

Norman Powell was an apprentice on the *Obuasi* from September 1956 to September 1957. Here he recounts a memorable Christmas on board and some amusing incidents leading up to it.

**AN OBUASI CHRISTMAS  
BY  
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Things had been a little quiet for a while. We had incurred the wrath of head office while in the UK at the start of the trip, the first being when "the lads" were returning from the "Seven Steps" a rough waterfront pub outside the gates of Toxteth Dock, and noticed the battery operated cargo handling equipment being charged up inside the dock shed.

This was about the time that Sterling Moss and Mike Hawthorn were the heroes of the Grand Prix circuit, and in our somewhat inebriated state we thought that imitation was the best form of flattery and organized a grand prix course inside the dock shed, complete with the long straight, chicane, hairpin turn etc. using cargo and dunnage to mark the course.

This was before fork lift machines had made an impact in Britain, and cargo was taken to and from ship side by electrically driven flat jitneys, with the operator standing at one end, his controls being a pedal and a steering tiller, and it was not long before the lads got the hang of it and had a fine old time racing each other around the shed until the batteries started to run down, (and the effects of the beer wore off), at which point they put the equipment back where they found it, reconnected the charge equipment and turned in.

The batteries must have needed a full nights' charge because early the following afternoon cargo operations, never very fast at the best of times, slowly came to a complete stop - the jitneys' had run out of power and the dockers had to be sent home. We surmised that the cocky watchman must have told on us as "head office" was not amused, and we all received a royal bollocking, loss of shore leave etc.

Our next infraction was while anchored off Swansea. The cricket match commentator in order to illustrate how pleasant the afternoon, turned the camera onto "OBUASI" and remarked about the crew swimming off the stern. Of course the Officers were not aware of what we were up to, at least until they received word from head office when we berthed - one or more of "the suits" must have been a cricket fan, and another chewing out ensued which we thought was rather unjustified as in our minds, we were not doing anything wrong - just getting a little exercise, or so we maintained.

Come December, we decided that a Christmas party was needed, but we had to do it in style and had a tarpaulin muster, with each Cadet contributing 5 pounds - almost a month's wages - and also one or two Officers made a donation to the cause after getting wind of our plans. Anyway, we finished up with more than 100 pounds, a small fortune in those days, which was converted into booze at the Kingsway store in Lagos.

Christmas Day saw us at anchor off Vittoria. Things could not have been better. The anchorage was safe, guarded by islands across the entrance to the bay, and the weather fine and cool. We decorated the cadet's rec room with streamers and flags, constructed a bar out of beer cases and hatch boards. Entertainment was provided by the latest records and also four of the lads who played the harmonica and who practiced on the foc'sle head while one or other of them was on lookout duty - they were actually pretty good and called themselves the Three Skins. We were very fortunate that we had the best Chief Steward in the fleet and he came through with all sorts of "finger food".

Unknown to us, before coming aft Captain Brookes had advised everyone midships that he believed that the Cadets had got hold of some booze and that he wanted whatever we had to be finished off that evening as he did not want "the young buggers" to be drunk for the rest of the trip. Well - they did their best. They really tried, but they had no idea of the quantity of booze we had accumulated. I must confess that my memories of the evening are somewhat bleary, but I do remember that Sparky, an older man, complaining that he had lost his false teeth but could not remember if it was in the toilet or over the stern, and Captain Brookes sitting with his number ten dress uniform open at the collar and all askew saying as how it was the best party ever.

It was a very sorry crew indeed at daybreak December 26th when the pilot boarded and we had to shift the ship round the corner and up the creek to Tiko!!!

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