

Mike Smith's second voyage as a cadet on the *Durham* turned out to be an epic. In the following article, Mike has recorded his memories of this 13-month voyage, during which the *Durham* spent 6 months in Galveston, Texas, whilst the broken crankshafts from both her main engines were replaced.

Peter Lloyd has provided the colour photographs and a newspaper article, and Peter Snow has provided the black and white photographs.

**DURHAM – THE GALVESTON VOYAGE
BY
CAPTAIN E M (MIKE) SMITH**

The *Durham* finished loading in Liverpool for New Zealand in the early autumn of 1957, departing with a full cargo into worsening weather. This was my second voyage and there was an air of anticipation among the cadets as the prospect of Christmas in New Zealand was always a more pleasant one than Australia in those days.

Around three to four days out the weather steadily worsened and there was a full gale blowing which soon had the ship hove to with the seas breaking green over the bow. The 4 to 8 watch in the morning seemed to be the peak of the weather and memories of the sea state and wind have lived with me ever since. The Master and Officers were talking of Force 12 and who was I to doubt the likes of Capt. Hocken and the Chief Officer Mr. Rollinson. All I know I was frightened by the sheer size of the seas washing over the fore deck when I was trying to steer the ship.



Atlantic Storm

Memories after all these years will of course not be wholly accurate however I seem to think that it was the evening of that day that we were able to resume

course. On turning in after the evening 4 to 8 watch the starboard engine stopped suddenly. We were well used to the engines being stopped from time to time as they were pretty tired and the engineers were always flat out trying to keep them running. This was different however as the sound of the starboard propeller ceased suddenly. The next morning there was a hush in the wheelhouse as the news spread that the starboard main engine had suffered a broken crankshaft.

Durham was steaming slowly on the port engine awaiting orders and it seemed like an eternity. Cadet Ships were always rife with rumours however it was obvious that we were not going to spend Christmas in New Zealand this time. Falmouth for repairs was the favourite choice so when it was announced that we were to head for Galveston Texas there were a few puzzled faces. Out came the Atlas in the Anteroom as we all tried to find out where the heck it was. We were soon to know only too well.

I have memories of the ship rolling gently along at around 8 knots on the port engine as the engineers nursed it along. Steering the ship according to Peter Snow was "hard a port" to "mid-ships" for three or more weeks. Lord knows what the condition of the steering gear was like when we got there. We slowly headed on via Kingston Jamaica where the pilot boat came out with charts of the Gulf Coast of Texas and the approaches to Galveston. Warm sunny days heading for heaven knows what and where brought us, after three and a half weeks off Galveston one windy Sunday evening.

The old ship was a deep drafted vessel for her length and the tugs could not get along side that night with the rough sea. It was the next morning that all the Galveston tug fleet with some from Houston 60 miles up the Ship Canal swarmed around us and made fast. It took 5 hours to work the recalcitrant old lady up the channel into her berth at the Todd's Shipyard on Pelican Island adjacent to Galveston Island. Pelican Island was formed with dredge spoil from the shipping channel and the entrance channel to the Houston Ship Canal. It was flat, featureless and uninteresting and the shipyard was more a repair and maintenance facility than a place for building ships. They were to prove to be a remarkably efficient and capable bunch of people by the end of it all.

As the ship was worked into her berth we lost the port engine. Nothing unusual in that, we seldom arrived in port without some excitement from the bowels of the black hole as *Durham's* engine room was often referred to. Once alongside we were descended on by the Texas Rangers and the Border Patrol. The sight of tall Texans in 10 gallon hats and carrying six shooters brought a chuckle or two to the Cadets however when one of them demanded that one of the Cadets break the seal and open the entrance hatch to No 3 hold, then things got interesting.

He was politely refused at which he became very angry. Capt. Hocken, who was watching from the bridge, took over. I had never seen a British Ship's Master in full flight before and I was amazed at the effect it had. "Dig" Hocken was an old style NZS Captain and a living legend in his own right. The Border Patrolman never stood a chance. The hatch stayed shut and sealed. The Border Patrol left. The Texas Rangers stayed on for a few heart starters and we had arrived in Galveston Texas.

The date was the 9th Dec 1957, and most of us were to be there until 10th June 1958. It was not long before it was discovered that the port engine had suffered the same fate as the starboard engine with a broken crankshaft. *Durham* was going nowhere and as the news filtered through to the Cadet quarters we felt sure that we would all be back in UK early in the New Year. We had not of course thought that through very well but then we were but callow youths at the time learning very fast as it happened.

The local population, were soon being told over the radio that there were 95 Limeys stranded in Galveston on a broken down British cargo liner for Christmas. The gangway phone ran hot for days and soon every one on board had somewhere to go for Christmas dinner. The generosity of the local people was to be memorable and the saying "Ya'll come back" was to become part of our vocabulary. It was decreed that because it was not possible to let every one go ashore at the one time for Christmas Dinner, all would remain on the ship for Christmas and then we could gratefully accept the invitations afterwards. This was regarded as a very fair move by all.

It was quite obvious that there were going to be some drastic changes. The repairs were to take 6 months and the job was huge. The entire main machinery was to be removed for the crankshafts to be replaced and while they were in that far it was decided to renew pipe work and carry out survey work as well. The full load of cargo had to be transshipped to another vessel and the *Haparangi* was allotted the task after her discharge north bound in the New Year.

The rumour mill was going flat out down aft in the cadet quarters. Capt. Hocken was the first to leave us as he went on leave before taking over *Otaio* as a new ship. His replacement, Capt. Keith Barnett was to have a lasting and positive influence on all our lives as he arrived to take over the battered old lady with her young and soon to be depleted crew of cadets. Morale was still reasonable although it was becoming very apparent that living on a broken down ship in a repair yard in the middle of the Texan Winter was not exactly a holiday camp.

Then the news came through that some of the cadets were to head home and after leave join the new cadet ship *Otaio*. When the list of those who were going and those who were staying was posted those of us staying, which was the majority, felt as though we had been dealt from the bottom of the pack. We had not made it to New Zealand for Christmas, we had not returned to UK for repairs,

we had then found both engines damaged. Now we were to say farewell to our mates and were destined to have to stay with the ship in what was rapidly becoming a very depressing place. I seem to recall that they left us after the cargo transfer however 45 years has muddled the memory a bit. Life was at a low ebb when the others did leave I know that.

Not that everything was doom and gloom. Cadets were always broke, and things were expensive in Galveston. Just getting into town was an effort as we had to walk through the yard, catch the ferry to the other side of the channel and then walk into town.



On the Ferry to Town.

Peter Mathews, Dave Fenwick, Eric Beetham, Peter Robson and Peter Snow

We did a lot of walking in those days! A weekly trip to the cinema, a hamburger in the local drug store, window shopping and generally mixing with the locals gave some relief. Capt. Barnett gave us some privileges too. Cadets were required to wear uniform ashore until they were in their senior voyage. This rule was relaxed while in Galveston and we were, with the notable exception of the first trippers Peter Snow reminds me, allowed ashore in "civvies" which was a big plus. The first trippers made arrangements to leave "civvy" gear ashore so they were able to travel incognito as well. Well sort of, we still stood out like sore thumbs among the locals but that did not matter.

The Company realized that money was a major problem for us and they gave us a bonus while we were stuck there. These little changes made a big difference to us. Four of us formed a little "Skiffle Group" which was all the rage at the time and Dave Moorwood was an accomplished guitar player. Dave (Dai) Fenwick was on the other guitar, I played (?) the tea box base and Dave Sandeberg

played the washboard. We named ourselves the Ocean Ramblers and played together all through the remaining time on the ship even after Galveston.



No danger of breaking this limit!

Peter Snow, Dave Moorwood, Peter Robson and Dave Fenwick

John Robbins, a cabin mate of mine was a very keen fisherman and he inspired me to have a go as well. He made up a rod for me and a reel arrived by mail as a birthday gift from home and soon I was spending many hours on the end of the jetty reeling in the local catfish. They were said to be poisonous if eaten however I do know that they had some serious stingers on them and we treated them with great care. I have never ever been able to catch fish as well as I did then in fact my reputation these days is that the only thing I am likely to catch is cold.

The end of January saw us moved from the Todd's Shipyard over to the cargo berths on the Town side of the channel. We then started to transfer cargo from the *Durham* to the *Haparangi*, which was to take around 8 to 9 weeks. We had the ships tied up alongside each other with *Durham* discharging to the wharf and to the *Haparangi*. Des Jones mentions that as 2nd Officer he did manage to keep *Durham* from falling over even without the weight of the engines in her although the old girl did seem to lean on the *Haparangi* wearily at times. The cargo in the hatch squares was moved into the warehouse and then the cargo from the wings was transferred to the wings of the *Haparangi*. Locker stows were transferred to her lockers one by one and then when we had cleared all the squares we changed the ships around and she loaded cargo from the wharf and some from us. Well that was the basic theory however it was adjusted as needs be! Sounds simple? Well I can assure you it was not, however from that day on cargo work never fazed me! At the end of all this *Haparangi* sailed away and we were left waiting for the new crankshafts. We were lying on the town side with

the port engine on the fore deck and the starboard engine on the dock over in the yard. Des Jones and the home going cadets vanished and we were in limbo.



Haparangi alongside Durham (1)



Transferring Cargo



Haparangi alongside Durham (2)

It was around this time that morale hit a very low point. There was no news on when the new crankshafts would be ready. They were made in two sections, and that made four sections in all. Three were to be made in Seattle and one from the engine builders in Switzerland. The need for replacement was known back in December 1957. The cause was attributed to the sinking in Gibraltar during the War. When she was built in the early 1930's all engine bedplates were chocked with Lignum Vitae timber chocks. This is a very hard wood from Norway and has a very high oil content and is very dense. It was ideal for the purpose and was also used in stern tubes of that era. When the ship was repaired in Falmouth in early 1943 Norway was occupied by the Germans, so the timber was not available. Steel chocks were used in the damaged area at the aft end of the engines. During the very severe weather just after departing Liverpool the chocks moved and the bedplates went out of alignment. The starboard engine was out over 70 thou over some units. The port engine was not so bad but sufficient to crack the shaft in the end. This was the reason for our predicament however lying laid up alongside an unused cargo berth in Galveston in early March this all seemed rather unimportant.

During our stay over in the lay up berth a Lykes Line vessel berthing astern of us did not pull up in time. All the Lykes ships were steam turbine and they overshot and whacked the old lady firmly up the rump. It set the other vessels stem bar back and breached her fore peak causing enough damage to require her to dry dock. *Durham* was shifted back into the dockyard around the same time and we were lying alongside the pier with the floating dry dock on the other side of the berth. Late one night a raiding party nipped over to the Lykes Ship and nicked the house flag. The squeal of the halyard block almost gave the game away but all was well.

Another humorous incident occurred when the Master, Chief Engineer and Chief Officer were returning from a run ashore. They decided to have a nightcap at the last bar before the ferry to take them back to Pelican Island. Late at night the ferry ran every hour from Galveston and half-hour from the Island. As they sat down for a snifter of Bourbon a cultured English voice came up and asked them for their order. It is not recorded who was the more aghast, the cadet taking the order or the three senior officers. Needless to say he was not seen ashore for a few weeks although the punishment seemed quite light under the circumstances.



The Last Bar.

Peter Snow, Peter Mathews, Peter Robson, Dave Fenwick and the PTI

The other forgotten men were the regular crew such as the cooks and stewards. They were stuck there too, however the class system that still was hanging on then made our view of these stalwart seamen rather unenlightened. The butcher was very keen on the Wild West and he procured a highly illegal side arm. He used to walk off down the dredge pipeline on his time off shooting snakes. One day he did a fast draw and blew a hole in his foot. He hobbled back to the ship where the Doctor patched him up and he was sent home DBS. One way of getting out of the place the more cynical of the cadets remarked.

It was around this time that we all realized that once the replacement cadets, if any, arrived prior to our departure, then the small band of survivors would not be quite the same. It was decided that a small Association should be formed and would be open only to those cadets who had made the complete Galveston Voyage. We called it the *Durham Association* and we ordered, with Capt. Barnett's permission, a tie from London. Peter Snow reminds me that John Pring's grandmother made the arrangements and was responsible for the design on our behalf. The tie was to be Maroon with the *Durham* crest in gold. I seem to recall that only sufficient ties were ordered for us plus one for Capt. Barnett.

We wore it with pride as our badge of office and I still have mine, soiled old and faded. Of course others took the Association on to far greater heights to the amazing organization that it is today but I wonder if any one really knows where it all started. It is never referred to, however I can assure you all that is where it started. The Association as it is known today of course formed later but the tie and the name were born in Galveston Texas around April 1958 as a group of lonely lads, miles from home decided to commemorate their experience together.

The floating dock adjacent to the berth was a constant source of interest. The average stay for a ship was about 4 days. T2 tankers made the bulk of the ships however there was a collision in the Houston Ship Canal one night and the Norwegian freighter that was cut right through to the keel aft of the engine room was coaxed into the dock and hauled out. She was rebuilt and away in four weeks. They were experts in that yard and although they hardly ever saw a diesel engine and certainly not one as big as *Durham's* they did the repairs very well. Slowly the engine parts vanished from sight back down into the engine room.



Broken Crankshaft



Anchor Work

We spent our time chipping the port side of the vessel with air guns hired from the yard. I never walked past the port side of that ship again without a feeling of pride in the job we did. At the time we cursed our luck mind you! It almost felt like our version of the Burma Railroad! When the ship went into the dry dock before sailing they sandblasted the entire hull except for the bit we had laboured over for weeks! We wondered then why we had been required to hand scale the side when the rest was to be sand blasted. We never found the answer to that question. To add insult to injury they then spray painted the entire hull, including our lovingly hand painted bit!



Durham in Dry Dock

An incident occurred while we were in dry dock that was most embarrassing. Cigarettes were sold in light tin boxes of 200. I was sitting in the aft starboard cabin one night in dry dock and someone bet me I could not throw the empty tin out of the porthole like a Frisbee. Never one to shirk a small wager out it went without even touching the sides of the port and as it vanished in to the night we all froze. We had forgotten that we were in dry dock and were right over the work area surrounding the starboard propeller. Capt. Barnett and C/O Allan Rollinson and others were on the dock floor and it missed them thank God. I looked out and down and looked straight into the beady eye of Mr. Rollinson. I lived to tell the tale and we all learned the lesson of wearing hard hats in dry dock!

The day we had all waited for came in late May when the starboard engine was to be turned over for the first time. Duty watch was closed up to tend moorings and we waited with baited breath. At 1220 the engine was turned over on air a few times and then the Chief fed her some fuel. Slowly she picked up each cylinder and ran for about 20 minutes. Then silence. After a while we were stood down however the smiling engineers told us that they were doing a full inspection and that it would be later in the afternoon before they tried again. The looks on their faces said it all. We were winning at last. In the days that followed the port engine also was started and then for days we ran them ahead and astern together to reduce the load on the moorings. The day for sea trials arrived and the old ship took to the sea again for yet another reincarnation.

I can clearly recall doing gangway watch after the sea trials. We were lying in the roadstead over night while the last surveys and inspections were made and the drinks were partaken. I was standing the 4-8 gangway watch at the shipside door and looking out over Galveston I was higher than the highest part of the island. The Texas Gulf Coast is very low lying and the highest land on Galveston Island is only 15 feet above high water (springs)! It was a great feeling to be heading on however that was a little unfair. The local people had taken us to

their hearts, looked after us with kindness and generosity and they were still calling “Y’all come back now” even as we dropped the pilot on departure.

June 10th 1958 we sailed for New York to commence loading for Australia. The rest of the voyage settled into the old routine although the callow youths that had started out on the voyage nearly eight months earlier were toughened by the experience. The ship’s engines ran well from then on and she was able to hold 14 knots all day with very few stops. We loaded all down the East Coast of the States and then headed through Panama for Noumea, Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne and then commenced loading north bound for the continent and UK finishing in Fremantle. The voyage was turning into a saga by then and any new port was just another stop. If anyone had said then that I would spend most of my working life as a tug master in the Port of Fremantle and that it would become a favorite place of mine I would have laughed.

Peter Snow has jogged my memory after all these years about our arrival in UK. After Antwerp we went to Hull, then coasted the ship round to Avonmouth where we at last paid off and headed home. Thirteen months from the time we sailed from Liverpool, having avoided a near collision in the River Scheldt leaving Antwerp as a last throw of the devil’s dice we went home for Christmas. I recall leaving the ship around lunchtime and changing trains to arrive in Newcastle up north after midnight. I guess the idea was to give us a chance to have Christmas at home that year however we were required to report on board on the 27th December. This meant leaving home for the return to the vessel on Boxing Day.

Ten years later, qualified as Master, I joined the salvage tug based in the Port of Fremantle and retired thirty years later as Senior Master. The memories of that voyage have stayed with me always. The training that we received from those dedicated Masters and officers way back then will never be equaled. The system was tough, we worked very hard and we played hard, we were always broke but never were we found to be unequal to the task given us. No one complained about the work, we just did it however that time in Galveston I must confess it was pretty tough.

When I arrived home my father reckoned I still had a Texan accent, but then he always was a comedian.

Note:

Peter Lloyd has provided the following article from a Galveston newspaper:

MS Durham to Sail Monday

**Open House and Buffet
To Show Ship's Gratitude**

The owners, crew, and cadets of the English training ship MS "Durham" will show their appreciation for Galveston hospitality during the last six months with an open house aboard ship and a buffet luncheon prior to the ship's sailing on Monday. A buffet luncheon at the Ricksha Room next Monday noon will be the scene of the public acknowledgement of Galveston's hospitality to the crew and cadets of the "Durham". Representatives of the ship's owners and agents will make the acknowledgement.

From London

Coming from London, England, to offer thanks are J. D. Currie, managing director, and R. Strachan, superintendent engineer of the New Zealand SS Co., owners of the vessel. With them will be Cedric Norton and O. B. Cioli of New York, officials of Norton, Lilley Co., general U. S. agents for the line. Arrangements for their visit and the luncheon are being made by Thomas Phillips, director and vice president of LeBlanc-Parr Inc., Gulf Coast agents. Invitations to the luncheon will be confined necessarily to persons having direct interests in shipping or in restoring the vessel to service.

Open House

Capt. K. Barnett, master of the Durham, will hold open house aboard ship from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday for all others who have extended the hand of friendship to the men of the ship, Phillips said. The Durham is expected to sail Monday almost six months to the day after she limped into port all the way from the Azores with her main crankshaft broken. Ninety-five officers and men including some 30 cadets in training were on board the Durham Dec. 8, 1957, when she tied up at Todd Shipyards. As soon as it was learned they might be here for a protracted period, Galvestonians and Mainlanders opened their homes to the strangers from England, Scotland, North Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and other parts of the far-flung British Commonwealth.

Pleasant Interlude

Instead of bleak holidays that seemed in store for the men far from their native hearths, the season turned out to be a pleasant interlude as the invitations to Christmas dinner poured in from all parts of the city and county. In the ensuing

months the men were welcomed and entertained in scores of homes and fast friendships were made. Saturday Captain Barnett will put the ship through a trial run. If no further trouble develops she will sail away on her long delayed voyage with crew and cadets carrying home happy memories of Galveston.

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