



with

**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 and around 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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# DECEMBER 2007

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The **IVS Cabernet** maneuvering on the open seas



## OIL RIGS & MORE ANTARCTIC SHIPS IN CAPE TOWN Bunker Barge also on the port's horizon

"*Blow!*" she commanded. Apparently, I hadn't blown hard enough. "*Blow!*" she repeated firmly. I did, for she was a daunting, scowling figure. "*Pass!*" she said. Lest readers jump to wrong conclusions, this encounter occurred when I was breathalysed for the first time in over half a century of docks rambling.

The scene was the Repair Quay, currently a make-shift repair centre dedicated to the refit of the rig **Orca**, and guarded by an army of security folks who, on instructions from PetroSA, breathalyse those entering that precinct, even Taiwanese trawlermen returning to their vessel further up the quay after a night on the town.

My purpose in wandering along the quay was to view the Antarctic supply vessel **Amderma** across the harbour at L Berth. She is one of a large class of ice-strengthened ships built in Finland in the early 1980s to the account of the Russians for their Arctic and Baltic trades, both of which develop various thicknesses of ice in the winter.

With a ro-ro facility as well as conventional cargo holds, these are useful vessels, particularly in specialised roles such as carrying polar supplies that filled the cargo apron at L Berth. Among her cargo on this voyage are modules for the new British Antarctic base, of which some were prefabricated in Cape Town. My dockland ears hear that part of the structure is not ready for shipment; if true, it could delay the construction project considerably.

Her Maierform bow gives her an ice-breaking capability as the vessel rides up on an ice shelf, enabling the weight of the ship to break the ice. Bank Line who bought four of these vessels from the Russians fitted bulbous bows, a more appropriate structure for their trade to the warmer climes of the Pacific islands.

Towering above me on the Repair Quay was **Orca**, now destined to be part of the skyline for several more months as urgent structural modifications are taking place. Also at the quay is the almost derelict rig **Atlantic Venture**, the subject of much discussion in the port as she is taking up valuable space that could have been allocated to the Capesize bulker, **Mineral Capeasia**, in port for protracted engine repairs. However, the bulker is currently at the Landing Wall, a valuable bunker berth, given the growing pressure on the few bunker facilities in the absence of a bunker barge. Smit Amandla Marine named their new bunker barge in Durban last week for service in Durban, and I understand that Chevron will begin barge operations in Cape Town in the near future. Unicorn has earmarked one of its Chinese-built barges for Cape Town from March or April next year.

Towed out of Cape Town by the tug **Red Sea Fos** was **Mighty Servant 3** that has been here since June this year after sinking off Luanda nearly a year ago. She will be repaired in the Bahamas.

Another tow that left Cape Town this week bound for Trinidad was the Japanese barge **Ocean Orc**, towed by the Murmansk-registered tug **Kapitan Martyshkin** whose enclosed bridge-wings are typical of vessels operating in polar regions

Talking of polar areas and tugs, the amiable salvage expert Captain Dai Davies was on the phone. He reminded me of an operation done by his company Land & Marine Salvage in 1980 when their tug **Causeway Salvor** assisted in refloating the exotic cruise liner **Lindblad Explorer**, close to where she sank a fortnight ago - as **Explorer**. On that earlier occasion, recalled Davies, she had got too close to rocks while carrying a film crew, and ripped her bottom open.

A long, complex operation that involved **Causeway Salvor** and a Russian tug succeeded in pulling the vessel free of the rocks, and, since she was floating on her tank tops amidst stormy conditions, it was a long and delicate tow to the drydock in southern Chile.

Besides hauling barges and the immobilised **Mighty Servant 3** away from the quay, Cape Town's tugs and pilots have been busy with two gassers and large containerships whose high windage areas present some difficult moments during the Cape summer winds. **MSC Messina** and her sistership are the first containerships over 300 metres in length on a regular service to South African ports, while a growing number of 294-metre Korean-built ships are making an appearance. All of these require three tugs to turn them in the container terminal.



**Lars Maersk**

The latest Maersk ship on the Europe-South Africa trade, **Lica Maersk**, and **Maersk Dresden** were in port together on Sunday, while **Lars Maersk** was anchored in the roadstead. To have had

all three blue-hulled ships alongside would have made a historic and exceptional photograph, but local ship photographers were denied the opportunity to record such a memorable event when **Lica Maersk** sailed for the coast before **Lars Maersk** berthed an hour later. Shortly before midnight on Sunday, **Maersk Dresden** rounded the breakwater, bound for Mauritius.

The number of ships in port and the impending arrival of a bunker barge begs the question whether an almost derelict rig on which no refit is planned should occupy important space. Seasoned agents are frustrated that, while the other two rigs are contributing to the local economy via huge expenditure on refits - including employment for many, some of whom breathalyse ancient shipping columnists - **Atlantic Venture** has remained in port indefinitely.

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## CHC WITHDRAW FROM HELICOPTER SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA Replacement needed for offshore Operations



Steve Thomas took this photograph last week of the George-based S61 landing on the deck of **Glas Dour**, the FPSO operating off the Southern Cape

Attending a Christmas lunch for clients turned out to be a wake. CHC Helicopters announced to their guests at the function last week that operations would cease at the end of December. This is a major blow to the shipping community as many relied on the dependable, vital helicopter service, especially in off-port-limits operations, transfers of personnel to offshore rigs, and in salvage work.

While the air force has many extremely miraculous sea rescue operations to its credit - including the rescue of over 60 people from **SA Seafarer**, wrecked in terrifying seas at Green Point in 1966 - the highly professional CHC pilots have also worked miracles, sometimes in appalling weather, piloting their aircraft to land on the decks of umpteen rolling ships.

During the 1967-1975 Suez Canal closure, the forerunner of CHC, Court Line Helicopters, established a base on the present site of the Table Bay Hotel.

Their first aircraft here was a Sikorsky that reminded me of the first helicopter I ever saw - as part of the 1952 Van Riebeeck Festival, aircraft, including a Sunderland flying boat, made several fly-pasts over our house.

Since hundreds of ships diverted to the Cape route, Court upgraded their choppers that became very busy ferrying crew, mail, victuals and other stores to passing vessels, their cargo often dangling in a net underneath the ship as they flew to the rendezvous point, usually about 7 miles off the Green Point lighthouse.

On reaching the vessel, the pilot employs every skill to adjust his aircraft's speed to that of the ship so that he can land on the deck, or position his helicopter to place the under-slung cargo on the deck, always wary of the dangers posed by radio aerials, radar masts and ships' derricks.

The attraction of a helicopter service is that, during the entire operation, the ship can keep her course and speed.

Evacuations of casualties from ships or salvage operations have caused the chopper crews to scramble at a moment's notice.

My first helicopter flight - in a later Sikorsky - was to the Norwegian bulk carrier **Fernmanor** off Cape Point. A week later, that chopper crashed into the sea, killing a well-known ships' agent.

One of the finest hours of the commercial helicopter service at Cape Town was the lowering of divers onto the anchor of the huge laden tanker **Castillo de Belver** that had caught fire and split in two near Saldanha Bay in 1983. Her after section had sunk while the forward section remained afloat, upturned, with the massive bulbous bow pointing to the sky. The task of those intrepid divers was to secure to the anchor a towing hawser from the salvage tug **Wolraad Woltemade** so that the bow section of the tanker could be towed away from the

coast. I marvelled at the sheer guts of the divers, and at the skill of the pilot, flying that aged Sikorsky, as those men were lowered onto that anchor some 50 metres above the sea.

CHC took over the South African operations, and, besides servicing passing ships, are also used for crew transfers for the oil and gas structures off the southern coast.

Soaring fuel prices and considerable periods of inactivity have brought closure to the CHC operations, a sad conclusion to an efficient service involving friendly people.

Other helicopters are around, notably those serving the tourists and the powerful Russian-built aircraft on standby for mountain fires, but not necessarily suitable for offshore work.

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## MURRAY GRINDROD RETIRES AFTER 50 YEARS IN SHIPPING



**Inyala** was launched at the SLS Shipbuilding Company, Tongyoung, Korea this week. She is the second Unicorn ship to bear the name.

The first was a 2070-deadweight coaster, bought from German owners as **Erne Witt** by Smiths Coasters in 1963 and renamed **Inyala**. She became part of the Unicorn fleet in 1966, and was sold in 1977.

Thereafter, she had eight different names under six different owners. As the Sri Lankan-flagged **Shiba** she sank in the Red Sea after a collision with **Altaawin Alarabi**.

The tanker **Inyala** is the seventh in series of 11 identical high-specification 40,000 dwt IMO 3 oil products/chemical tankers ordered by Unicorn Shipping from SLS. **Southern Unity**, trading on the South African coast, was the first of this series. **Inyala** has already been committed to long-term charter to an oil major and will trade world-wide.

Bless SAA whose 17:00 flight to Durban last Tuesday left more than two and a half hours late! Any airline can have a technical glitch that may delay a plane, but the handling of the delay is what counts. Although it took about 20 minutes after the scheduled boarding time (16:30) to announce to queuing passengers that the flight had been delayed, free munchies were provided and the pilot cranked up the replacement plane for us to land in Durban at about 21:20, not bad going.

Sadly, an option to have gone by sea is not available these days!

While in Durban, I had the pleasure of chatting to Murray Grindrod, the doyen of shipping personalities who earlier this year, retired after half a century in the maritime industry. Since his father, Walter (aka WB among the shipping fraternity), ran African Coasters and several other shipping-related activities, conversation around their dinner table centred on the dynamics of shipping, and the young Murray frequently ventured to the docks with his father.

However, having read engineering at Cambridge and with a Springbok blazer for golf in his wardrobe, he could have gone into several other fields, but he chose shipping. Wisely, his father dictated that he should begin as a tally

clerk on Maydon Wharf in 1957 so that he could learn the ways of shipping from all perspectives, a lesson for those who would begin at the top!

We spoke of times when African Coasters ran a handful of ageing ships between Durban and Cape ports, with occasional sorties to Walvis Bay. They earned their keep mainly from shipments of sugar and Lever Brothers' products from Durban. Later, rolls of newsprint filled some of the holds for the 10-knot voyage to the Cape.

The company was struggling to combat the effects of serious competition on the coastal trade as return cargoes to Durban did not fill the ships, testing the skills of the accountants to balance the books. Arch-rival Smith's Coasters and a few interlopers also had a significant slice of the cargo.

As he rose through the ranks, Murray Grindrod was a hands-on executive who spent time on ships, at the docks, and talking to clients. Not only did he attract capital from the mining house Union Corporation to modernise the fleet - an essential project, not only to increase efficiency levels of the ships, but also to attract clients to a modern fleet, rather than the old bangers that once hauled the coastwise cargoes. He also orchestrated the amalgamation of African Coasters, Smith's Coasters and later Thesens into Unicorn Lines that has remained a household name in local shipping for more than forty years.

Since then, the Grindrod Group has undergone minor name changes, it has listed on the stock exchange, and has moved into tanker operations as well as extensive ship chartering through the acquisition of Island View Shipping from Tiger Oats in 1999 for a mere R15 million. Although it seemed an exorbitant price at the time, and despite troubled days when the shipping market collapsed at the turn of the century, IVS has been a favourite goose laying very golden eggs. Bulk carriers chartered for a song have been sub-chartered at handsome profits, none more so than the Capesize vessels on which the company initially lost mega-rands, only to enjoy the current bull-run where such vessels can fetch around \$200 000 per day!

And the Unicorn tankers have also done well, operating at rates well above budgeted levels along the coast and in foreign tanker pools. Windfalls have come when other owners, wanting to cash in on the buoyant markets yet unable to find a shipyard with an open slot, have offered Unicorn favourable prices on half-built vessels that would deliver to her new owner on completion. More tankers are under construction in Korea and China, while bunker barges will be commissioned for South African ports early next year.

Word is that the fleet of owned and chartered vessels will grow to around 100 in the near future.

Add to all this the Grindrod Group's involvement in Ocean Africa Container Lines (a joint venture with Safmarine in feeder shipping), port terminals (especially the Matola Terminal in Maputo, and other opportunities in that growing port), ships' agency operations, other terminals, and even investments in railways, vehicle transporting, and a bank. It is not surprising that the share price went from less than R2 to its current heady heights.

Thus, on his retirement, Murray Grindrod could reflect on a most exciting, challenging and successful career in shipping.

Although the company's Annual Report indicates considerable personal financial success along the way, Grindrod's dignity and personal integrity have been the cornerstones on which the company has been built. He is a highly respected figure, locally and on the international shipping scene. Indeed, the Group's current leadership attest to his being the role model on which they have based their own careers.

No wonder Murray Grindrod remarked that instead of choosing golf or engineering as his career, a far more interesting time awaited him in shipping.

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