

**SOME MEMORIES OF THE FIRST TWO VOYAGES OF THE *OBUASI* AS A
CADET SHIP
BY
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I had sailed as an apprentice on *Obuasi* for the two voyages prior to her becoming a Cadet Ship with fellow apprentices Glen Lundy, Karl Praker and Dick Hayton and we all followed through to the her first voyage as such, with the exception of Glen Lundy.

Prior to joining *Obuasi* as a Cadet Ship the majority of the new crew of eighteen cadets held Life Boat and E.D.H. certificates as we were replacing the original deck crew. Four of the cadets occupied the normal cadet's cabin and the balance of fourteen down aft on the poop deck.

We joined the ship in July 1953 at Liverpool's Gladstone Dock, which was an unusual berth for Elder Dempster ships, and across the branch from us the *Empress of Canada* lay on her side after having capsized during attempts to put out a fire on board. Before sailing to load cargo on the Continent a couple of group photographs were taken. One with the ship's officers, which appears in "The Elder Dempster Fleet History" and the other with the cadets only, a copy of which I had but which has mysteriously disappeared, much to my regret. We were split up into the traditional three seagoing watches of three men per watch, four cadets in the old apprentice's cabin carrying out the usual apprentice duties and the balance on day work and studying. I must confess that I don't recall much studying, but it was carried out and there was an additional Third Mate to assist in this purpose.



Eighteen Cadets + Guide in Hamburg – *Obuasi* 1953
(The author is on the extreme right)

The eighteen cadets were: head man Johnny Miles, his right hand man J R Reilly, Peter Burden and myself were third and fourth hands, the balance being in no particular order, Tachie Menson and J Jones from Ghana, A G Maxwell, Peter Bowman, Karl Praker, Dick Hayton, G H Ryan, A A Munro, J F Forster, Dick Koker (South African), Charlie Wood, Colin Milner, Trevor Lewis Parry, and S D Chapman.

We proceeded to Hamburg and Rotterdam for loading where we indulged in the normal off duty activities. Among other things we were treated to an evening at the Operatenhaus (spelling may not be correct) where the main entertainment featured the magician Kalanag. The England football team were also there and we met them at the interval including the captain, Bobby Moore. Later on in the show Kalanag had Bobby Moore come on stage and sit in the driving seat of a car. Kalanag then made the car and the England captain disappear, a feat, which we think was achieved with the use of mirrors.



Cadets Touring Hamburg – *Obuasi* 1953

At Rotterdam, again in addition to the usual off duty activities, we were treated to a coach trip to Amsterdam and we experienced a tour of the city's canals and dinner at a steak house. Two girls from the Rotterdam office came with us on the trip, which was fine, but on the return coach journey we stopped in the middle of nowhere for a call of nature, and to spare the girls' sensitivities we moved away from the coach in the semi darkness. In front of me was Peter Burden and I'll never forget his anguished cry as he disappeared into the drainage channel, which we hadn't seen ahead of us. He occupied a lonely seat at the front of the coach for the rest of the journey.

While at Rotterdam we bought a turntable for our 78s, which I coupled up to an older radio using my basic knowledge of steam radio. The "Rec" room was now equipped with its own in house entertainment system for the playing of Nat King Cole, Kay Star and Guy Mitchell records.

On the outward voyage we bunkered at Las Palmas, and we took the opportunity to stock up on a plentiful supply of beverages of different sources for a party, which was to be held when a suitable opportunity arose later in the voyage. I can't remember now where this was except that it was somewhere at anchor of the coast of French Equatorial Africa. The party was enthusiastically indulged in without any permanent damage to the participants.

The first outward voyage was the usual one of all points from Freetown to Port Harcourt and on the return we loaded for the East Coast of The United States calling at Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. We may have called at other ports but I cannot recall them at his time. New York, however, was as always the main port. During our stay there we were treated to a visit to the Mercantile Marine Academy at West Point where we sportingly allowed them to beat us at a game of soccer.

On the return voyage to the West Coast we called at Trinidad to load asphalt in drums at Point Fortin but prior to that we called at Port of Spain to load a small quantity of cased rum to the mail room in the tonnage well. It was decided to use the cadets to transfer the cases from the deck to the mail room, which we duly did, taking great care not to allow the decks and the ladder to become slippery by becoming wet from the odd leakage from any bottles broken during the handling, by catching any leakage in 'suitable' containers.

The rest of the voyage and the following voyage were the usual routine of working the ship, covering the watches at sea, day work, working cargo and where possible studying for the Second Mates Ticket. From what has been said earlier some may think that we took a somewhat frivolous outlook on life. This was far from the case and we made sure that the ship was by far the best run in the fleet. We tackled all the jobs required in running a ship without hesitation. I do not like heights but it did not prevent me, when painting the after jumbo, from climbing over the top of the jumbo to paint the other side from a boatswain's chair.

Safety was always an automatic unconscious reaction and instinctive coming from awareness and experience. There was one incident, which could have resulted in tragedy. We were crossing the Gulf of Biafra, it was the afternoon watch and Dick Koker was painting the awning spars around the poop deck. To achieve this he was using the ships rail as a makeshift stand and the inevitable happened and he fell overboard. What followed was a classic example of "man overboard" exercise and he was picked up within a short time by the motor lifeboat. I had been on nights and was asleep at the time so I missed the action.

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