

Melbourne Branch

The Log
The Monthly Newsletter of the Melbourne Branch of
The Company of Master Mariners of Australia Limited

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**NEXT MEETING
POSTPONED DUE TO
COVID-19**

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From the Branch Master

This time last month things were looking up. The daily number of new cases of COVID-19 were low. Restrictions were being eased and there appeared to be reasonable prospects of a gradual return to something near normal. Then the second wave hit and we were back to stage 3 restrictions.

This time the states closed their borders and the Commonwealth limited the number of people who could enter the country from overseas. These measures were designed to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect those who were virus free from potential carriers.

Countries around the world have similar restrictions in place and in some cases they are causing problems for seafarers.

IMO has received reports of seafarers being denied the right to go ashore for medical treatment including some cases of life threatening medical issues.

IMO Secretary General Kitack Lim has issued a set of recommendations for port states on how to accommodate seafarer's medical needs in the COVID-19 era.

The recommendations cover the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, the use of proper PPE and minimizing exposure during disembarkation and transfer to a medical facility. States should ensure that seafarers can access medical care without delay whenever they need it.

IMO has asked national governments to designate seafarers as key workers and to facilitate timely crew changes movements. Thousands of seafarers remain stranded on ships several months beyond their original contracts. Their relatives are stuck at home unable to join the ship and unable to work.

The Philippine Bureau of Immigration reported that since the beginning of the pandemic it has processed and cleared more than 16,000 Filipino and foreign seafarers mainly from the 25 cruise ships anchored in Manila Bay.

The problem is not limited to seafarers. Foreign overseas workers have the same difficulties in returning home at the end of their contracts. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs estimate that as many as 167,000 Filipino workers are still stranded in host countries including 88,000 in Saudi Arabia. India has hundreds of thousands of workers awaiting repatriation in Arab Gulf States.

An International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes hosted by the UK has been told that since March 2020 only about 25% of normal crew changes have taken place leaving 200,000 seafarers stranded at sea while a similar number wait ashore to relieve them. The summit was told that seafarer's tours of duty cannot continue to be extended and need to be kept to a duration of less than 12 months as set out in MLC 2006.

The ILO has confirmed that force majeure can no longer be used as a blanket excuse for seafarer's contract extensions but these must be considered on a case by case basis.

How AMSA will respond to lengthy seafarer service periods is set out in Marine Notice 04/2020.

Where the seafarer has served for less than 11 months without leave AMSA will take no action provided a valid Seafarers Employment Agreement is being complied with. Where service is between 11 and 13 months the Master must provide a flag state approved plan for the repatriation of the seafarer before he has served 14 months. Failure to do so will result in the ship being detained.

Extensions of service beyond 14 months will not be accepted by AMSA unless the Master or Owner can demonstrate that all possible efforts have been made to repatriate the seafarer without success.

Details of the arrangements that apply to seafarers joining or leaving a ship in Australia vary from state to state. This information is available on the Shipping Australia Limited web site. shippingaustralia.com.au

From a quick reading of the requirements in Victoria it is apparent that to conduct a crew change in Melbourne on a ship with an overseas crew would be a complex operation and could be very expensive.

The 25th June is the Day of the Seafarer and this year the campaign calls on member states to recognize seafarers as key workers and to provide them with the support, assistance and travel options open to all key workers during the pandemic.

Melbourne Harbour Master

The speaker at our first and only meeting this year was the Melbourne Harbour Master Captain Kell Dillon. During his talk he said he believed he was the first Australian born Melbourne Harbour Master. We have recently received correspondence from Captain Stewart Bolles who wrote:

My congratulations to Captain Kell Dillon on his appointment as Melbourne Harbour Master and on his many interesting achievements to date.

I am pleased though to be able to say that he is not Melbourne's first Australian born Harbour Master. Captain Ian Macfarlan was Australian born and probably Captain Ray Samson. I was born in Perth Western Australia.

Captain Bolles included the following photograph thinking some of his fellow "oldies" might recall a few familiar faces.

L to R Captains Ray Samson retired 04/1983, Ian Macfarlan (07/1982)
Stewart Bolles (03/1987), John Ross (1973) Len Chennell (1969)



Container Ships in the News

The largest container ship to call at the Port of Melbourne arrived on 29th June. The 299 metre long CMA CGM vessel URAL can carry up to 10,662 TEU.

The vessel berthed at Victoria International Container Terminal at Webb Dock.

The Liberian flagged container ship Navios Unite reported that it lost three containers overboard in rough weather off Cape Leeuwin on 25th June while en passage from Fremantle to Adelaide. AMSA sent a Challenger Jet to search for the missing containers but nothing was found. AMSA has not issued any updates on the incident which is unusual given its strong stance on containers lost overboard.

The Liberian flagged German owned Conti Makalu was detained by AMSA in Sydney on 15 May due to breaches of cargo securing, defective lashing equipment, substantially corroded lashing plates and failure to load containers in compliance with the cargo securing manual. The ship sailed 16 hours after its scheduled departure time.

Seafarers Rest Park

A letter has been sent to the Melbourne City Council in support of a proposal from the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network that the design of the Seafarers Rest Park should contain provision for a monument to the hundreds of thousands of seafarers who passed through the Port of Melbourne over the years.

The design which can be viewed at www.participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au will have some nautical artefacts such as an anchor, propeller and the old wharf crane but apart from the parks name there is nothing to commemorate seafarers. Our submission asks for a prominent site to be set aside for a suitable tribute to the seafarers who played a vital role in the establishment and development of Melbourne.

“Iron Wyndham” Gas Pipes to Taiwan Part Two

By Captain John Paine

Compared to the “interesting start” to the voyage the leg to Kaohsiung was uneventful and provided some much needed time to completely overhaul all the 5 tonne union purchase cargo gear and reinstate the majority of the rigging which had been stripped down and stowed away while on the regular iron ore trade. Not an insignificant task as in addition to the running gear all the steam cargo winches needed considerable attention and these activities kept the engineers and the very large deck crew gainfully employed right up to our arrival.

Following our berthing we had a lengthy discussion with the stevedores and it was decided to put the winches in double gear to allow maximum lift but with clear instructions that 5 billets were the maximum allowed per sling as that was right on the safe working load of the derricks.

We might as well have spoken to the bollards on the wharf for the very first lift that cleared the lower hold at NO.2 hatch had 11 billets in the cargo slings. No amount of very choice language from the duty mate, loud whistle blasts, clouds of steam and sparks due to the frantic efforts by the winch drivers hauling on the brake was enough to stop the whole load swinging over to the outboard derrick, carry away the guy ropes, the preventer wire and finally thunder down on top of the small truck positioned to receive the load on the wharf. Totally destroyed the truck, scattered the personnel on the wharf and big surprise not one single injury and the ship's cargo gear still mostly intact. A very lucky near miss indeed. Cargo operations stopped forthwith and all the winches changed back to single gear to mechanically limit each winch to the safe lifting capacity of 5 tonnes.

The next few days were hectic to say the least and the rough handling by the stevedores took a heavy toll on all components of the cargo gear. Just as well cargo

operations ceased about 2300 each night as it was necessary to have a mate, an AB, an engineer and a spare engine room rating on duty replacing or repairing various items of cargo gear right through the day and into the evening. This must have been one of the few occasions where the total crew of 52 were well and truly justified. The pipes were landed on the wharf with minimum damage but the many and varied trucks and trailers used to transport them and the casual attitude to securing the pipes by the drivers left some doubt as to the condition they would arrive at their final destination.

Prior to departure the ship was boarded by customs and the political police who were searching for a whole list of prohibited items including communist literature and Chairman Mao's little red book in particular. Everybody had been notified in advance of this requirement but our red headed storekeeper of Irish descent decided that the search contravened his rights as a trade unionist and refused to allow the officials into his cabin. Some very insulting words were used to the very well-spoken Chinese officer who made every effort to resolve the situation but the officer finally lost patience, the pair of soldiers with him produced a pair of handcuffs, unslung their sub machine guns and an instruction was given that any further discussion would be conducted ashore and the vessel would depart without him.

This was obviously a situation that would not be solved with a carton of cigarettes or a bottle of scotch so the Master had a very frank discussion with the delegates who then had an even more frank conversation with the rating at the centre of the incident. A suitably worded apology was made and the ship cleared for departure. All in all a timely reminder that flying an Australian flag when you are berthed in a foreign country does not carry any special consideration from local authorities when they are enforcing their normal clearance regulations.

From Taiwan the Iron Wyndham sailed to Japan through the inland sea to Minamata to load magnetite for Newcastle then departed for Groote Eylandt to top off the load with 2 hatches of manganese for Bell Bay. All very routine and remarkably good weather all the way until just abeam of Manila in the middle of the China Sea when at 0035 the general alarm was sounded and loud cries of Fire Fire.

Out of bed into some clothes and onto the bridge in about 3 minutes with the brain still catching up from about 2 decks below. A rapid situation briefing and it appeared

that the quick thinking 3rd Engineer had noticed a strong smell of petrol when he was carrying out his routine stern tube inspection after taking over his watch and had climbed up the tunnel access ladder only to find that the entry to the steering flat was well alight. He then grabbed a handy portable foam extinguisher and was able to knock down the flames before they had established a major hold in the oil slick that was evident on most of the steering flat deck.

Loading the magnetite had deposited a fine layer of white dust all through the cargo spaces and a careful fire inspection of these spaces revealed two sets of footprints along the tween decks directed to a 44 gallon drum of fish oil which had been broached and several charred rags lying in the subsequent pool of fish oil on the deck.

Clearly this was a determined attempt to do the ship a significant mischief and just about the worst incident that could happen at sea so all hands were mustered in the mess room and everyone's feet inspected for traces of magnetite dust. Sounded like a good idea at the time but did not produce a definite result so the Master stated that he would allow 24 hours for the culprit to identify himself or he would forward the complete crew list to the Northern Territory Police to carry out a full investigation prior to our arrival at Groote Eylandt.

Back in the 60's there were some very colourful characters sailing on the Australian coast a number of whom were very happy to remain inconspicuous so it was no surprise when early afternoon next day the Ordinary Seaman was propelled horizontally through the Masters office door with loud cries of "it was me, it was me". Two very large Northern Territory policemen were waiting for us on the wharf at Groote Eylandt and while the Master was explaining to them the Official Log Book entries detailing the attempted arson, the 3rd Cook came running up the stairs covered in blood shouting that the Chief Steward had attacked him and he wanted the police to charge him.

The first couple of hours after arrival are always pretty hectic with the crew stripping the very heavy beams and wooden hatch boards by hand and the loading sequence for the manganese ore discussed with the shore personnel not to mention the usual customs clearances on return from an overseas voyage so an altercation within the catering department was an unwanted complication to an already busy morning.

Apparently the Chief Steward had gone down to the galley to settle a dispute between the 2 elderly Cooks and the trainee Cook who was refusing to carry out his allotted duties. Some heated words were exchanged and the 3rd Cook decided that he could win the argument by striking the Chief Steward several times in the face. Very bad move as the Chief Steward had spent his younger years making a name for himself as a likely middleweight at Festival Hall and he finished the discussion with a good hearty left hook at which stage the 3rd Cook lost interest.

After stitching up a 4 inch eyebrow cut and obtaining detailed statements from all concerned the Master instantly dismissed the 3rd Cook who was then landed in the care of the Northern Territory Police who were more than happy to make sure he travelled back to Darwin with them along with the Ordinary Seaman who was under arrest.

It would appear that on this occasion the sea gods were well and truly alert as later in the voyage it became clear that the 3rd Cook was the most likely owner of the second set of footprints and although it was not possible to prove this fact without a witness statement from the Ordinary Seaman his removal from the ship was entirely due to his own behaviour and the deduction of the cost of his return fare home from Groote Eylandt from wages due was considered by the entire ship company the minimum penalty that could have been imposed for such a serious offence.



Proposed Seafarers Rest Park viewed from park entrance at Seafarers Bridge