more agreeable to some Cape Times readers who write of their concern at the presence of these ships so close to the coast.

"*Won't she go aground?*" an anxious reader asked. In the south-easter season, the off-shore wind makes it safe for these and other ships to anchor in the deep water a mile or two off the coast. In winter, the north-wester and westerly swell will force them to anchor closer to Robben Island.

"*I am scared she will explode!*" e-mailed another. Those gassers at anchor are in ballast - shipping-speak for carrying no cargo - and are usually awaiting orders to load liquefied natural gas in Nigeria. Even if she were full, the technology aboard and the exceptionally high standards of specialised training among gasser officers and crew will minimize any risk of explosion. Although I could only find a reference in one article, I seem to recall that an Exocet missile hit a gasser during the Iran-Iraq war, without any explosion, although that happy outcome for the crew could have been attributed to a malfunctioning missile! However, marine underwriters place gassers at a lower risk than crude oil tankers

Yet another reader expressed concern that the exhaust gas from anchored ship was contributing to global warming, mentioning also that a haze surrounded the gasser one evening. A marine engineer who knows his stuff tells me that many gassers have a waterspray system to wash the exterior of the tanks and to serve as a fire extinguishing system. "*Perhaps,*" he ventured, "*they were testing the system when your reader noticed the haze.*"

The contribution of ships' exhaust to atmospheric changes is a huge subject that I hope to address within a fortnight.

28 JANUARY 2009

## MAERSK LEADS THE WAY BY DIVERTING HUGE SHIPS TO THE CAPE ROUTE



TOP: **Eugen Maersk**, one of the huge E-Class containerships that Maersk has diverted to the Cape Route as a cost-saving measure.

Photograph : Maersk Line



TOP: The cruiseliner **Albatross** due in Cape Town.



RIGHT: **Aurora**, arriving in Cape Town.

Photograph : Robert Pabst

They are coming! Maersk Line has diverted its largest containerships to the Cape route on their voyages from Europe to the Far East, rather than their usual route via Suez. They will transit the canal on their return to Europe.

The first of these 394-metre ships, **Elly Maersk**, is heading this way, having sailed from Algeciras on 22 January on a direct voyage to Shanghai. Since her arrival date in the Chinese port (*23 February*) is about the same as if she had gone via Suez and a few other ports, Maersk's Chinese clients will not have to wait longer for their cargo.

Since these ships are too high and too fast for boarding by pirates, this move is not connected to the piracy plague in the Gulf of Aden. (*After a ship belonging to the Danish carrier was attacked last year, the company diverted some of their smaller vessels whose route took them past the pirates' lairs.*)

Rather, the diversion of these larger, 11000-teu and 8000-teu ships via the Cape represents a significant cost-saving measure at a time when lines are exploring every possible way to balance the books.

The arithmetic involved is quite simple. A diversion to the Cape will mean about eight days' extra steaming during which these impressive vessels consume a lot of fuel per day, costing \$225 per ton at Rotterdam. To the fuel costs must be added the daily operating costs of the ship (*including depreciation, maintenance, insurance, wages, and other costs*) for eight days, and you will arrive at a figure less than the Suez Canal toll of around \$700000 for a large, fully-laden containership.

With no canal toll, and no piracy insurance surcharge, a saving of over \$100000 per voyage via the Cape is likely! By taking the longer route, the ships are gainfully employed for a longer period, enabling the company to keep them trading during these appallingly bad times for shipowners when other companies are laying up ships.

Although these ships - if fully laden - will not be able to berth here, some analysts believe that since they will not have full loads, there is every prospect of adaptations being made to both the schedule and the stowage of containers so that they can berth at Cape Town or at Coega when it comes on stream. In this way, Maersk will be able to integrate the Europe-Far East, Europe-South Africa and South Africa-Far East services.

If the ships will not berth here, local ship-spotters scanning the horizon might see these deep-draughted ships with their characteristic blue hulls bearing the Maersk logo as they close the coast to round Cape Point. Carrier Marine's off-port-limits launch service and Titan helicopters may glean a few rands from them if the ships require crew changes, stores or urgent spares.

For the ships' complements, the diversion from the crowded Mediterranean and Red Seas will be a rare chance for several days' blue-water cruising. Once the ship has cleared the fishing grounds off the bulge of Africa where regulatory riding lights are often ignored by the cockleshell fishing boats, the next relatively busy time for bridge watchkeepers will be when she passes the South African coast. A dart across the Indian Ocean, also relatively free of shipping, will give a further respite for the officers, before she approaches the Sunda or Lombok Straits where fishing boats, inter-island ferries and other traffic will keep the officers on their toes.

Since Maersk is regarded as the major carrier in terms of the size of its operation, other lines have also reached for their computers to calculate whether they can effect similar savings on voyages via the Cape. Recent news is that the French company CGM CMA and Geneva-based MSC will also be routing their ships via the Cape to avoid pirates and to take advantage of the free ocean highway off the South African coast.

Over the years, other ships have also made use of the longer Cape route, rather than Suez. Blue Funnel Line used to send some of their Australia-bound passenger-cargoships via the Cape during the northern hemisphere's summer to avoid the excruciating heat in the Suez-Red Sea area. For the same reason, P&O's B-class liners on the Australasian immigrant service also came this way in the inter-war period.

During a boom time a few years ago, some of P&O Nedlloyd's Bay-class containerships called at Cape Town en route from Southampton to Fremantle. With masses of cargo available at the time, logic showed that if the ship took on enough bunkers only to reach Cape Town where she would refuel for the leg to Fremantle, she could carry more containers. Thus, despite the slightly longer voyage and the Cape Town port costs, the additional revenue earned from the extra containers and no Suez toll to be paid made the trip more profitable.

Those containerships carried a handful of passengers who enjoyed a few hours in Cape Town, and folks wanting an experience to relate over dinner would have booked their return passage in those ships as they usually rounded Cape Horn en route from Australasia to Britain.

Also passing the Cape on a more regular basis will be the largest bulker, the 343-metre **Berge Stahl**, carrying about 340000 tons of iron ore from Ponto do Madeira in Brazil to China. The 22-year-old vessel has been switched from her usual route carrying Brazilian ore to Rotterdam for which she was designed, and indeed, the Brazilian port was also specially designed to handle her.

She made a trip to China two years ago for drydocking, and to minimise the steaming time in ballast, she loaded a half-cargo of Australian ore for Rotterdam, and, shortly before Christmas 2006, she drew considerable interest from the local shipping fraternity when she topped up in Saldanha Bay.

Unless she requires launch or helicopter service, even ship-spotters with mountainside eyries are unlikely to see her as she will probably steam on a great circle route from Brazil to the Lombok Strait.

With plenty of shipping in local waters for the foreseeable future, the ship-spotters are not the only ones who will be having a field day. The off-port-limits launch service and helicopter service report a few good weeks, and a growing booking list.

Egypt's loss is South Africa's gain.