

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
ZOOM TRIVIA QUIZ
1700 hrs 25th NOVEMBER

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From the Branch Master

The theme of our October Zoom meeting was “Crew changes and Covid-19”

The first speaker was Alex Evered who started by talking about the role her company, Bayside Shipping Services, fulfils as a correspondent for the P&I Clubs. Alex explained that there are 13 major P&I clubs that between them provide cover for a wide range of liabilities for approximately 90% of world shipping.

Crew changes in Australia are governed by Federal and State laws. The State laws vary in their requirements particularly regarding quarantine. Alex went through the requirements of each state. The greatest problem affecting crew changes from foreign ships is the availability of flights in and out of Australia.

The next speaker was Captain Errol Lobo , the owner of Liganis Maritime, which provides ship management services to Danish, Japanese and Singaporean Shipping Companies. He spoke to us from his office in Mumbai. He was able to tell us how the companies he is involved with manage the crew change problem and what systems have been set up by IMO and member states. He also spoke about the action taken to prevent the virus infecting ships. Most ships are virus free but are of risk of infection while in port.

Mario Dsouza ,the Safety and Security Officer for the Port of Melbourne spoke about virus control and prevention in the Port of Melbourne and Gerard Veldkamp explained the COVID -19 procedures followed by the Port Phillip Pilots. It was a very informative evening for the small number of members who participated.

The November Meeting is usually the End of Year break up and Christmas Party but this year because of COVID-19 this will not go ahead and in its place will be a Trivia Quiz conducted over Zoom starting at 1700 hrs on Wednesday 25th November.

I received an email from Captain Peter Varani commenting on some of the issues raised in last month’s LOG. Hearing that the Polly Woodside was having financial problems reminded Peter that many years ago when he was an advisor to the PMA Board the Polly Woodside was in financial trouble but following a submission to the Board the PMA provided a grant of \$10,000 per year for 5 years.

Perhaps a submission to the Port Authority might again be successful.

Peter was interested in the article on the Honourable Company and in particular their headquarters ship "Wellington." Some time ago he was shown over the ship by the Master of the Company Captain Alex Rawcliffe. Peter recommends that any member visiting London considers visiting "Wellington". You need to ring for an appointment on 020 7836 8179 and a letter of introduction from COMMA is appreciated.

The annual Seafarers Church Service at St. Paul's Cathedral was broadcast by Channel 31 on 19th October. Because of COVID-19 restrictions it was a very different service this year. The choir consisted of only four people, there were no Navy musicians, the procession of ensigns and flags did not happen and much of the service had to be cut out to fit into the 30 minutes of the broadcast.

The Cathedral was only allowed to have 5 people involved in the service so Commodore Greg Yorke representing the Navy and Captain Nigel Porteous representing the Merchant Navy and Rev. Inni Punay representing the Mission to Seafarers had to attend the Cathedral the week before to have their part in the service pre-recorded.

Given the difficulties and limitations I thought the service went very well and importantly kept alive a tradition that goes back over 100 years.

Membership Applications

The following applications for membership were read at our October Meeting,

Kishore MATTA	Ordinary	Sydney Branch	Awaiting CV or bio
Karen MONTFORD	Associate	WA Branch	Master -24 m
		Currently VTSO at Barrow Island	
Preetham KUMAR	Ordinary	WA Branch	Master Class One
		Currently pilot with West Coast Pilots	

Blame the Master

On 2nd September 2020 the 299,986 DWT Greek owned tanker “New Diamond” suffered a boiler explosion which killed one crew member and started a fire that burned for a week. The “New Diamond” was carrying a cargo of 270,000 tonnes of crude oil from Bahrain to India and was about 40 miles off the coast of Sri Lanka when the explosion occurred. The ship was also had on board 1,700 tonnes of fuel oil for its diesel engine and a small quantity of this leaked into the sea and produced an oil slick about 30 metres wide and a mile long. The slick was sprayed with dispersant chemicals and quickly disappeared. There was no leakage from the crude oil cargo. The crew were taken off and landed in Sri Lanka.

A spokeswoman for the Sri Lankan Attorney General told Al Jazeera “There is sufficient evidence to prosecute the skipper under the Marine Pollution Act as well as the penal code for criminal negligence”. After some negotiation the Greek Captain agreed to plead guilty to violations of the Marine Environment Protection Authority Act. The Attorney General had asked for \$1 million in restitution but the court reduced it to \$65,000 and allowed the Captain to leave Sri Lanka. The “New Diamonds” owners will pay \$2.4 million in compensation to Sri Lanka for its firefighting efforts. The ship is being towed to the Port of Fujairah in the UAE where the cargo will be transferred to another tanker for delivery to the Indian refinery.

Commenting on the case the former editor of Lloyds List, Michael Grey, noted that the improbability that the Captain might have been in some way involved in the boiler explosion that started the fire that gutted the whole after end of the ship and led to the bunker tank leak is irrelevant to the authorities who will always look for someone to blame and prosecute. The Master of a casualty is the obvious choice.

Some reasons for this thinking are given in a recent article by John Konrad the founder and CEO of g Captain. The rationale is along the lines that IMO estimates that 90% of accidents are caused by human error therefore humans are responsible for 90% of accidents and this is taken as code for “Blame the Crew”.

In some of the biggest maritime cases it has been the captains who have been positioned as scapegoats by the companies that employed them.

Crew negligence is an insured risk, Owners negligence is not.

The three reasons for blaming the crew given in Konrad's article are:

1. Crew errors are easier to recognize compared to poor design, poor maintenance and poor enforcement of rules.
2. Ship investigators are incentivized to only focus on the surface, operational issues rather than the systemic issues underlying them.
3. Blaming the crew is the easy way out to avoid identifying culpability of the ship owner, constructors or those responsible for ship maintenance.

As Michael Grey Commented, "There is something grimly predictable about the attitude of the authorities to the master of the ship." "Throwing the book at the senior survivor, because he or she is available cannot surely be described as justice".



Mission to Seafarers Art Show

The Official Opening of the 2020 Mission to Seafarers Art Show was held on 15th October. This is usually a very social event with a large crowd of art lovers and Mission supporters sipping Chardonnay and appraising the artworks which are displayed throughout the Mission building. This year because of COVID -19 the official opening and the artworks could only be seen online. Sue Dight who conducted the opening said the Art Show raised the profile of the Mission and was a major funds raiser.

This year there were 200 entries for the Maritime Art Prize of which 107 were selected for display. Total prize money was \$20,000 of which \$10,000 went to the winner of the Maritime Art Award and \$5,000 to the Traditional Maritime Art Award.

Sue did a sterling job conducting the opening on her own with only a couple of technical people to assist in producing the presentation. The Mission Chairman, the three Judges and the winning artists appeared by zoom.



Winner overall 2020 “A Submariner dreams of Home”
Oil on Canvas by Rodney Forbes



Winner Best Traditional work “Tooronga and Change”
Watercolour on Paper by John Woodland

“Iron Derby” Coal Consumption

By Captain John Paine

Iron Derby (a sister ship to Iron Wyndham) was originally built with coal fired boilers and steam turbine main engines. The coal bunkers were of sufficient capacity for a standard voyage from NSW ports via the inside passage through the Great Barrier Reef to Yampi Sound in WA and return to NSW. On the occasions when the vessel was required to deliver steel products to Melbourne, Whyalla and Kwinana (near Fremantle) then on up the WA coast to Yampi Sound to load iron ore for NSW it was necessary to load additional coal bunkers at the BHP steelworks at Kwinana to make the return voyage safely. As with any products delivered from the east coast bunker coal was very expensive so in true ship owner fashion BHP expected the Master and Chief Engineer to limit their additional coal requirements to the bare minimum. This was achieved in part by slow steaming if the delivery schedule allowed to reduce the coal consumption to the minimum.

With all these instructions in mind the good ship Iron Derby departed Whyalla in July with a full load of construction girders for WA and the Chief Engineer was given instructions to proceed at the most economical engine speed which was about 80 RPM. At the end of the first days steaming it appeared that the vessel was actually making much better speed than calculated and logic would have considered that this to be an unexpected bonus. The Captain took a different view however and instructed the Chief Engineer to further reduce the revs down to 60 RPM to save even more coal and despite some vigorous discussion as to the merits of slow steaming at these revs he refused to change his orders.

Any trip across the Bight in mid-winter with a full load of steel is a challenge as the weather cells are frequent and extreme so despite the fact that the course was well to the north of the usual crossing it was only hours before the Derby was beam on to a very large swell rolling violently and steaming into a rapidly increasing gale. Three days of this, still at 60 revs with very little sleep and no hot meals for everyone a delegation of representatives from all departments on board met with the Captain and suggested in the politest of terms that it might be a good idea to go back up to full speed and get out of the storm conditions sooner rather than later.

Absolutely Not we must save coal was the answer which was unfortunate as after one day of moderate weather the Derby was back into an even more severe storm with such a heavy swell that it was necessary to sail 160 miles into the Indian Ocean Before it was safe to gradually alter course north towards Fremantle. By this time the passage from Whyalla had taken 3 days longer than usual and early morning a RAAF Orion aircraft flew over at a very low altitude and signalled "what ship" and after our reply they flashed "are you OK" which was a bit of a surprise to all of us. The only means of contact between ship and shore back then was by radio-telegraphy and Morse code and the quality of the transmission was dependent on the location of the nearest coast station and the prevailing weather conditions so the Radio Officer had a particularly important role in completing a voyage safely. Always a worry when you find the Air Force is out and about looking for you so a quick visit to the radio shack found the Radio Officer at his desk in front of the radio transmitter looking as if the light was on but there was nobody home. Further investigation revealed that due to a large and continuous intake of gin none of the routine voyage progress messages had been sent and were still sitting on his desk so to the rest of the maritime world we had virtually disappeared. First contact with Fremantle was some hours later using the VHF bridge radio (range of about 30 miles) so the Derby arrived at the discharge berth well and truly overdue and a whole lot of please explain messages requiring immediate attention waiting with the ships agent. First job for the Chief Engineer was to physically climb into the bunker space and measure the remaining coal then calculate what he needed to make the remainder of the voyage back to Port Kembla. Oh Dear what a surprise the additional coal required was almost twice the amount we would have used if we had actually completed the voyage from Whyalla at full speed. Never did find out what sort of exchange passed between senior management in Newcastle and the senior officers on board but one could assume that it would have been terse to say the least so the rest of us more lowly souls kept our heads well below the barricade. Not long after that incident and despite the fact that BHP owned a large number of coal mines in NSW all their coal burning vessels were converted to burn heavy marine oil fuel as it was becoming difficult to access steaming coal of sufficient quality to use as a marine fuel.