

# LIBERTY SHIP ANECDOTES

By Mike Bartlett Old Worcester 55-57 and Contribution by other Ows on the Internet Group

Andrew Langsdale OW (62) originally asked for info on War Built ships so Liberty Ships would of course come into that.

Mike gets the ball rolling with this reply.

G'day Andrew,

I noticed that you've had very little input from Forum OW's on your request for Liberty ship anecdotes, presumably most are too young to have served on them. Few lasted beyond the late 1960's and I presume most British companies had replaced theirs by the late 1950's, early 1960's.

Anyway I've finally managed 7 anecdotes in addition to those I sent a while ago, so I'll post one a day on the Forum in the hope they may act as memory joggers for some of our older members.

Hopefully they may be of some assistance.

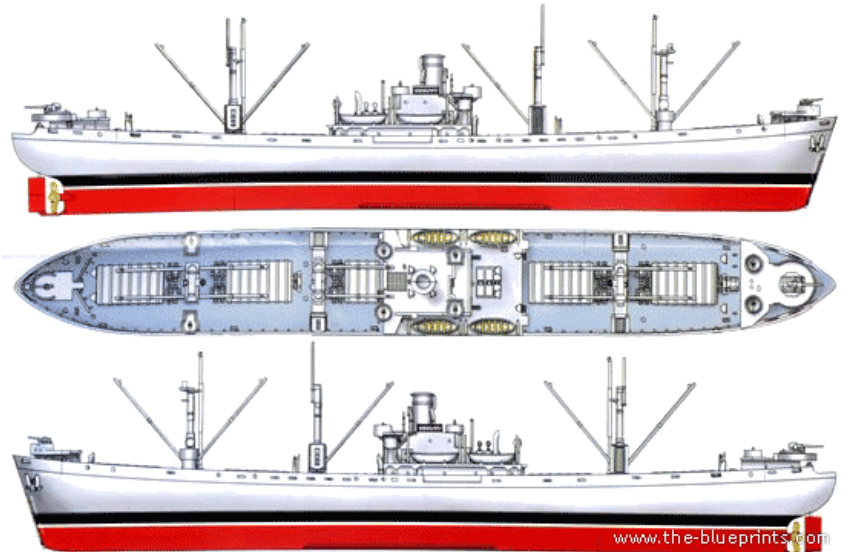
Best wishes,

Mike Bartlett

1955-57

*Any info I have inserted is in blue italics for easy identity.*

*Colin Thurlow OW 62-65. Too young for Liberty Ships !*



Mike Bartlett - Liberty ship anecdotes from 1957 and 1958 - SS City of Colchester.....ex Sam Lea 1944 - SS City of Shrewsbury.....ex Ben H Miller 1943

## Surveyor's assistant

A few minutes after joining the ship in Glasgow the mate told me to change into working gear and do whatever the Lloyds Surveyor instructed me. When I reported to him he was tapping the hulls of the steel lifeboats with his hammer, on one boat he penetrated the hull and subsequently condemned all four. They were offloaded and subsequently a couple of days later a steam tug came alongside with four timber lifeboats in tow. These were from the Brocklebank ship Mahout and had the name and 1919 [I recall] cut into the timber. So another job was to stencil our ship's name onto each.

Later the first day the surveyor told me to get some red paint and paint red lines around the davits, being inquisitive I asked why and he told me they were condemned! Naturally I asked what would happen next as we were starting a voyage to India and he said they were OK for this voyage but would have to be replaced within a year, a very comforting statement. Perhaps this contributed to the decision to sell the ship the following year when she became the Liberian flagged "Sunset".

Mike Bartlett

1955-57

Although I sailed on the City of Ely, on the Persian Gulf run , I can't think of any particular anecdotes because she was my first experience of ships at sea .



After the Worcester the accommodation was the height of luxury with interior sprung mattresses on the bunks, oscillating electric fans in all the cabins. Ellermans had fitted individual AC units in the Capt and C/e cabin the hospital and the Officer Mess. The company supplied folding camp beds the plan being that we could sleep in the saloon and the Watch Keepers could run a 'Hot Bunk' principal in the hospital. I think we tried this idea for one night but coming out into the heat in the morning was such a shock we all decided to sleep on deck using the folding camp beds. What I do remember is helping 'Chippie' build 'Thunder Boxes' on the outside of the rails aft for the Arab dockies to use, apparently the Indian crew wouldn't let them use their bogs. The CITY OF ELY was the SAMARINA and joined the fleet in 1947 sold in 1961 and became the PAGET TRADER she was demolished in 1966. This information was from Ships in Focus by John Clarkson & Roy Fenton. I think the information is correct but I always thought her original name was SAMBRAKE.

Barry Leech 56/59

I have lost the email in which somebody is producing a book on life on board a liberty ship. I have a friend, an OC, who was a chief mate on a RML Sam boat he has quite a few stories to tell. However I don't want to broadcast his email address to everyone without his permission.

Every time I go to San Francisco I go on board the George O'Brian ([Jeremiah O'Brien](#)) tied up at Fishermans wharf. The old RML and Holland America berth.

And I remember that the Cadets cabin(port side) is the same size as the Masters cabin on the Starboard side. Luxury indeed for the two cadets. Not so for the master. RML had 4 "Sam" boats which from time to time we would ship visit.  
Peter W 56



My first ship was the 'Clan Macfadyen', ex 'Samderwent'. She was on Voyage No.44 to India. It was her last voyage as a Clan Boat and when we drydocked her in Glasgow at the end of the voyage she was sold off to Greek interests.

We spent a lot of time in Colombo that voyage. The cadet's cabin was minute, just room for two bunk beds and a small

couch. They had added a bridge and wheelhouse above the original. The old wheelhouse was just an empty room and was part of the Captains quarters.



There was a weld up on the foredeck that had failed. It was re-welded in just about every port, but as soon as we hit any swell it broke open again. We used to put a 2lb ball peen hammer into the open weld to watch it get crushed as the ship flexed!

A few years ago I was watching a program on Liberty ships on the History Channel and they showed one being launched. I somehow got a screen grab of it and cleaned it up and I think it is actually the 'Samderwent' being



launched! Sid 55-57

G'day Barry and Peter,

Barry at some stage I reckon the Master and Chief Engineer of the City of Ely must have been very enlightened to have the accommodation modified as well as having some air conditioning fitted, possibly by the Chinese contractors Ellerman's used in Calcutta, they were open to all sorts of suggestions, treated us all right royally and no doubt non authorised work, including the





parties and dinners they hosted, would not have appeared on the invoice. Our hospital was a locker located in the main deck alleyway on the starboard side and there was no officers mess.

While I probably get to San Francisco less often than you Peter I too always visit the Jeremiah Brown ([O'Brien](#)), the apprentices' cabin you saw was indeed better than what we had as on the 4 apprentice ships we were located on the main deck starboard side forward immediately

behind the steam winch at No 3 hold.

*There is also an active Liberty ship called John W Brown in the USA. [HERE](#)*

*This is a very complete PDF on Liberty Ships by James Davies [HERE](#)*



Best wishes,  
Mike

The mess I referred to was the Dining room which was across the bridge front on main deck level. As for the AC units they were on the ship when I joined I have no idea where they were installed. I was told the previous summer one of Ellermans ships was in the Gulf and anchored off Kuwait for a number of weeks awaiting a berth in the inner anchorage and were suffering with the heat. The company sent somebody from the personnel department to see how bad it was and when he stepped off the plane experienced the extreme heat and immediately decided to send the officer, in two groups, to Cyprus to escape from the heat, for a couple of weeks.

Barry

## Cargo work

Like many ships of that era our hatch covering comprised lateral portable hatchway beams beams into which timber hatchboards were fitted by hand, a somewhat challenging task at times as 2 teenage apprentices found they were heavy and also often only fitted in a specific sequence, these were then covered by several layers of canvas tarpaulins which were secured around the edge by wooden wedges driven into cleats and then, for longer passages, steel securing bars were fitted over the canvas laterally.

To work cargo the hatches had to be uncovered and the bars, tarpaulins and hatch boards stowed on the adjoining deck and wedges collected into sacks. The deck space wasn't adequate given the competing need for space by wires from the derricks, ring bolts, cargo clusters for night work, steam pipes, access to the steam winches and sometimes overstowed cargo requiring temporary storage. So access to the hatch rim could be somewhat difficult or hazardous at times as we apprentices were responsible for keeping a tally, recording marks as well as indirect supervision on behalf of the mate, hence we always had a much used notebook in our top pocket.

When rain threatened, or at the end of a shift, all the hatch gear stowed on the deck then had to be replaced, sometimes very rapidly, to protect the cargo beneath.

Certainly on these ships we apprentices learned a lot and became adept at cargo work.

For night work cargo clusters [portable lamps hung on lanyards] were used as illumination and often suffered damage, particularly those at the corners of the hatch so we were for ever replacing globes and blown fuses. The latter were copper strips within a small brass cylinder located in an unlit deckhouse, generally behind a working cargo winch. The operation was fiddly and on occasions we were known to substitute suitable size nails as a replacement for the fuse, strictly in the interest of keeping the wharfies working.

Mike Bartlett

1955-57

Steel securing bars were used to secure the tarp edges along the sides and ends of hatches so that when wedges driven home in cleats ( can't remember proper term) so that pressure applied whole length of tarp and not just at each wedge.

Cluster cables forever getting cut, dockers always wanted them further than rope tails would reach so suspending them on cable, more damage. Use them in inaccessible places with the risk they would get over stowed a risk fire with over heating. Used to try and feed all clusters via access hatches and stow them there between shifts.

Martin Tregonning

I never sailed on liberty ships but the old Brocklebank ships had hatch boards and tarps. The cargo clusters were always an issue and I was amused when Mike said a nail was used instead of a fuse/breaker. We used to call that a Liverpool dockie fuse – a six inch nail!

Alan Reid

Those were the days indeed. Health and safety was never written about as it is today yet we never injured or killed anyone!

Thanks for the memories.

Regards,

Alan

I likewise never sailed on Strick Line's one which was launched 22/04/1944 as Samglory, purchased by Strick Line for £135,000 in 1947 and renamed Serbistan. She was sold to a Liberian Company for £90,000 in 1962 and finally scrapped in 1969. I do know that she was the only ship belonging to Stricks, including several war built vessels, which Kelvin Hughes refused to provide a Ralston Stability and Trim Indicator for on the grounds that the stability information was insufficient and they required another inclining experiment, which Stricks were not willing to pay for. Still, she stayed right side up for 25 years which was pretty good for a one trip ship.

Alasdair.

[Here is a good large illustration of a liberty ship cutaway and a great site. HERE](#)

[Good list of Liberty Ships HERE](#)

[And a good PDF on Liberty Ships HERE](#)

From Martin

As just recalled that bars over the hatch joined somehow in the middle and didn't the outboard end hook under the side bars for security?

From Andrew Lansdale

The hatch bars had hooks on the outboard ends. They hooked into eye pads on the side of the coaming. They met in the middle of the hatch where they were formed in a vertical right-angled ending which stuck up for 3-4 inches and either bolted or padlocked together.

From Nigel, Martin & Mike

And the wedge had to be hypotenuse to the bar, if not it would spilt!

The "locking bars" slipped under the coaming, and were joined by a hook and "D" with a screw in hub that was tightened like using a windlass bar.

G'day Martin,

thanks for this, must admit I'd forgotten about the steel bars under the wedges, and my Nicholl's Seamanship 1941 edition didn't even refer to them when I checked to see what they were called.

I seem to recall they were often a bastard to keep in place before driving the wedges home and had a nasty habit of springing out on you.

Best wishes,

Mike 55-57



G'day Alasdair,

The Ellerman ships didn't have Ralstons, probably not for the same reasons. Saw my first Ralston. a great time saver, on the brand new City of Auckland in 1959, none of my previous 5 ships had one.

regards,  
Mike 55-57

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Martin

On the Clan Chisholm homeward bound through the Bay of Biscay we went through a Hurricane. The Old Man said it was the worst weather he'd seen in 40 years at sea. We 'submarined' a couple of times, sliding down one swell and sticking our bow into the next wave right back to the bridge. The wind was hellish and there was a small tear in the tarp on No.2 hatch. It ballooned up and there was a loud noise and the hatch bars were gone! One half whistled right up in front of the bridge – it's probably still in orbit!

Sid

G'day everyone,

i enjoyed reading some of the other posts on Liberty ships and will certainly get around to responding to a couple of them, particularly yours Barry. in the meantime here's the next one of my anecdotes.

Regards,  
Mike 55-57

## Speed

Nominally the Liberty ships were supposed to have a design speed of 11 knots but I never experienced such a giddy speed. On my first ship the master used to reward us all with fruit cake if the day's run achieved 240nm [10 knots] and there was seldom the need for the fruit cake .

In heavy weather 3-4 knots wasn't unusual and I recall on 3 October 1958 in the Atlantic the Dutch tug "Noordsee" radioed for assistance as it was towing two barges, with crew on each, the second of which was sinking. We were the nearest ship and naturally went to assist. "Volunteers", all single men except the engineer as they were all married, stood by our only motor lifeboat which was swung out and held in the gripes ready for lowering if we got close enough. We "volunteers" were convinced in the prevailing seas that if we were to launch we'd never get back to our ship. However our speed was such, at full 75 revs plus some, that we were in sight of the tug and barges when the 2<sup>nd</sup> barge sank just after the crew had managed to get hand over hand on the towline to the 1<sup>st</sup> barge. Subsequently the two crews went hand over hand to the tug and the 1<sup>st</sup> barge sank as we watched helplessly still not close enough to render any assistance.

On another voyage a passage from Belfast to Dundee around the top of Scotland the ship had to anchor until the tide changed as it was too slow to stem the tidal flow.

On another occasion as we steamed slowly in the Mediterranean we actually entered in the log, on 20 August 1957, when the then largest tanker , the Greek " World Splendour " passed us at

speed and left us in her wake. Ironically one of the Worcester Greeks of my term was 2<sup>nd</sup> mate on her while I was a first year apprentice.

Mike 55-57

Alasdair,

Remember you and I going down to Greenock to see the inclining tests on the new Clan Boat? I think it was the "Clan Ross". We saw some navy ratings who were saluting and then we realised it was us in our Worcester No1's that they were saluting!!

Sid

Remember that day well Sid and a good day it was! Not the only time I was caught out when ashore on visits and encountered the navy saluting furiously.

Between the time when the Canal was closed, going for grain charters or heading home from other exotic places in Stricks we ran the Agulhas quite frequently, the rule being "sit on or slightly outside the 100fm line unless the wind shows signs of increasing from the south or west in which case get inside that line fast". Coming north we rock hopped as close inshore as possible to get the counter current and the rule was "if the engine so much as coughs alter course 90° away from the coast".

Alasdair.

Mike

On the City of Ely we were heading west passing Cape Bon heading into a westerly gale when our daily run was -10 miles, yes minus.  
Barry



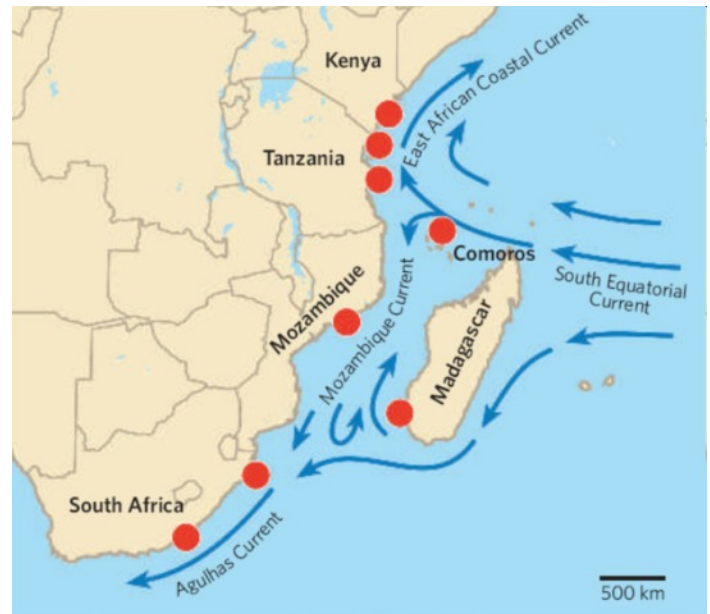
Could be a nasty spot that, spent a watch doing +/- 1 knot there when 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate on the Arabistan. She was a Doxford economy ship - 10,000 tons deadweight, 10 knots on 10 tons per day(?) with a 3 cylinder Doxford which could blow the most perfect smoke rings. I think the Mate managed to get us back into positive territory on his watch as it eased. The Secunnies earned their keep that night going from hard over to hard

over to keep us head to wind. We didn't have to guess the wind speed for the met log if it was a headwind - just look at the rev counter which reduced by about ten revs for every knot of wind.  
Alasdair

We had the opposite experience. Heading South from Durban we got caught in an eddy of the Agulhas current and logged 30 knots for about an hour and we didn't even have the washing out!!  
Sid

## Cargo shifting

Probably in common with many general cargo ships of that era there were many instances of cargo shifting and in September 1957 while on passage from Aden to Karachi our cargo of railway wagon wheels in No 3 hold started to break loose and were threatening to pierce the ship's hull. The stow consisted of two railway wagon wheels joined by an axle all stowed in a nest several layers high, fore and aft, with each wheel/axle resting on the one below cushioned by timber dun-





nage and lashed to the next with wire lashings. It certainly looked safe when we left Glasgow but we'd been rolling heavily for some days and several lashings had parted so the stow was rolling side to side in the hold and had broken some sections of the ship's permanent dunnage, [Nicholl's Seamanship refers to this as Portable side battens] in places and the hull was being impacted.

We were sent below with ropes, wires and clamps and by standing in front of the axles as they came towards us we were able to temporarily lash them to the ship's side with rope before securing each with wire. Once we'd secured one we could duck under it and move to the next and repeat the procedure. As the movement of the stow decreased we were able to move up the stow, standing on the axles, to repeat the process. The first few were quite frightening as we watched the wheels coming towards us, hoping that they didn't penetrate the ship's side and crush us, however our confidence increased as the movement of the stow was reduced and finally after many hours was eliminated.

Presumably in these days of workplace health and safety and the volumes of policies and procedures the stow would have been left to its worst and probably cripple the ship!

Mike 55-57

I joined my first ship in December 1951 in West Float, Birkenhead. Two of us were first trippers, both O.W.'s myself and Dennis Drown. Our ship was the City of Portsmouth, formerly Samsoaring ([Suggest Samhain ?](#)) [Launched as Henry Van Dyke](#). We sailed in deteriorating weather, and were racing down the Irish Sea at about 10 knots, when we were put on alert to try and find the American ship "Flying Enterprise". I was stationed on the monkey island all day, trying to keep a lookout despite being by now soaked to the skin. Do you remember Messrs Silvers oilskins. Mine was securely stuck together, and as such useless. We never did see the Flying Enterprise, or the tug Turmoil, and so carried on bound for Port Said. When we arrived there the Egyptians were starting to "play up", and we had to use our own boats and crew to moor to the buoys – that was an experience!

Then on to Mombasa, where we finished up being moored in Port Reitz for seemingly ever. The port was severely congested, and the only means of clearing it was by rail up country. There was only a single track line to Nairobi, so everything moved at snails pace.

The Liberty ships were not built for hot weather, so life was most uncomfortable for us all, and particularly for Dennis and me as we were berthed in the cabin aft of the bathrooms and

over the galley and engine room skylight. In the end, the Mate felt sorry for us, and moved us to the pilot cabin on the main deck starboard side, which was larger, and airier (just). The snag as pointed out by one of our correspondents was that there was a steam winch right outside. Not only that, the steam pipe for the winch ran through the cabin. This steam pipe made a very cosy home for the multitude of cockroaches who lived aboard.

While we were anchored, we – the cadets- had spent the day sewing on flags to dress the ship overall to celebrate Princess Elizabeth and Prince Phillip joining the "Gothic" the following day. At about 1630, we were approached by one of the large tugs, skippered by an Indian. He called out to say that the King had died, and that we were to put the ensign at half mast, which we duly did. Then up to the bridge to tell the Mate what we had done, and to ask if we could leave the flags until the morning. NO ...put them all away before you knock off. No guessing what we thought of that!

## LIBERTY SHIP

**Laden deep from lands afar,  
The Liberty stands at the pilot's bar,  
A Rusty tramp that has euchered fate,  
Heaves in the swell off the Golden Gate.**

**Yes, she's Liberty built in twenty days,  
One of the hundreds that slipped the ways.  
A Champagne bottle, an unknown name.  
And no designs on future fame.**

**She was laden deep with goods of war.  
Below her marks both aft and fore,  
And as if to tempt the hand of fate,  
Her docks were piled with plane and crate.**

**Each time she dives she shudders free  
And pounds her way through the angry sea;  
There are those who would sneer at these,  
But they have never sailed the seas.**

**The Liberty tramp, the butt of jests,  
Can opener ship, and all the rest.  
An ugly duckling, a rusty pot,  
Waiting for the wrecker's lot.**

**So now, dear lass, don't mind the name,  
Your endless miles have won you fame,  
From tropic heat to Arctic flow,  
There's not a sea lane you don't know.**

The murmansk run, and Attu's shore,  
Salerno beach-head and many more,  
After the Naval gun fire shook,  
You were the first to drop the hook.

Why, there's not a cargo great or small  
But a Liberty tramp has carried them all,  
High test gas and TNT  
From Guadalcanal to Tripoli.

You are the prey of the U-boat pack  
That lurks on the ocean's merchant track  
Your hulls lay blasted on oceans bed,  
While your sister ships sail overhead.

We've trod your decks, we're proud to tel  
You've sailed us in and out of hell,  
We've cursed you, and we've praised you  
As sailor men so often do.

We'll drink a glass at the Mariner's bar,  
To you, good ship, so there you are,  
A Merchant ship, a Liberty,  
Another tramp upon the sea.

But hark, that is the stand-by bell.  
The Pilot's boarded, all is well,  
Another trip comes to it's end,  
We say, farewell to you, my friend.

A week ashore, we'll hear the call,  
An then, the Sailor's Shipping Hall,  
A Sailor's life is bold and free  
"Oh Hell! ANOTHER LIBERTY."

I was telling this story to Tony Maskell when he and Mary were staying with us in 2012, and it transpired that he was aboard a B.T. tanker in Mombasa that very day, and had had the same news from the same tug.

Eventually we did get alongside and work cargo, before working our way down the coast, and eventually arriving at Mtwara, with cement for the ill fated port to be the outlet for the equally fated "Ground Nut Scheme". By that stage, all the bags of cement – stowed at the bottom of No.2 hold, had burst, and so the cargo was in Bulk. Guess who had to clean that lot up? By the time we came up for air, we closely resembled the "mud men" of New Guinea.

Liberty ships did a great job, and served their owners well. I for one, was glad that I only did one trip in them, as they were not ideal for hot voyages. I went aboard the "O'Brian" when she called into Chatham some years ago, and it all came back in a rush.

Happy Days. David Dornom 1950-51

I remember repacking the Rudder gland on the City of Ely whilst up the gulf. The packing material was about 1 1/2 inches thick. The steering flat was B\*\*\*DY hot.

Barry

## Fire and aftermath

Most of Ellerman's Liberty ships at one time or another were engaged in the carriage of jute from India and then East Pakistan [ now Bangladesh] to mills in Europe, Ireland and particularly Scotland. These cargoes were prone to spontaneous combustion, often with fire breaking out as the ship neared the discharge port some 40-50 days after sailing, as loading would take around a month in anchorages like Chalna some of the jute had been in the holds for up to 80 days. Although hold temperatures were monitored religiously several times a day, if fire broke out there was little that could be done to extinguish it. For instance in August 1958 a barge laden with jute had caught fire and sunk in the river at Chalna 5 weeks before our arrival, when we sailed over 4 weeks later smoke was still billowing to the surface as the fire was still burning underwater.

Three of the ships I served on had fires, fortunately not while I was aboard, but on 7 October 1957 while sitting on the bore moorings in the Hooghly River at Calcutta we four apprentices were clearing out the fo'c'stle store, below the main deck, as a recent jute fire in No 1 hold had burned the paint off both sides of the collision bulkhead and everything in the fo'c'stle store was scorched including all the drums of paint and chemicals. Some drums had buckled with the heat. Consequently with labels gone we had no idea what was stored there so, drum by drum, we were removing the lids to determine the contents, then labelling and stocktaking them. Unfortunately when the senior apprentice was opening a drum the contents erupted all over his head and face. He was in agony as we got him up the ladder and through the hatch onto the foredeck where fortunately we had "water on deck" and we quickly hosed him off [ notwithstanding it was highly polluted Hooghly water it was the only water we had readily available ]. The drum had contained Carbolic acid.

He was rushed to hospital ashore and four days later the doctors assured him he would regain his eyesight. We left him in hospital in Calcutta and I do not recall whether he resumed a career at sea.

## Water rationing

The Liberty ships were originally designed for relatively short trans Atlantic voyages carrying a complement of around 40 people so the water supply was relatively small. We carried a complement of 15 Caucasians plus 40-50 lascars [as they were termed in those days] *perhaps another OWW who served on Liberty ships may recall the exact number* and for much longer voyages so with no water making facility we were generally on almost constant water rationing.

For we apprentices it was generally one galvanised bucket per day taken from the pump near the poop but when water was in short supply this was reduced to one bucket between two. For both drinking, washing ourselves and our clothes. The latter often were towed astern for a few minutes,



which at under 10 knots did not involve them getting shredded, although whites used in the saloon had to have more gentle treatment.

Consequently as we apprentices were mainly employed in chipping, scraping, boxing up and painting [ using our hands and cotton waste instead of paint brushes ] we tended to get very dirty but were required to front up for meals in our whites. So three times a day we stood in a basin of shallow water for a sponge bath, often administered by your cabin mate so as to conserve water. We had a very rigid and fair order of the wash so each at some stage got first use of the clean water but you can imagine the colour and consistency of the washing water at the end of the day. [ As I shared a Liberty ship cabin with Ron Little 57 he can attest to this, surprisingly we're still good friends when we meet, all too rarely! ]

At least during the monsoon season, when we were in port we could rig up a canvas over the poop and collect rainwater and funnel it into the tanks giving us a better supply. [ much better than the foul tasting water we took on in Aden, I'm sure other OW's recall this ]

However our water collecting method backfired on us a little when in Chalna for over a month in 1958 loading 69,000 [ I recall ] bales of jute as it coincided with a cholera epidemic and the funeral pyres which burned 24/7 were on the river bank in close proximity and the water we collected tasted of ash [ who knows what else ] . Certainly the female crew on a Hansa line ship anchored nearby were repatriated as they complained about being sickened by the constant burning of bodies.

Mike 55-57

## Hull splitting

On my final voyage on a Liberty ship from Chalna to Belfast with a full cargo [69,000 bales] of jute loaded in only 31 days we were somewhere near Trincomalee when while checking the steering gear I noticed a narrow shaft of light coming from the starboard side. On checking I found a minute crack in the hull. On reporting it to the Mate I was asked "did you Mike it ", I thought he was taking the Micky seeing my name was Mike, but he explained it need to be measured every watch using a micrometer and the gain in length, if any, being recorded in chalk on the hull. This we did on every watch and it slowly lengthened which imbued us with confidence as the popular story at that time was of Liberty ships shedding their sterns.

Many days later when leaving the Mediterranean we received the order " paint ship for new owners " . This proved a difficult task given the weather, particularly the rain and besides we'd called at both Aden and Suez where, not surprisingly a quantity of paint had gone astray. I recall Simon Holdsworth OW and I painting all the green winches with a small amount of paint mixed with copious quantities of linseed oil which resulted in a very shiny finish. We crossed our fingers it wouldn't rain until after the new Lebanese owners representatives had inspected the ship on arrival in Boulogne, fortunately our luck held out, the stern remained on, the paint passed muster and the ship went on to have a place in history as the "Marucla" carrying Russian missiles to Cuba in that famous/infamous convoy.



I think that pretty well exhausts my anecdotes but I'd suggest that if a group of ex Liberty ship crews were to get together there would be many more.

Mike 55-57

For what it's worth ...

In the summer of '62, training in the old racing whalers up towards 5 Chimneys, we dropped alongside a Greek flagged Sam Boat 'on the buoys'. She had taken heavy damage in way of #3 Hatch

on the starboard side and the plating was concentrated to just short of the ER Bulkhead and the lower hold flooded. ...their cargo was empty oil drums and this must have helped considerably. It was the conversation we had with the Mates that stays with me ... sort of incongruous following a Channel collision ... "You English have better ships but us Greeks are better seamen!" ... the thought has always interested me.

Aye... 'arry.

The Padstow Office.

[List of Liberty Ships on Wikipedia](#) [HERE](#)

Mike's last Liberty Ship was Built as Ben H Miller then City Of Shrewsbury (right) and finally Marucla.

Some stuff below about the role of SS Marucla during the Cuban Crisis.

Some history from [HERE](#)

"The only "enemy" ship actually stopped and boarded by US Navy forces during the Cuban Missile Crisis was the Lebanese freighter, Marucla. It had been commissioned by the Soviet Union to transport goods to the nation of Cuba and as it approached the Navy's quarantine or blockade line around Cuba the decision was made to stop and board her as a show of America's resolve."



The destroyer USS Joseph P. Kennedy (DD 850), sends a boarding party over to the freighter Marucla during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Oct. 26, 1962. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command photo



A chance to show some determination seemed to appear toward evening on Thursday. The *Volker Freundschaft*, a passenger ship flying the East German flag, was nearing the quarantine line. But here too Kennedy decided against action. If things did not go well, it would be impossible to justify firing on an unarmed passenger vessel.

Finally, a compromise was found. Atlantic Fleet headquarters was ordered to stop the first ship that was neither a passenger vessel nor flying the Soviet flag. Early on the morning of October 26 a ship appeared that fit that category, the Swedish freighter *Kollangatt*, chartered by the Soviet Union. But they decided to let it through. The White House didn't want to antagonize the government of traditionally neutral Sweden. They decided to pick a simpler and more modest target.

The lot fell to a Liberty ship, the freighter *Marucla*, Panamanian-owned, registered in Lebanon, and bound for Cuba under Soviet charter to deliver a cargo from Riga to Havana. Everyone was certain that it was not carrying weapons and that there would be no conflict. Two destroyers, the *John Pierce* and the *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.*, followed the *Marucla* throughout the night. Apparently the latter destroyer was chosen to please the president.

As soon as the ship crossed the quarantine line, at 6:50 A.M. on Friday, it was ordered to stop its engines. The destroyers lowered motor launches with a boarding party. There were no incidents, no weapons were discovered, and the *Marucla* proceeded on its way.

The White House considered that this interception would "graphically demonstrate to Khrushchev that we are moving to strengthen the blockade." At the same time, as if to show restraint, Soviet ships were left untouched.

The letter to the U.S. president was already on its way to Washington when news reached Moscow that the *Marucla* had been stopped.

# THE END

Thanks to all Ows who contributed