

NAVIGATING THE VOYAGE OF LIFE

By Graham Elliot OW 1961

Part 1

Each of us Worcester cadets had different reasons for joining the college; perhaps from our own desire to go to sea, or maybe from persuasion of our parents in their interest for our education. My desire for a sea career started with a decision in early 1959 in Sydney Australia. Going to the movies one day, I saw the film "The Sea Chase" about a German ship in Sydney Harbour at the outbreak of the war; her captain (played by John Wayne) became aware that war was about to be declared and so he quickly decided to sneak the ship out to sea and return to Germany. After watching the film, (followed by another, "The Cruel Sea"), thoughts of a sea life excited me, as well as being a great opportunity to get out of school, which I hated. When my mother saw my interest, she arranged to take me for an interview with P&O. However they only took on their cadets from England, and so they directed us to their partner company, the New Zealand Shipping Company, who annually gave a scholarship to one Australian and one New Zealander to attend the training ship HMS "Worcester" (RNR).

After applying and successfully sitting for an examination, they arranged for me to join their Federal Steam Navigation Co's cargo ship "Hertford" in Melbourne. So in October 1959 I left Australia bound for Liverpool. Being away from parents and school my new life was beginning, (including a regular

New Zealand Shipping Company's and Federal Steam Navigation Company's Scholarships.

Cadetships of the value of £100 per annum for a two years' course in the *Worcester* are granted by these Companies. Candidates must be New Zealand or Australian born and of British parentage. Cadets will be indentured to the Companies on completion of their *Worcester* training. Approved candidates will be given a free passage from New Zealand or Australia. Applicants must be 15 years of age. Applications should be made to the General Manager, New Zealand Shipping Company, Limited, Wellington, N.Z.; or to Messrs. Birt & Company (Pty.) Ltd., 4, Bridge Street, Sydney, N.S.W.; or to the Secretary, Thames Nautical Training College Ingress Abbey, Greenhithe, Kent.



tsmv "HERTFORD"

smoke!). As is normal on a first trip, I got sea-sick soon after sailing, (although I blame the English 'blue cheese' I was served with my first meal).

Not being a passenger, I was signed on as 'supernumerary' with a pay-off wage of 21 shillings. We sailed via the Suez Canal, first anchoring off Aden for bunkers (where the captain took me ashore for my first overseas experience), then Port Said and Genoa to discharge bales of wool, finally arriving in Liverpool on 4th January 1960.

On joining the "Worcester" in the first term of 1960, I was soon to experience the difference between 'upper' and 'lower' classes. I've just read in Captain Gordon Steele's 'The Story of the Worcester' that 'The cadets were divided so that the youngest boys lived aft in the vicinity of the staff, who could keep an eye on them. The biggest and toughest boys were put into the foc's'le as far away as possible from the small boys.' Then why wasn't I, being one of the tallest cadets, not put in the focsle division? Imagine the thought that our divisions were in order of priority, i.e. focsle, fore, main then mizzen; starboard then port; 1st then 2nd, and the



HMS "Worcester"

decks - upper, main, lower, then orlop. What lower scum could there be than an Aussie first term in 2nd Port mizzen division on the orlop deck! On one occasion I was on my hands and knees scrubbing the deck in the alleyway between the classrooms when a passing senior cadet didn't like the way I looked at him, and calling it 'silent nerve' he kicked my bucket across the deck! At least it had me ready for experiencing a similar attitude in my first year at sea, that us deck apprentices were the lowest of scum, being referred to as 'tripe hounds' (which my dictionary describes as worthless and obnoxious, the lowest of the low.)



(...used with thanks to Colin's instructions to 'feel free to plunder')

Being only 15 years old I needed a guardian in England, so my mother had arranged for her aunt in Somerset to take on that role. She lived on her own in the School House at Temple Cloud, a small village outside Bristol. After my first term, it was time for holidays, which I was to spend with her. Leaving the

"Worcester", I travelled by train from Greenhithe to London, then started hitchhiking to Bristol. My first lift was to Slough, where the kind driver invited me to his house for a meal before returning me to the highway for my next lift. Being picked up again I finally arriving in Bristol in the late evening and started walking the country road to Temple Cloud. Needing an urgent visit to the heads, I went behind a nearby tree on a vacant block of land, but then returning to the road, a police car pulled over to ask what I was doing. Taking my name and address, I was left to continue on my walking. Thankfully a milk delivery van passing soon after offered me a lift to my guardian's home in Temple Cloud. Unfortunately the relationship didn't work well with my guardian, being an elderly spinster and principal of a girls' school, you can imagine a resulting clash of our two personalities (especially when she detected the smell of smoke from one of my rollies I was sneaking upstairs in the bedroom!). I only spent that one vacation with her, though looking back I see it was my problem, I now see her as a kind lady.



Myself & Pete Grainger

Back to the "Worcester"; once when I was caught smoking in the heads, I quickly tossed the butt out the porthole, but would you believe, it landed on the plate edging of the ship's side! When I was to be given the usual punishment of six cuts on the rear I cleverly wore my pyjamas under my pants to soften the pain!

My hobby on the Worcester (apart from sneaking rollies) was ship spotting. I spent much spare time on the main deck with the aldis lamp calling up each passing ship in morse code, 'What ship, where bound?' We often played snooker, though sometimes our balls would be scattered when the Worcester gently rolled after a ship passed up or down the Thames, but that was accepted as part of the game. Very occasionally we would secretly visit Greenhithe's 'Brown Bear' where I learnt to drink the English 'lukewarm' brown ale and enjoyed listening to hit songs on their juke box, like 'Shakin' All Over' and "Summer-time Blues".



(Another plundered photo from Colin's gallery)

Our annual 'knock out' boxing competition was compulsory for all cadets (supposedly to equip us with the necessary skills to defend ourselves should we ever need to in a foreign port). Using my long arms to advantage in keeping back my opponents, I was able to win my first two bouts; and again to my advantage, I used my friendship with my next opponent in letting him know I wanted to lose to avoid the more serious bouts that might follow.

Being allowed two weekends ashore each term with parents' or guardian's approval, the New Zealand Shipping Company (my scholarship providers) organised visits to any of their ships that might be in port up at the Royal Albert Dock in London. These visits included a mid-day meal with the captain and officers in the dining saloon. (On one visit to the 'Rangitata' I was told that on passenger ships 'you must always wear your uniform when visiting the heads, including your cap'!)

During the next term I discovered that the nearby coastal shipping company Everards were quite happy to take on a Worcester cadet as a 'supernumerary' during the end of term holidays, so I took that opportunity rather than having to stay with my guardian. My first ship was their yellow peril "Singularity" which carried paper pulp from Lervik to London, then bulk cement to Rochester. In Lervik I took an opportunity to visit the town, which meant going up a mountainside, so I thumbed a ride. A cyclist on a pushbike stopped for me, but then climbed on behind me. I had to do the pedaling!



ss "Singularity"

After working on the "Singularity", Everards agreed to sign me on in the future as a fully paid 'Ordinary Seaman', so for the following end of term holiday I worked on their oil tanker "Acuity", visiting ports like Emden, Rotterdam and re-fuelling tankers in the Thames Estuary. Finally over the 1960 Christmas break I worked again as O/S on the "Sociality", doing continual trips to Leith in Scotland carrying bulk cement from the cement works at Purfleet just across the Thames River from the "Worcester".



m.v. "SOCIALITY"

In the first of my two years on "Worcester" was the requirement of sitting for the G.C.E. Having left school in Australia, I thought I had escaped all that and the college training would be just nautical studies; I had no interest in other subjects, apart from maths

and English, and especially no knowledge at all of English Geography. And imagine being given an opportunity before the exam to see the questions, yet still achieving only 16%! (To protect the innocent, I won't mention who did what via the ship's side and through a port-hole.) I was told my low marks were only achieved through spelling my name correctly on the exam paper.

For the next holidays my friend Pete Grainger invited me to stay at his family home in St Leonards, near Hastings. This turned out to be



Myself & Pete

really appreciated; I virtually became part of the family, and their place became my family home for the three years of my coming apprenticeship.

One day towards the last term I was called to visit the New Zealand Shipping Company's London office, their marine superintendent needed to organise which of their three cadet training ships they would put me on to start my 3 year sea-going apprenticeship. However, after 2 years on "Worcester", I was not really looking forward to three more years on another training ship. Knowing that they owned a few ships that were managed separately by Trinder Anderson, (known as the Avenue Shipping Co), I boldly expressed my reluctance to spend more time on training ships and asked if I could do my apprenticeship on one of those ships. The marine superintendent's immediate response to my request was... "Well, we don't want any unwilling horses on our ships!"

When the results of that meeting were reported to the Worcester's acting captain superintendent, Freddie King, he sent for me. He told me he was very disappointed in what I'd said, and that I'd let the "Worcester" down! (The way I understood his comment at the time was that the college cadets were expected to join higher class companies like P & O or Ben Line etc, but reflecting now perhaps it was my dishonouring the scholarship I'd been given.)

Wednesdays were sports days when we'd all go ashore to the college's playing fields. In my last term I was playing rugby, (or 'rugby union'), and in my favoured position as left winger. Being tall with long skinny legs I was more suited to being there on the back line, the forwards being much stronger and heavier but slower to run. During the match I was passed the ball. Full of enthusiasm to score my own try, I took off across the field to the other side where there'd be less opposition to reach the goal line. But of course that was foolish; as I crossed the centre of the field I ran headlong into the forwards of the other team! They all jumped me, and being so very lanky my hip was dislocated as I crashed to the ground under their heavy weight. An ambulance was called for, picking me up from the centre of the field, and I was taken to Dartford hospital where I spent the rest of the term lying on my back. Unable to return to the college to sit for my "Worcester" Certificate, they graciously gave it to me!



(Another plundered photo from Colin's gallery)

Eventually I was fit enough to leave hospital, Peter Grainger's parents looking after me at their home down in Hastings, where I spent time limping on crutches. In due course Trinder Andersons contacted me to arrange the signing of my indentures with them in their London office



m.v. "AJANA"

before joining my first ship, the "Ajana", in Hull.

That day soon arrived. I was chauffeur-driven up to London, (Peter's father being Deputy Chairman of London Transport and on the Board of British Rail), my indentures signed and witnessed, then I took a train up to Hull - this included a few lonely hours sitting in front of a warm fire in York's railway station waiting room. Finally I limped down the wharf at Hull with my

loaded suitcase and up the Ajana's gangway. When I was asked why I was limping, I quickly

replied that I'd sprained my ankle! I didn't want any official knowledge of my hip dislocation, I wanted to get my sea career started!

The New Zealand Shipping Company's ships managed by Trinder Anderson were known as the Avenue Shipping Company, and similar to NZSCo's Federal Steam Navigation Company ships being named after English counties, the Avenue ships were named after Irish counties. The three ships of the Australind Steam Shipping Company were owned by Charles Trinder himself and named after Western Australia towns, "Ajana" "Araluen" and "Australind", the company having originated as the 'West Australian Farmers Company'.

My first voyage was a load of bulk coke from Bremen in Germany to Noumea, then to Australia to load a general cargo for European ports and finally UK. That gave me the anticipation of seeing my family again after nearly three years away. It was freezing weather in Bremen. When our cargo of coke was loaded, we were getting ready to sail and everything was covered in snow. The mate told me to clear the bridge wing, so I filled a bucket with water and sloshed it on the deck. It immediately turned to ice, making the situation even more slippery and dangerous. Well, what would an Aussie deck apprentice know about snow and ice?

Unlike the New Zealand liners with their regularly scheduled routes from the UK, Trinders managed their ships from port to port without any set program. The next cargo and destination was arranged by their shipping agents. I found tramping the oceans to be a far more adventurous and interesting experience than the thought of continual repetitive voyages to the same ports.

Here's an example of a typical voyage. We were given orders to sail light ship from Liverpool in the general direction of Canada, with a specific port yet to be confirmed. It was after two days at sea before we were given Sheet Harbour in Nova Scotia as a destination, to load paper pulp for Pusan in South Korea. Arriving at Sheet Harbour was an interesting experience, it being a very small port in a bay of calm waters and surrounded by steep mountains. As we approached the wharf, some of the townsfolk came down to watch us arrive. Being a small port, there was no pilot or tug boats to assist us, the captain had all responsibility in approaching the wharf and safely bringing us alongside. The eleven days that followed were quite unusual and unforgettable. The town was so small and the townsfolk so friendly that we became part of their social life. Every night we visited the local milk bar/coffee shop, playing the juke box, some dancing etc., and even joined in a sleepout in tents. When we finally sailed, after loading three of our five holds with paper pulp, it was all very emotional, with quite a crowd on the wharf seeing us off.

We were given our next port, New Orleans, to load the remaining two holds with Soya Beans for Yokkaichi in Japan. This meant sailing down the east coast of America, through the Florida Strait, then up the Mississippi River. Our cargo included a large portable tank secured on the main deck. As we were sailing through the area known as the 'Bermuda Triangle', we were buzzed by several Cuban airforce planes. I can well imagine the tank on our deck would have looked very suspicious, considering the political tension of being in proximity of Fidel Castro's rule in Cuba.)

It was very interesting steaming up the Mississippi, it had such a large entrance and there was so much other shipping, including a large fleet of laid up liberty ships from the days of WW2.

After loading in New Orleans, we took on water at Cristobal before transiting Panama, then across the Pacific to unload our cargoes in Japan and Korea. Our next orders were to travel light ship to Fiji to load a full cargo of raw sugar for Liverpool, stopping on the way at Moji for bunkers. We commenced loading at Port Ellington, then Lautoka. Lautoka became a port that we were to visit on numerous occasions, and it became one of my favourites with its warm climate, friendly people and a local milk bar with its juke box. Our 'bulk' cargo of sugar arrived at the ship in bags! A mesh floor was placed over each open hatch, then the bagged sugar in slings was loaded with our own derricks and winches onto the mesh floors.

Each native wharfie then picked up a bag, removed its string, wrapped it around his head, then emptied the sugar through the mesh floor. Watching in amazement, the first bagfuls scattered like dust to the bottom of the hold, how long was it going to take to load a full cargo? But with many wharfies working continuously, the holds were filled in only 6 days. Other interesting customs were their singing together continuously as they worked, and their conspicuous use of a portable toilet placed over the ship's bow!

Our return trip to the U.K., so often given to us as 'LEFO', ('Lands End for orders'), was again via the Panama Canal, 22 days away. After transiting the canal, we stopped at Curacao for fuel before heading up through the Atlantic and encountering its rough seas, as is normal. Being fully loaded and so well down in the water, large solid waves ('greenies' as we called them) would continually crash against the bow, with many breaking onto the decks. On one occasion my fellow apprentice, being senior to me, was called out in the middle of the night to assist the seamen secure the stowed gangway which was breaking loose. Returning

to our cabin in great fear, he told me that a wave had swept him off his feet and he was swirled horizontally off the deck as he desperately clung on with his hands.

Our final port was to become Liverpool. When it came time to discharge the bulk raw sugar, pneumatic drills were required to break it up as it had literally become concrete because of a burst water pipe. That's tramping!

Charles Trinder (who was to become London's Lord Mayor) would often organise a formal dinner with business colleagues on his ships when they were visiting London's Royal Albert Dock. All cargo work was stopped during that time, with the derricks guyed off and the ropes cheesed down. My duty was to stand at the top of the gangway in my number ones as part of the welcoming party.



mv "ARALUEN"

My three year apprenticeship was completed in Sydney on 31st August 1964 after five voyages on the "Ajana" and four on the "Araluen", visiting 105 ports with 8 transits of Panama and 4 of the Suez Canal. Looking ahead, it was time to confine myself to the Australian coast with shorter voyages so that I could enjoy more of family and friends.

As the Sydney Technical college didn't start its 2nd Mates course until the new year, I looked for temporary employment, first finding work as a storeman in a Woolworths supermarket at Mosman, then as a car detailer at a second hand car yard at St Leonards, and finally with the Shell Oil Company working on a bunkering barge in Sydney Harbour. My wages enabled me to buy my first car, which I then used to attend Sydney Technical College to complete my 2nd Mates ticket.

My first ship with my 2nd Mates was the Eastern & Australia line's "Nellore", joining her in July 1965. She traded general cargo from Australia to eastern ports like Taiwan, Philippines and Hong Kong and carried about a dozen passengers. I was third of four officers and experienced the excitement of being in control of my first watch with



ss "NELLORE"

all its duties and responsibilities. Pacing the bridge is the best memory, a great time for personal thoughts with total independence of any intrusion to adventurous dreaming. This was also my first of three experiences sailing with passengers. One evening after first joining, I hadn't turned up at the pre dinner drinks with the passengers. The captain sent for me. I was instructed that it

was a requirement for all deck officers to attend and be dressed in number ones, including a 'cummerbund' (which I'd never heard of before!). Another evening a passenger asked me what time we would be passing a certain point of land on the coast. I told him I didn't know. Later the 2nd mate told me I should always give an answer regardless of its accuracy; the passengers needed to have a positive impression of us deck officers!

Preferring to be more on the Australian coast and away from the formalities of carrying passengers, next time in Sydney I made an enquiry for a job with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, so they took my details. Some days later when the "Nellore" was in Melbourne, the radio officer came across the deck to me with a telegram and a grin on his face as he handed it to me. I looked at it and read, 'Come and see me, from Sugar.' So four days later in Sydney I signed off the "Nellore" and joined the "Tambua", again as third mate. She was another old steamship of the 1930's, mainly carrying bulk raw sugar and tanks of molasses from the North Queensland coast to the company's refinery in Sydney.

After four voyages, I thought I'd try another company, and so visited Burns Philp. Although their marine superintendent inferred he would have liked to offer me employment, there was unfortunately no vacancy at the time. So I was very surprised when, arriving back at my family home in Mosman, there was a taxi waiting for me, to take me to their ship, the "Malekula"! For some reason, it suddenly needed a third mate, and the superintendent whom I'd just visited had urgently sent the car to pick me up! (Perhaps he'd taken advantage of the opportunity to make an employment change!)



mv "Malekula"

A six week return voyage on the "Malekula" was totally so different to today's containership cargoes. Loading in Sydney for fourteen ports took about 12 days. The teamwork needed for loading was the 2nd mate looking after the two for'd holds, the 3rd mate the two after holds and the 1st mate supervising the overall loading. Each 'parcel' of cargo (which sometimes even included a car) had to be so placed to be appropriately accessible for unloading in the right order of the 14 ports, which were from memory... Lae, Madang, Lorengau, Wewak, Lombrum, Kavieng, Rabaul, Soraken, Sohano, Teopasino, Numa Numa, Aragua and Kieta. Discharging at each port was done anchored off-shore into barges and using the ship's derricks. My final shipping company where I was to spend the rest of my sea career was the Broken Hill Pty Ltd, known as the BHP. They owned steelworks in the New South Wales ports of Newcastle and Port Kembla, and Whyalla in South Australia.

My first ship with them was the "Iron Baron", joining her as third mate in April 1966. Australia.



ss "Iron Baron"

She had been a coal fired piston steamer of 1938, now converted to oil. We mainly carried steel products from Newcastle and Port Kembla to major cities, returning with Iron ore from either Whyalla or Cockatoo Island in Yampi Sound, Western Australia.

One interesting run which lasted for over a year was continuous fortnightly trips in W.A. on the "Iron Warrior" from Bunbury to Port Hedland carrying railway sleepers, then iron ore on the return trip to

Kwinana, near Fremantle. One incident when we were loading the sleepers showed how heavy the jarrah timber is; a sleeper fell out of its sling as it was being loaded, hit the water and immediately sank! As 2nd Mate, I was responsible for organising the crew's wages, which involved travelling into the town of Bunbury to get the money from the company's agent. As the pier was about 2 kilometers long, I was provided with a push bike! Another incident, on arrival at



ss "Iron Warrior"

Port Hedland on one trip we had to anchor offshore to await our berth. A few of us used the motor-driven lifeboat for a trip ashore, lowering it down the side and then climbing aboard down a Jacob's ladder. As we started for the shore, the cook yelled from the ship that he wanted to come too, so we turned about. As he climbed onto the Jacob's ladder we saw he was totally drunk! He soon tumbled off the ladder into the sea. A couple jumped in off our boat, grabbed him and pulled him aboard. We started resuscitating him, but even though he appeared drowned we kept it up, taking turns until we reached the shore, to have someone officially make that decision.

Instead of flying me home, the BHP took advantage of the "Iron Wyndham" in the nearby port of Kwinana, transferring me to her, and so finally I arrived in Newcastle in May 1968 for a well earned five months leave. And an exciting holiday it was. Firstly, I went to an advanced driving school at Warwick Farm, organised by famous racing drivers Brian Foley and Laurie Stewart. Instructors included motor journalist Peter Wherret and another champion driver, Kevin Bartlett. The course consisted of three levels; firstly handling your own vehicle at racing speeds, then both a Morris Cooper 'S' and an improved 1370 Cooper, and finally an Elfin Cosworth open wheeler. It was such great excitement to handle a vehicle at racing speed around bends, with the screech of tyres, the smell of hot exhaust and burning rubber. But then

discovered something even more exciting when I went on a skiing weekend at Thredbo down the south of NSW in the Snowy Mountains...

My next 2 ships as 2nd mate were the "Iron Clipper" and "Iron Whyalla". I arranged to park my hotted up



ss "Iron Whyalla"



Me & Cheryl

the many organised dates with my new girlfriend. After many such trips, I asked her a ques-



Mr & Mrs Cheryl Elliott

tion relating to marital matters, and she said 'yes'! Her father, being a school principal, required the timing of the official ceremony to fit in with both school holidays and my being on leave, so choosing August 1969 meant back to sea for another six months. On requesting my friend Pete Grainger to be best man at the wedding, he upheld his role perfectly by shouting me a whisky just before the official event, (to overcome my nervousness!)

With more seetime as 2nd Mate on the "Iron Cavalier" and "Iron Spencer", I finally had the required seetime to sit for my Master's ticket. And so back to sea in September

ber 1970, I soon was promoted to 1st Mate. At last, the highlight of my sea career! Although that still had its hard times on the Australian Coast, involving frequent 'Seamens Union' industrial disputes with its tensions. For example, one time after expressing concern to the bosun of a slackness in the sailors' work, I returned to my cabin later to find my portholes painted over – a hint from the seamen that they didn't like me watching them!



In cabin "Iron Whyalla"



"Iron Cavalier" at anchor in Sydney Harbour in wheelhouse

But then, did I really want to stay at sea all my life? I would only be home for say six weeks twice a year, apart from the odd days in Newcastle or Port Kembla. My wife Cheryl and I were looking forward to our own family, so it probable was time to settle into a shore job. Pete Grainger suggested a maritime surveying and insurance firm called Cargo Superintend-

ents which he had done some work with, so I took opportunity of an interview. They offered a job in Gladstone, Queensland, but first needing a month of training in insurance work at an office in Townsville and also requiring my wife to operate the office, so she was interviewed as well. We decided to take the job.

We were provided with a typical elevated 'Queenslander' weatherboard house and a Holden station wagon. We settled in to the work, Cheryl in the office printing out reports and official certificates, and me visiting ships as a 'quantity surveyor' to calculate an official measurement of the loaded cargo. The work also included assessing an official 'share of costs' between insurance companies with motor vehicle accident insurance claims, according to the drivers' actions. However after a few months I came to the conclusion that our new situation wasn't going to get us anywhere exciting and so



ss "IRON YAMPI"

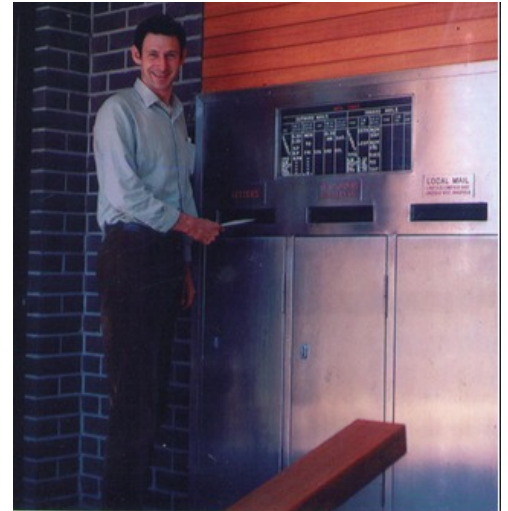
continuous voyages with cargoes of steel products to southern ports across Australia and returning with iron ore from Yampi Sound in the north west, she was sold for scrap.

With a cargo of steel billets, we sailed her final voyage to Hong Kong. After discharging, we anchored off shore and all the crew were flown back to Australia. But I had to remain on board on my own for several days until the sale had been officially completed. Not far away from our anchorage was the Queen Elizabeth! It took the



ex "QUEEN ELIZABETH" after her fire.

help of friendly neighbours. Our farm house was on the bank of the Macleay River, supposed to be the second fastest flowing river in the southern hemisphere when in flood. On one occasion returning from shopping in town, my wife arrived at the bridge next to our farm to find it totally submerged in floodwaters. Our dairy farmer neighbour kindly ferried her and our baby son across the river in his boat. To think I was pacing the bridge a thousand kilometers away with no idea of what was happening!



Posting letter of resignation from BHP

preferred to be back at sea. That

was no trouble, the BHP virtually gave me a promotion to 1st Mate of a larger ship, the "Iron Yampi".

Following time on her and another few months on leave, my next ship was her sister ship "Iron Derby". After the usual



ss "IRON DERBY"

opportunity of a photograph.

Returning to a city life in Sydney became our next concern. As BHP traded mainly from Newcastle and was my official 'home port', we would be just as close if we lived somewhere in the country, so we bought a small farm further up the coast near Kempsey. Managing cattle became my hobby, so when at sea I studied the subject in my hours below when off watch. Mind you, it meant my wife being on her own for many months of the year to manage the farm as well as looking after our new little family, but she did well, and with the

Wanting to be ready for any opportunity of promotion to master, I qualified for pilot exemption certificates for the company's three main trading ports of Newcastle, Port Kembla and Whyalla. On the completion of one voyage as we approached Newcastle, the captain stepped back and let me bring the ship into port! It was an exciting experience. There were the tugboats to be continually directed by radio (with their appropriate number of whistle blasts in response), engine movements for the apprentice to ring on the telegraph and continual instructions to the helmsman. (Mind you, I was corrected for wasting time with requests as 'please' and 'thank you', just to keep to short worded orders.)



Then came my frightening experience crossing the Great Australian Bight. On the morning of 7th August 1976, my young wife, four months pregnant, and our 15 month old son were at home on our farm getting ready for a five hour drive to spend a few days with her mother. Meanwhile, over two thousand miles away, my mind was concentrating on the end of a straight at the Warwick Farm racing circuit where I had earlier completed a driving course. Braking sharply for the fast approaching right hand bend, I turned into it then immediately applied opposite lock. My excitement grew wild as I played with the accelerator, applying understeer and oversteer as I rounded the corner at top speed in my hotted up Volvo 123GT. Just about to plant my foot to roar down the next straight, I was completely distracted as a large wave tumbled over the deck below. Pacing the starboard bridge wing on the morning 4 to 8 watch, my dreaming was interrupted! The first of daylight was breaking, showing the white foaming seas mounting the main deck and swirling over and around the hatch coamings. We were returning in the BHP's bulk ore carrier "Iron Hunter" to Port Kembla with a full load of ironstone from Port Hedland.



ss "Iron Hunter"

Having rounded the southern cape of Western Australia, we were well into the Great Australian Bight with its continually heavy south westerly swell on our starboard quarter. Being a bulk ore carrier, it was quite usual for waves to tumble across the decks, the legal freeboard being much less than passenger ships with their greater risk to the

passengers' safety. I suddenly noticed a manhole hatch lid was open. Water was pouring in as each wave crashed over the deck. It would've been open since the previous day when I'd given the bosun a job for the sailors to grease the lid hinges. I needed to urgently notify the captain, so leaving the bridge I went down to his quarters. He told me to take the apprentice with me and look into the problem, he would take over on the bridge and alter the ship's course to avoid further waves coming over.

So after getting the apprentice, we climbed down to the main deck and went straight to the open hatch lid. We closed the lid and began screwing down the freshly greased wing nuts. Suddenly I saw a huge wave on the port bow climbing over the deck. There was no time to do anything but hang on. I yelled out to the apprentice and grabbed onto the hatch coaming. The wave towered over us as it crashed across the deck, picking us up and swirling us round; there was no way we could hold on with our greasy hands.


I was dumped against the hatch coaming and in particular my head bashed on the steel deck before I finally ended up against the ship's starboard side rail in the pressure of the wave gushing over the side. (A few feet further on the rail had actually been torn away.) In utter panic and fear of a further wave washing me over the side, I scrambled to my feet and

ran to the accommodation ladder, climbing to the next deck where I collapsed, leaning safely against the bulkhead. (Incidentally, in all my fear I didn't give any thought to the apprentice with me; he wasn't injured but ultimately left his sea career.)


It was soon helped up, and limped to my cabin with an aching head and a blinded left eye. My injured eye being the only consequence, the captain did my next watch for me. As I was only thought to be suffering from a black eye, I was put back on watch again the following morning. Before sunrise, the sailor on lookout duty on the monkey island rang two bells to warn of a light ahead on the port bow. I tried to see what he was reporting, but not only was my left eye still blind, my right eye was watering, making it so difficult to see anything at all. Some minutes later, there was an urgent horn blast right next to us on the port side. I raced to the bridge wing and saw a fishing trawler passing down our side, with someone yelling at us and shaking his fist! A very close experience, but fortunately no mishap! After arrival at our next port and following a visit to the eye specialist, I was found to have permanently lost most of the sight in my left eye, and so unfit for a sea career.



The summary of the remaining 25 years of my working life began with taking up dairy farming at Kempsey. After two years of milking cows, we realised the stupidity of a twice a day, 7 days a week commitment (and with no holidays), so changed to breeding beef cattle. This involved subdividing and selling our dairy farm to purchase 2,200 acres at Coonabarabran in the Warrumbungle ranges of central west NSW. Our



AUSTRALIND RED POLLS



A typical Australind breeder with 3 month old calf at foot

RED POLL COW POWER — GOOD DAM BUSINESS!

Use Australind Red Polls for:—

- * Lifting herd fertility
- * Calf growth rate
- * Mothering ability
- * Easy calving
- * Docility
- * Natural polling
- * Crossbreeding for vealer production
- * Natural ability to finish vealers off grass

Sires in use:


- * Wynfield Noble Justinian
- * Maleer Lambert
- * Mundi Mundi Apollo

Enquiries and inspection welcome anytime

GRAHAM AND CHERYL ELLIOTT

"Kooregah" — Phone (068) 42 7843

COONABARABRAN, N.S.W. 2357



STUD PROFILE

Australind Red Polls

The ability to finish top vealer calves off ordinary pasture country is the reason why Graham and Cheryl Elliott chose to run Red Polls on the 902 hectare property "Kooregah". Situated in the Purlewaugh area east of Coonabarabran, N.S.W., "Kooregah" is on a spur of the Warrumbungles, being a mixture of heavy and light soils in hilly basalt country.

The "Australind" stud was established in 1982 with the purchase of 20 registered and 87 commercial cows from "Bundaleer" and 3 stud bulls from "Nyalindee". Bulls have since been used from "Mundi Mundi" and "Maleer", with the latest acquisition being "Wynfield Noble Justinian" who was Senior Champion at Canberra in 1986 and sire's progeny winner at Sydney in 1987.

Presently the "Australind" herd comprises 240 females including heifer replacements. They are run on lucerne and improved pastures to finish the calves around 325kgs at 10 months. In good seasons surplus lucerne and oaten pasture is baled to supplement feeding in hard winters.

The cows are calved in July so that the calves are on the ground long enough to be able to handle the increased milk supply associated with a spring flush.

Graham and Cheryl believe that in any beef enterprise, of the three most important factors — fertility, growth rate and carcass — fertility has by far the biggest influence on herd profitability, and so culling in the herd is heavy for this heritable trait.

From experience they have found that while a bull might be fertile, his serving capacity can vary greatly. For example,

one bull may get 30 cows in calf in 10 weeks whereas another may have over 60 cows in calf in 6 weeks. Although fertility can be checked by testicle circumference and palpation, serving capacity requires a practical test in the yards, which all Australind bulls will undergo before selection for sale.

Replacement heifers are selected and weaned at 7 months to avoid development of excessive udder fat which can inhibit potential milk production. They are grown out in a back paddock of natural pasture then joined over six weeks at a high bull ratio separate to the main herd to calve at 30 months. Those failing to conceive in this period are culled, with priority for selection given to those heifers which conceive early.

At joining of the main herd, bulls are run for six weeks and then a cover bull is used in the combined mob for a further six weeks. Replacement heifers and bulls are only selected from dams that calve in the first six weeks. Calving rates have improved in the Australind herd from 75 per cent in 1982 to 95 per cent in 1987.

The Elliotts would recommend all Red Poll herds participate in Breedplan as most factors relating to breed improvement, especially fertility, mothering ability and growth rate, cannot be detected as easily and as early by visual appraisal, especially in females, whereas Breedplan can identify poor performers so that they can be removed from the system before their influence is spread. Also, as Breedplan becomes more accepted there is bound to be buyer demand for performance figures. (Breedplan was featured in the August 1987 issue of the Red Poll Newsletter).



first breed of cattle was Red Polls, and establishing a stud (which we named 'Australind'), we also became involved in cattle shows.



Some years later, we 'updated' our breed to Gelbvieh, (the German name for 'yellow cows'), first buying a half share of a heifer in Canada which we had flown out to Australia. We used her in an embryo transplant program. Our commitment deepened in our stud breeding, including being the NSW state chairman of the Gelbvieh Association for a couple of years.

Finally we improved our rural enterprise yet again, this time to breed composite cattle, using semen from top quality Red Poll, Gelbvieh, South Devon and Red Angus bulls, thus establishing "Australind Composites".

When our three children had finished school and went off on their own careers, we sold our farm and retired in 2002. (Well, what an opportunity when two separate neighbours plead to purchase your property!) By the way, the similarity I found with life on a farm to a sea career is that (1) you don't have to live in the city, (2) you don't have to travel to work and (3) you're in charge of your own watch!



Stuart Me Bronwyn Cheryl Peter

The Whole Crew today



Peter Stuart Me Cheryl Bronwyn



*Bailey Thomas Toby Bronte Oliver Hayden
Hamish Laura Levi Madison*