

Editor's Note

Here we are with the half century Newsletter, what a milestone for the SA Branch. If we are still editors when we reach issue 100 perhaps a younger Vindi Boy will take over!!!

The feedback we received from various members on my profile was very encouraging and we are waiting with baited breath to receive more stories. Don't be shy. I'm sure we are all broad minded. Any photographs submitted will be laughed at and returned. It would be appreciated if volunteers could give their names at the meetings.

Derick Johnston sent us a story and yes Derick it is most suitable.

Mike Day informed us that the Maltese Queen's Victory Band played Anchors Aweigh for the Vindi Boys after the Anzac March.

Brian Toogood is keeping the ball rolling by putting pen to paper and giving you an insight of his life before and after joining the Vindi in 1955. So before starting to read about him I suggest you get yourself a cuppa and sit down. This is more like a book so we will do it in instalments.

Next Meeting Sunday July 29th 11.00 am

Jill & Mick Surfield



For those who wish to attend the Annual Dinner at the Buckingham Arms on July 14th I will be collecting monies at the May meeting.

We have a drought in the raffle prize store, any donations would be greatly appreciated, bottles go down well, (as do their contents).

After the September meeting, there will be a lunchtime cruise aboard the Dolphin Princess departing from the lighthouse wharf . Names required at the July meeting for those wishing to sign on for this trip.

Anne Iles

This Scottish bloke is sitting reading his Daily Record when his wife sneaks up behind him and whacks him on the head with a frying pan.

'Whit wis that fur?' he cries.

'That wis for the piece of paper in yir troosers pocket with the name Mary-Rose written oan it,' said she.

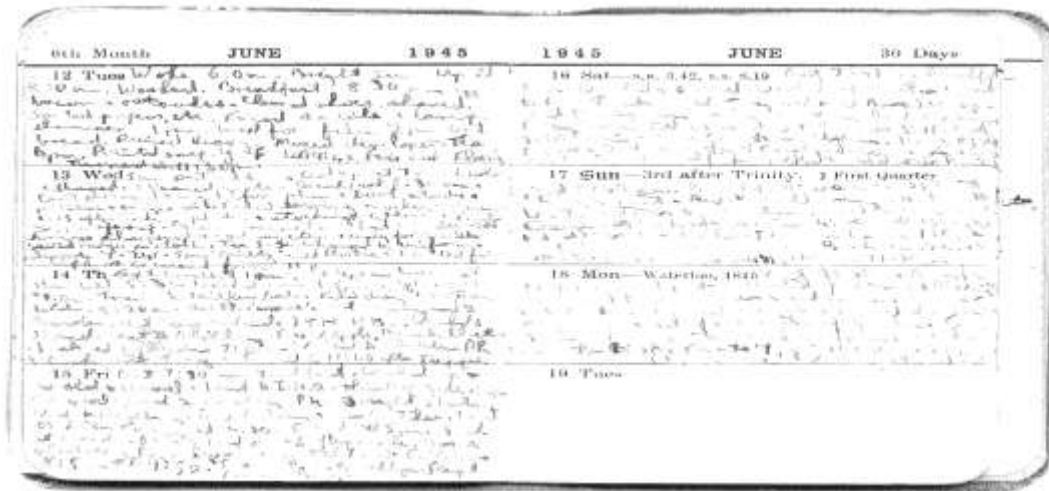
'Don't be daft,' he explains, 'Two weeks ago when I went to the races Mary-Rose wis the name of one o' the horses I bet on.'

She seems satisfied and apologises and goes off to do work around the house.

Three days later he's again sitting in his chair reading when she nails him again with the frying pan, knocking him out cold.

When he comes around he says, 'Whit the hell wis that fur?' 'Your firkin horse phoned', she said.

Translation of Mike Day's Diary



On Leave

1945

12th Tuesday. Woke 6am. Bright sun. Up at 8am. Washed, breakfast 8.30am, eggs bacon and oatcakes. Cleaned shoes, shaved. Sorted papers etc. Fixed saddle and lamp. Dinner 1pm. Went for film 2pm. Got bread. Rained heavy. Mixed developer. Tea 6pm. Printed snaps of Florrie till 8.45pm. Fair with Florrie, turned in 11.30pm.

13th Wednesday. Sun out 6am. Got up 7am. Washed and shaved. Cleaned grate. Breakfast 8.30am. Got dressed went for film, boot studs, potatoes and singer oil. Fixed sewing machine. Dinner 1.15pm. after taking photo. Stockings to Florrie. Printed three copies of Marg. Sunny weather but windy. Got knives sharpened and carvers etc ready for scouts. Sewed badges on cloth. Tea 5.30pm. Changed to uniform. Scouts at 7-7.45pm. Saw Guilty with Florrie. Waited for lift at crescent from 11pm.

14th Thursday. Left crescent at 1am. Slept in train at station till 5.30am. Walked around Spring Garden till 7am. Train to Millers Dale. Filled diary 7.30am. Train to London 8.20am arrived St Pancras. Got underground to Neasden. Met Tony outside BTH. 12.30pm washed and shaved went to Highbury saw Walpole, Marshall etc. Back to Willesden 7.20pm. Walked to Gladston Park and back with Tony. Turned in 11.40pm after supper.

15th Friday. Out 7.30am. Breakfast. Washed up. Washed and shaved. Went THQ then Moorgate shops. No good. Went to Finsbury Park bought shorts. Went to Highbury saw Malcolm and Min Cruthers. Went to Sister Laura at 2.30pm, stayed till 5pm. Back at Neasden 6.20pm. Had drink of tea and cake. Bus to Gladston Park. Swimming till 7.30pm. Pictures 8.05pm till 9.50pm Tree Grows in Brooklyn. Slept downstairs.

16th Saturday. Out 7.45am. Breakfast 8.00am. Washed and shaved, washed up dishes. Went to Southgate with Tony and saw Mrs Stones. Went to Express Dairy Finsbury Park for dinner. Sister Laura till 2.30pm. St Pancras 3.15pm got train 3.20pm. Owed Tony £1 for oilskins. Home 8.30pm. Supper. Out on bike to Fairfield no one in. Saw cubs to Ashford Park. Bathed and washed socks.

17th Sunday. Out 8.30am. Breakfast. Wore new shirt and Tony's suit. Rev Russell today. Hot weather. Wrote letter to Christian Herald and Alec Martin. Florrie not back at 4pm. Tea 4.30pm with Beryl. Out at 5.30pm on bike. Florrie home at 7pm. Went to Edale on bikes. Back in Buxton at 10.20pm. Supper at No 1. Home 11.30pm.

18th Monday. Out 9.30am. Awake at 1.30am. Breakfast. Collected films at Pilkington chemist. Changed to dungarees. Cut lawn. Dinner 12.30-1pm. Mended mower and mowed lawn. Dug grass out of one side of garden. Tea at 5pm, Changed into scout uniform. Went out on bike 6.30pm. Scouts 7-10.30pm. Supper 11pm. Filled diary and turned in.

Reunion Thanks



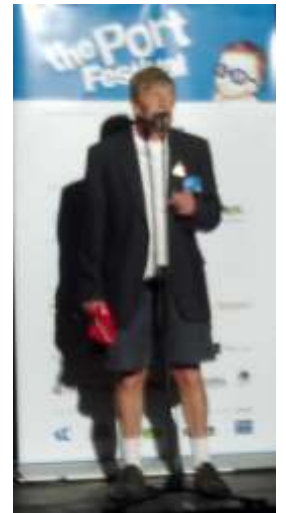
Keith and Anne Withey returned to the Weintal Resort to present them with an engraved plaque thanking them on behalf of the SA Vindicatrix Association for their contribution in making our reunion such a success.

Port Festival

Congratulations to John Williams for a great effort in organising the events for The Port Festival to inform the public of the role of the Merchant Navy during the wars and conflicts that have taken place.

On Saturday in Black Diamond Square there was music, stories and poetry and where would it have been without Mike Day's Diary. When that finished it was over to the pub for some Merchant Navy and Vindi Boys and their wives to end the day with a few more yarns.

Anzac eve saw the launching of over 500 decorated paper lifeboats; many containing the names of loved ones. A majority of which were made by school children; some from as far away as Pinnaroo. Me thinks Mike Day had a hand in this. The event was well attended by the children and their families and many others including members of the Merchant Navy Association and The Vindi Boys. John was so rushed off his feet that he didn't have time to dress up for his speech.



Anzac Day March



April 25th saw another sunny Anzac Day with 14 of us marching, including support from Vern and Eunice's son Trevor and Betty Wheeldon's son Alan. This was much appreciated as the number of marchers seems to be dwindling. Perhaps a few more could join us next year. Thanks to Eddie Nichols and his daughter Jenny who accompanied him on the walk. A great effort from Derick Johnston who made his own way on the train on his trusty gopher. The Cathedral Hotel was our destination after the march for lunch where we were entertained by the Scottish Pipers.

Man Overboard

Derick Johnston (deck '49)

It was in June '61 that I felt the urge to go to sea again. Having had two DRs for conduct in my discharge book and ABs being ten a penny, I was told my services were no longer required by the Connaught Road pool and went on my merry way in July '54. Now with national service ended, ABs were like hens' teeth and I had no trouble getting back on the pool at Dock Street.

I signed on the *Rippenham Grange* and found that things had changed a bit in my time ashore. There was a new rating *deckhand uncertificated* and a *steering ticket*. As far as I can remember the only ABs were the bosun, lamp trimmer and myself with the rest being OSs, DHUs and EDHs. The QMs had a separate mess. After leaving the Royal Docks I was walking down from the fo'c'sle when the captain yelled down from the bridge 'Hey you, are you an AB?' 'Yes I yelled back.' 'Get up here right away, don't bother to clean up,' he said. I took over the wheel from the QM who was not doing very well, until a replacement arrived. I was put on day work and was really chuffed as I had never had this since my peggying days and then I found out that watch-keepers were paid overtime for weekend watch-keeping. Yes things had changed.

Homeward bound from Cape Town, I was painting the boat deck handrails, aft end, port side. It was around two in the afternoon. One of the QMs, popularly known as 'Pissy Willy' (for obvious reasons), was sitting on the bulwarks below me. 'If I fell in the captain would have to turn the ship around and pick me up,' I heard him say. The second cook came from the galley and tried to coax him to get off the rail. 'Fuck off you Maltese bastard,' yelled Willy. The cook walked away in disgust and I carried on painting. There was a loud yell and a splash. I looked over the side, saw Willy's head in the water, heaved a lifebelt over and took off for the bridge like a greyhound. The second mate was in the wheelhouse. 'Man overboard,' I gasped. 'Willy's in the drink.' 'Piss off Jonno, don't mess me about,' he replied. I grabbed him bodily and pulled him out on the wing of the bridge. 'Look, you can see his head in the wake, turn the ship around.' 'I can't do that without the captain's permission,' said the second mate and ran off to find the captain. I shot down to the boat deck and started to clear away the accident boat. We sailed around for hours, sighted the lifebelt I had thrown over, but there was no sign of Willy.

I was in line to pay off when I was tapped on the shoulder and told I couldn't pay off until I had appeared at the Board of Trade enquiry into Willy's loss. I did this and told them exactly what happened, but only from the yell and splash and seeing Willy in the water. His family were there and I have no idea what other witnesses had said. I was asked if I knew him well and I replied no. I said that we were from different messes, had shared a beer and a chat in Cape Town as we had both been in the army and that was all. I was asked why I had started to clear away the accident boat and was I in the boat crew? I answered it was the obvious thing to do and I was not in the boat crew. I was questioned about my sea experience and the search for Willy, was thanked, went and paid off and didn't think much more about it until December 2000 when I obtained a copy of deaths at sea for August 1961 from the public records office at Kew. It gave the name of the ship, his rating, full name, place of birth and last known address, latitude and longitude and 'presumed drowned'. I was unable to get a copy of the ship's log or the BOT inquiry at that time but I am thinking of trying again.

New Anzac Tribute



Anzac Eve 2007 saw the staging of a unique tribute to the Merchant Navy when Adelaide schoolchildren, veterans and families launched a fleet of paper lifeboats bearing lighted candles on the Port River. Schoolchildren made their own paper lifeboats at school and during school holidays. It was a stunning new Anzac image and a fitting tribute to the seafarers who rowed the troops ashore at Gallipoli. Many of the school students had put the name of their veteran great grandfather or grandfather on the side of their paper lifeboat. Other students had written world peace.



Port Adelaide Enfield Mayor Gary Johanson welcomed all those participating in the event which was part of The Port Festival 2007. Reverend David Ingleton blessed the boats and said a prayer and was followed by lone piper Don MacAuley on the bow of the wheelhouse of the Port Princess with *Abide With Me* and *We Are Australian*.

All the boats floated on the river after being launched from the Queen's Wharf pontoons. The event started at 7.00 pm and finished at 8.00 pm so that all those participating could have an early night before the traditional Dawn Service on Anzac Day. The event was a

poignant reminder that many of the troopships that transported Australian troops to Gallipoli departed from Port Adelaide.

The event was staged by Merchant Navy Association SA, Vindicatrix Association SA and Semaphore Port Adelaide RSL. Port Adelaide Sailing Club volunteers in boats retrieved all the paper lifeboats immediately after the event concluded, to comply with EPA regulations for the river.

Light on the Water photos courtesy of Sama Reid Publications.

In Memoriam, Merchant Navy, 1939-1945

“No cross marks the place where now we lie
What happened is known but to us
You asked, and we gave our lives to protect
our land from the enemy curse.
No Flanders Field where poppies blow
No Gleaming Crosses, row on row
No Unnamed Tomb for all to see
and pause, and wonder who we might be
The Sailors' Valhalla is where we lie
on the ocean bed, watching ships pass by
Sailing in safety now thru' the waves
Often right over our sea-locked graves
We ask you just to remember us”

(Capt. Peter AK Boswell, MC)

The Life of Brian - The Lucky One



I was born on the 21st of March 1939 on the Isle of Wight.

My earliest memories were of aerial dogfights and V1s and V2s flying overhead and the massive bomber raids after the Royal Naval boats and installations at Portsmouth and the merchant shipping at Southampton. During these air raids, the whole family lived in the Anderson shelter whether it was day or night. Another memory is of picking up bits of shrapnel from bombs and shells.

Newport Church of England school was where I commenced my education and became an above average student excelling at sports; especially swimming and diving in which I represented the Isle of Wight against Hampshire and was the first island boy to win the Hampshire life saving medal.

On leaving school at 14½ years old, I approached the Union Castle Line where I was informed that I was too young to join the Merchant Navy and to come back in a year's time. I then contacted British Road Services in the hope of joining their coastal craft operations between Portsmouth, Southampton and Newport IOW. This however was not successful, but I was offered a job on the lorries where I became the Cadbury's Chocolate Boy delivering to most shops on the Island. When I reached 15½ years of age I once again approached the Union Castle Line. This time I was informed that they would sponsor me providing I passed at the Merchant Navy training school. **Enter the Vindi.**

On arriving at the Vindi in late December 1955, this being one of the coldest months on record, the dock was frozen over and I was sleeping onboard. Apart from semi starvation and freezing my nuts off, there were also lifeboat drills after de-icing the falls and pulleys and lowering and lifting the boat up and down. Other things that stick in my mind were the highly polished gash cans (not that there was ever any food slops in them) and the 10 seater dunny located on the dockside, where someone would always light a paper boat and send it down the channel singeing one and all, (no more frozen nuts).

Reporting to the Southampton Pool in early February 1956 I informed the officer in charge that I was spoken for by the Union Castle Line. On looking up schedules and making phone calls, he informed me that there was no Castle ship available as two were in dry dock for repairs. Another had been diverted to collect mail from these ships and so it would be at least a two week wait before I got a ship. There am I dressed in all my Vindi refinery and no ship in sight. Like many a Vindi before me I was high jacked by a pool official. 'I can do you a favour lad,' he said (and in fact he did). 'I have a brand new tanker arriving within twenty four hours. It must be new because I have never heard of it,' he continued. This magnificent tanker was on charter to the Esso Petroleum Company. So this bright eyed and bushy tailed eager young mariner (idiot, sucker you name it) agreed to be on the dockside at Southampton at midday to catch the crew launch to go to Fawley Refinery at the mouth of Southampton waters. Although the launch was packed with big hairy seamen, nobody knew about this new super tanker called the *SS Olympic Mariner*. My excitement grew as Fawley came into sight and I was nudged in the ribs by another lad of my age who said he was also joining the ship (I don't know whether he was a Vindi boy or not), I was too chuffed and forgot to ask.



The launch kept close to the shore and we could not see the tankers tied up to the jetty. Finally the big moment came as I staggered up the steps with my suitcase and duffle bag to eventually see four magnificent tankers. The first three looked very old, rusty and weather beaten. My ship was at the other end of the jetty. When it finally came into view my heart sank (it was a wonder the bloody ship had not sunk with it). Where the other ships looked a bit worse for wear, this one looked as if it had just come out of Davey Jone's Locker. We managed to find the courage to climb the gang plank which was a feat all of its own as she was in ballast after discharging her cargo. Having put our suitcases in an alleyway aft, we were told the purser's (another name for God) cabin was midships and to report there. God was in his cabin looking like Horatio Nelson in full uniform glittering with medals and gold braid. We were nearly blinded but certainly in awe, but then the seed was set as far as I was concerned. He was so laid back, jovial and friendly that we were put at ease immediately. He told us that the *Mariner* was a bare board charter boat that belonged to Aristotle Onassis the Greek shipping magnate and that it was originally built as an American Liberty ship for the war effort in 1945. She was initially named the *Snake River*, later the *John Flanagan*, and that we would be signing our lives away on six months articles, but most trips were about six weeks. Most of these ships were built in five weeks from laying the keel to launch. Their life expectancy was two to three trips doing convoy work. The tanker was the biggest prize for a U Boat Captain.

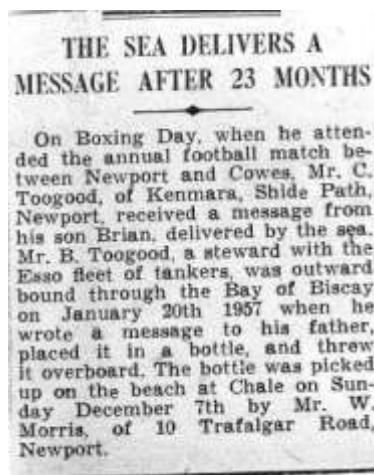
After the history lesson and pep talk he said, 'who is going into the galley and who is going to be the peggy?', After a short silence and with blank looks on our faces out came a coin. He tossed it and said to the other lad, 'call'. He did, and won the toss and opted for peggy. So the first fork in my road to life was set. Whilst he served the crew and washed plates, I served the two most important men on the ship, the chief cook and the second cook & baker; then I had to wash all the bloody pots and pans. I peeled spuds by the dustbin full and carrots by the field. Good job the peas came in cans.

My first trip was to an exotic place called Mena-Al-Ahmadi in the Persian Gulf (one of the assholes of the world). Three weeks at sea to end up at another loading pier in the middle of the desert. The highlight of our stay of 18 hours was to walk along to the Flying Angel hut to change books and have a warm coke, talk about living the high life and then seeing the other side of life. One more trip up the Gulf, different port, same result. The third trip was a whole different ball game. Being one of the first ships to arrive for the next convoy we were anchored very close to Port Suez when a dramatic message was received. About four or five ships (us included) were to remain on station, the rest were to go to wherever their owners wished to send them. Invasion!! Not that we saw anything of it. The out coming convoy was detained and several ships at each end of the canal were sunk; going from memory it took about three years before the sunken ships were removed. Most of the crews were stuck there for months before being repatriated.

As very junior ratings, the galley boy, peggy and two deck boys bunked in together. The deck boys (Vindi perhaps) were as mad as hatters. I don't know what sins they had committed but it was a hate hate relationship with the bos'n. On tankers, boots and shoes are left outside cabins especially those of deck crew and stokers because of oil on the soles. It had been very rough weather coming through the channel and the alleyways were littered with oil skins and boots including thigh boots belonging to the bos'n. These were taken away by the two likely lads who then put a 'deposit' in each boot before returning them They paid off and disappeared quick smart. The boots stayed outside the cabin for another 24 hours before being used. A few non nautical terms

were heard over the next few days. I'm sure he knew who the culprits were. The peggy and I just smiled.

As an assistant steward you worked either midships looking after the Captain, 1st, 2nd, 3rd officers and the purser or aft looking after the grease monkeys (sorry engineering officers). To cut a long story short, my mate the midship steward got his knickers in a twist over a couple of six week trips. He thought he was getting a raw deal so he left a little surprise package for his chums. Just before paying off, while alongside, he put a few ball bearings in all of the air conditioning ducts. Rather naughty. I'm sure they stayed there until the ship was scrapped. But where did they get them from? I smell engine oil.



Having spent all my money on loose women and cheap grog,
I sent my Dad a letter. He received it some considerable time later!

On my first leave home after six months at sea, my best mate Adrian (who was approximately a year older than me) and I got together for a catch up. We first met at pre-school in 1942. Unlike me, he managed to get employment as a deckhand on British Road Services coasters. From there he joined the Merchant Navy as a deckhand without having to go to sea school. He left the Merchant Navy joined the army then after basic training he volunteered for the Paratroops, was accepted and almost landed on my head at Suez, (being in the first wave of troops to land there).

Whilst on leave, I met a lovely girl on the IOW and started seeing her whenever I was on leave. Nothing too serious as I was only seventeen at the time. Arriving home at 20 years I found that she was engaged to a copper and being a good Vindi Boy, I stirred the pot and won the fair lady (actually a brunette). You never saw such a thoughtful and careful driver in the whole driving history of the IOW and this lasted over the next eighteen months, until the next phase of my life started.

With new orders, we sailed to the Big Apple (New York). This being my first trip to the USA, my first view of the Statue of Liberty was standing on the main deck with the rest of the crew (excluding officers) with my pants around my ankles having a short arm inspection. The Yankee Public Health Inspector with his ruler in hand seemed suitably impressed and I think this was where the statue acquired her smile. We spent three months delivering refined oils to Philadelphia then going down to Baton Rouge on the mighty Mississippi to pick up crude to bring back to Fawley refinery at Southampton. The next trip was around the Cape and back to the Persian Gulf. We stopped at Cape Town for bunkers and stores. We all had a wild night on the town ending up at Del-Monica's where Cherry Rainer the pianist played on the top floor. If my memory serves me right, the first two floors were full of naughty girls who wanted to share our pocket money. Fat chance I had on my £8.2.6. per month with Mum getting ten bob a week remittance. But things did get better later after recovering from my first contact with Cape Smoke brandy. From Cape Town we proceeded up the Gulf to the scenic sights of Bandar-e-Shapur, another oil jetty with more flies than grains of sand in the desert. Here was my first introduction to shark fishing; all very sportsman like, a bloody big meat hook with a barb welded on to it, a heaving line and a big chunk of meat and the after winch to reel it in. The only trouble was when it hit the top rail and flipped onboard we'd all scatter like chaff in the wind. Good for fish & chips though.

Returning to Fawley, my six month contract was up and as I was missing the family I signed off. My pay

including Sundays at sea and overtime came to the grand total of £80, a fortune for a 16½ year old lad.



As I had liked the easy ways of tanker life plus all the good food (the Captain was No.4 on the pecking list after chief cook, 2nd cook/baker and me). I decided to try another tanker as the Suez was closed and most of the Esso Fleet were going State-side. Instead of going to the Southampton pool, I rang Esso direct offering them all my experience!! They were duly excited at the thought and signed me on for another six months. As it turned out this was the best thing I could have done. The *Esso Plymouth* was my next delight. Another T2 built in 1936 and named the *Comanchee* at launch. She had just come out of dry dock and gleamed like a new pin after having a total makeover. Once again we headed to the USA.

Moving up and down the Yankee coast from NY to Houston, Galveston, Corpus Christie, to Venezuela, Lake Maracaibo and Aruba. There was great fun in port every few days. I just love, I'll say it again I just love those southern belles. We even found a few places where we shared our pocket money with them. But that was after I got sold twice as a 'Cherry Boy', it didn't work a third time. On a trip back to the UK a steward paid off, so I put my hand up for his job. The Purser said OK, so I got my first rating at 17 years of age. Almost a year to the day I was made up to 2nd steward.

Ringling up HQ for my next ship, I was considered a company man when I told them I wanted to go to the Federation school for cooking to obtain my 2nd cook/baker ticket. They were only too pleased to extend my leave and pay all costs involved.

Having been a 2nd steward for over a year, I had found plenty of time off to help in the galley and to start learning the trade. A young 2nd cook/baker and I became great mates (I ended up becoming a God Father to his first child, a little girl. This was after we left the sea in 1961. We still keep in touch.) The remainder of this trip lasted for four months. We signed off together and as luck would have it we were both assigned the next tanker together. So I had another five or six months of concentrated hands-on experience. Our last trip of the contract and we were still in the good old US of A down in Texas, Galveston to be precise. Just on day break after discharging our cargo and heading down the Houston ship canal, we were in gas (a term used after discharge of oil) and we were riding high. Another tanker with a full cargo was coming up. Our pilot took us a few yards too far and our stern where the engine room and crew accommodation were got stuck on a mud flat. Our bow drifted into the channel rubbing down the side of the other tanker (luckily we didn't hole her would be an understatement). As we had just left the terminal, the first officer and deck crew were still on the fo'c'sle coiling ropes etc. As this was all happening in slow motion they had time to rig water hoses to play on the collision points, otherwise I wouldn't be writing this account now. I had just arrived on the bridge with tea and toast for the Captain and Pilot, so had a wonderful view of all that was happening. When everybody had put on clean knickers and wiped the sweat from their brows, a tug had to come to our aid and tow us back up the channel ass first.

On docking the damage to our fo'c'sle was quite bad; an anchor, chains, ropes and buckled plates were all mangled together. It was evident that we were going nowhere fast, except to the pub for a quick one or three. Esso HQ were informed. I don't suppose they were very happy as we had to stay along-side awaiting Lloyds Marine surveyors to arrive to assess the damage. It took nearly two weeks to sort everything out. After our

lucky escape, El Capitano organised a trip ashore for the whole crew that evening. A hire bus arrived at the gang plank where we were all taken to a secret destination. Arriving at a very large bar/bordello, a huge pot of money appeared (don't ask me where it came from but I suspect Mr Esso was a few bob short of funds from somewhere) whereupon fun and games were had by all, including some of the crew who were of the other persuasion. Needless to say, ship board life was a bit ship shaped the next day.

The outcome was a big box being built around the bows and then filled with concrete. We were then told to go home very gently. Some hope as this was December and the Atlantic was hardly a mill pond and we were in ballast to keep the bows as high as possible. This was not very comfortable as we had to chug along at a greatly reduced speed. We arrived back in the UK on Christmas Eve and anchored in the Thames Estuary to await Lloyds surveyors to see if it was dry dock in the UK or the continent. To finish this lovely trip, the bloody Dockers' union had already said that there would be no movement of ships until after Boxing Day. The whole crew finally signed off on New Years Eve. Still at anchor with no decisions being made regarding dry dock, I believe it stayed there for nearly a month before a dry dock was found.

This was the leave on which I went to the London Dock Street School of Culinary Arts, better known as the Merchant Navy School of Cooking. I was here to obtain my 2nd cook/baker ticket and my mate was sitting for his chief cook ticket. We were lucky enough to train under one of the top Swiss Chefs at that time. My mate and I got on so well with him that he used us to help train a lot of the other would be cooks who had very little experience. On completion of our courses and having passed our exams, he offered us both the chance to stay on with him as assistants. I wonder where that path might have taken us. However, the lure of the sea was too strong so we both declined this fabulous offer and reported back to Esso to be re-assigned. Once again our luck held as we were both sent to the same ship. This one was a step up the ladder. The *Esso Oxford* was one of their super tankers, all 26,000 tons of it and only one year old. Talk about luxury. A massive galley with all the mod cons, high speed ovens, electric friers, dough making machines, spud peelers and chippers, but best of all, semi air conditioned. My cabin had formica bulkheads, lino decking with built in wardrobe and dresser, coffee table (bolted down) and an armchair, air con of course. On deck just aft of the funnel, a swimming pool with canvas awning rigged for the tropics. The Captain and officers had set times for their dog paddle sessions and the remainder of us riff raff had the rest. Eat your hearts out all you liner and tramp sailors. No wonder tanker men stick to tankers, they know where their bread, butter, cream and jam is spread.

The pride and joy of the Esso fleet, the *Esso Guildford* was a brand new super ship of 36,000 tons laying in Hamburg. The whole crew were sent out to prepare her for the maiden voyage. The Suez was now open again so once more it was off to the land of sun, flies and sand, the Persian Gulf. On arrival we were docked in the middle of this massive jetty which could hold about eight tankers at a time. We started loading and this would take about twenty hours. During the night we heard other tankers being pushed and prodded into the dock. Awaking in the morning we found we were surrounded by two Yankee Ludwig tankers, both 110,000 tons. We felt like a rowing boat. This was the first time any of us had seen deck crew and pump men going around the deck on bicycles. Our humiliation only lasted a couple of hours before heading home.



Before signing off and going on leave, the purser, chief cook and I got together to talk about my future regarding sitting for my chief's ticket. I'm glad to say that they thought I had enough experience to do the job.

About half way through my leave, I informed Esso that I had booked into Dock Street to sit for my ticket and this was all approved. When the course was completed, I informed the powers to be that I was ready for sea duty and that my expenses for the course and my stay in London were in the post. Big problem, they said they wouldn't be paying me as I had not given them enough notice. The shit hit the fan. I had to report to London to see the chief catering superintendent who informed me that I couldn't say the things I had said. So as in the famous words of that song and I quote 'I told them they could take their job and shove it' unquote. Going back to Southampton by train I don't think they needed any steam, there was plenty coming out of my ears. The following week I started to look for new horizons. I fancied the Baltic countries or perhaps a skin boat to the Caribbean. But this was not to be. A few days later Mr Esso sent me a letter saying that perhaps there had been a misunderstanding (my ass) and would I like to stay on their books. As I hadn't any luck getting a quick berth with another company I thought I would hedge my bets and say yes. Less than twenty four hours later and a telegram arrived saying I was to report to Fawley in two days time for my next ship. Another telegram to cancel followed within the hour. No details, something smelt fishy. I rang Esso for further information surprise, surprise, they were going to fly me out to the States for a nine month contract on the *Esso Christobal* instead as chief cook (no way José). Once again my telephone bill took a hammering, I spoke to the big white chief and said, 'I take it that my expenses have been approved and were in the post as you are shipping me out as chief cook?' big silence then, 'No.' There was a deadly 'ush from my end. I made him speak first and when he had finished his spiel I just said, 'No.' another big 'ush, compromise! Would I still ship out as a 2nd until this could be resolved? Smaller 'ush, by this time I had no money, so I said yes. Ho Ho jolly jack's off to sea again. I didn't know it at the time but this would be my final ship. On completion of this contract, which took me until 14th March 1961 I signed off so that I could celebrate my 21st birthday (dark forces were at work). Mum had found a newspaper article that would set me off in a new direction...

To be continued.



I would like to take this opportunity, as the two year anniversary of Vanessa's passing nears, to once again thank all of the Vindi Boys and Girls who attended her wake at the Stamford Grand.

Brian Toogood