



# The Porthole

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The newsletter of  
the Company of Master Mariners of Australia,  
South Australian Branch

PO Box 1, PORT ADELAIDE, SA 5015

Branch Patron: His Excellency the Honorable Hieu Van Le AC



## Branch Master's Comments

Good day to all our readers.

Summer has slipped into Autumn, and with the cooler than usual temperatures we have been experiencing in SA recently, it would seem that Summer has missed us. Must be Global Warming!

Shortly after our February monthly meeting, the Federal Court held a meeting by telephone to discuss a few procedural matters, the most important of which was where to hold our AGM, and indeed, whether we should hold it at all in the light of the Pandemic. It was decided that Sydney was safer and less likely to be closed than Melbourne, and so April 17th was settled upon, Covid permitting. To be on the safe side I booked my flights through a travel agent so that in the event of border closures, I could reclaim my fares. It looks like the main topic of discussion will be the changes to be made to the constitution, mainly updating parts of it to bring it into this century. The small changes envisaged will be presented to the members to vote thereon before anything is proceeded with. You understand that this may take a while. There is nothing that I consider contentious in the proposed changes. We recently received a proof copy of the "Master Mariner" by e-mail for perusal and comment, and this will also be discussed at the AGM.

I am not available for our monthly meetings next week as I shall be in Melbourne for the week, but Captain Phillips has kindly agreed to officiate in my stead.

On a more sombre note, our long-serving and active member Captain Phil Hammond was sadly felled by a heart attack during the night of March 11th, and his 'Socially Spaced' funeral was held in Murray Bridge on March 18th, attended by a representative group from the SA Master Mariners.

Happily, the grass on my farm is coming in green again, much to the approval of the sheep, and showing that regardless of anything else, nature just maintains its cycle of renewal as it has for eons. I'm sure there should be a lesson there for us.

The next monthly meeting will go ahead next Wednesday, at the Largs Pier Hotel at the usual time. Until then

Happy Sailing

Bob W (SABM)

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**COVID-19 restrictions permitting, the next Branch meeting will be held at The Largs Pier Hotel. 198 The Esplanade, Largs Bay, on Wednesday, 31st March 2021, at 1145 for 1200. Please confirm your attendance at the lunch or register your apology before 1200 on Monday, 29th March 2021 with Bob Westley (0427 644 947) or Ian Dickson (0418 807 788)**



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## Sadness is not enough.

By Michael Grey

“The crew change crisis is disappointing and sad” wrote IMC’s Group MD for Shipping Frederik Guttormsen in the latest BIMCO Bulletin. He suggested that it showed a lack of co-operative spirit and demonstrated that the industry, and the world in general, were not very good at finding global solutions to problems that no one country, or industry, could properly address.

A few hours after reading this, I heard a BBC World Service news item about the plight of more than one hundred seafarers from Kiribati, who had been stuck in Hamburg in a hostel, some for more than a year. You might think that with this number all wishing to go home to the same place, it would not have been beyond the wit of any person to reunite them with their families. But the problem was not the lack of transport to this Pacific archipelago, but the fact that their home country had been Covid-free and the inhabitants wanted to keep it that way. These things are often more complicated than meets the eye.

You might suggest that throughout the past few hundred years those islands had suffered enough from unwanted imports and their caution was understandable. It is not that different from the policies of both Australia and New Zealand, two countries completely dependent upon shipping to carry their trade but keeping ships’ crews at arms’ length. The 40,000 Australians caught abroad but who cannot get home, like the crews of the ships, are regarded as collateral damage, although they seem to have made exceptions for international sports players, which to many people seems pretty outrageous.

But it serves to underline Mr Guttormsen’s view that while we universally suffer from the pandemic, the strategies employed to deal with it are anything but global. There have been plenty of good intentions expressed by nation states and institutions alike, but when it comes to translating them into practical solutions to the crew change problem, there are very few places where innovative “Singapore”-type strategies are being followed. We are told that everyone is working “tirelessly” behind the scenes to devise solutions, but month succeeds month and there are still no answers as to how internationally travelling seafarers can be vaccinated, or why they still have to jump through huge hoops to get home or re-join a ship.

It is crises such as Covid-19 that emphasises the fact that the shipping industry remains hugely fragmented, although if nations cannot work more co-operatively, it is a bit much expecting co-ordination from shipping. But there is a failure of governments in general to grasp the seriousness of the situation. The ships still come and go; the goods are delivered and shipped, so what is the problem?

Would it be so desperately difficult to identify strategically placed crew-change hubs upon which ship operators could depend? What prevents a degree of inter-company co-operation, that could, for instance, see them getting together and chartering ferries or small cruise ships (there are still some which haven’t been scrapped) to serve as mobile quarantine hotels and transport between hubs and ports where crews could congregate.

Couldn’t owners and managers, along with charterers, be able to put together such crew delivery systems, and encourage states and ports to co-operate in something so worthwhile? And why would it not be possible, even allowing for the predictable screams of shippers, to finance such schemes with a small surcharge on freight? It would surely be better than remaining disappointed and sad, among all the good intentions.

*Michael Grey is former editor of Lloyd’s List.*

Source: *Maritime Advocate* 773

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### Captain Philip Hammond

Died suddenly at Murray Bridge, South Australia, on 11 March 2021, aged 81.

Philip was born at Crayford, Kent, on 8 March 1940. On completion of his schooling, he served his apprenticeship with Buries Marks, after which he served with Port Line and Jardine Matheson. He also spent some time on oil rig supply vessels in the Timor Sea.

He became a South Australian Harbour Pilot and served in the out-ports and in Port Adelaide.

He served in the RANR, was a JP and a member of the Lutheran Church.

After his retirement as a pilot in 2002, he moved to Murray Bridge, where he became Master of river passenger vessels, and also led fitness classes.

He is survived by his wife, Erica, 5 children and 13 grand children.

He was a member of this Branch for 45 years and a past Branch Master. We enjoyed his company and he was highly regarded. He will be greatly missed.

## An Italian job

By Michael Grey

Whatever your particular mode of transport might be, you are well advised not to have any sort of accident within the jurisdiction of the state of Italy. An advanced European country, you might think, with a well-developed system of justice? That may be the impression everyone who loves that country likes to think, but just don't make any sort of a mistake in Italian waters, if you don't want to end up serving a custodial sentence.

This view has been recently reinforced by the treatment accorded to five members of the crew of the cruise ship MSC Opera, which, it might be recalled, had a spectacular "hard landing" in 2019, trying to get alongside in the port of Venice. Terrifying videos were instantly available from several angles, showing people running for their lives on the quay as the ship, apparently out of control, bounced off the wharf and slammed into a harbour cruise craft. Five people were injured in the general mayhem.

The initial explanation was of a "technical problem", but such malfunctions did not save the master of the ship from a five month gaol sentence, with the ship's chief engineer and the chief electrician being given two months apiece. Two others were found to be at fault and were given ten days gaol time.

The rationale behind these sentences, as revealed by the court, was that there were indeed problems aboard the ship as she approached the port, but that the accused pressed on with their intention to berth, when they perhaps should have held off until it was perfectly safe to proceed. The company, which backed its on-board team, maintained that the technical problem was just that, and the fault lay with the people responsible for the equipment.

Custodial sentences in such a situation might seem very harsh. It was possibly influenced by the location of the incident, and the timing, as it coincided with a tremendous effort by people in Venice to get big cruise ships banned from the lagoon. It also has to be borne in mind that, unlike some places that have a system where the cause of an accident is investigated by independent marine professionals, in Italy the investigation is merely part of a judicial process – in effect a trial, where any professionals play only an advisory role.

Italy is just one of many countries that have elected to maintain such a system and shows no reluctance to commit to prison those deemed to have been responsible for marine accidents. There have been a number of such occasions in recent years. Maybe one should not be judgemental in such matters, but it might be reasonably asked what might be served by the criminalising of professionals who have made a mistake, lapse of judgement, or merely have been overtaken by circumstances.

In such cases a complete lay person will surely find the technical complexities that might be extenuating completely mystifying. This is increasingly the case when advanced automation systems effectively relegate the ship's technical staff to bystanders. The handling of big ships in very confined waters, such a non-professional judge may well conclude, will surely be no more challenging than parking a car.

Italy might have form in this respect, but maybe we should not hold its systems as unduly harsh. Indeed, it might be suggested that the determination of blame, rather than causation, has become entrenched throughout the whole world, and that accidents which would once have been dealt with by professional investigation now increasingly involve law enforcement. The enforcers in most of these places are also now armed with a host of useful catch-all charges that can be deployed, such as "hazarding a ship", to suit the situation in a wide range of circumstances. They are surely giving effect to something of a societal change that has seen growing intolerance to any sort of "accident" – a word that has ceased to have much meaning.

Will marine professionals be less inclined to any form of error, if they know that it carries with it the risk of a custodial sentence, to satisfy the public demand for somebody to be "held to account" for his or her actions? And in an age when these marine professionals are being asked, overtly or covertly by managements, to shave safety margins, to handle bigger and bigger ships in more fraught circumstances, with prudence and caution being regarded as outmoded, shouldn't we cut them a bit of slack?

*Michael Grey is former editor of Lloyd's List.*

Source: *Maritime Advocate* 772

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## Grounded Mega Ship in Suez Canal Paralyzes Trade for Second Day

March 24, 2021

By Salma El Wardany, Mirette Magdy and Jack Wittels (Bloomberg) —

Tugs and diggers have so far failed to dislodge a massive container ship stuck in the Suez Canal on Wednesday, increasing the chances of prolonged delays in what is arguably the world's most important waterway.

Work to re-float the ship was suspended until Thursday morning in Egypt, shipping agent Inchcape said, citing the Suez Canal Authority. Dredgers are still trying to loosen the vessel before any attempt to pull it out, the ship's manager said.

It's taxing to even grasp how big this ship is. About a quarter mile long (400 meters) and weighing in at 200,000 metric tons, its sheer size is overwhelming the efforts to dig it out. A huge yellow excavator, itself about twice as tall as its driver, looked like a child's toy parked next to the ship's bulbous bow.

The situation has gotten so desperate that an elite salvage squad is due to arrive Thursday to work on prising the *Ever Given* from the bank of the canal, where it's blocking oceangoing carriers that haul everything from oil to consumer goods.



MV *Ever Given* aground in the Suez Canal, March 24, 2021. Image courtesy Suez Canal Authority

canal, which connects the Mediterranean in the north with



Workers are seen next to a container ship which was hit by strong wind and ran aground in Suez Canal, Egypt March 24, 2021. Suez Canal Authority/Handout via REUTERS

The struggle to dislodge the ship is now falling to SMIT Salvage, a legendary Dutch firm whose employees parachute themselves from one ship wreckage to the next, saving vessels often during violent storms. This ship is so heavy that the salvors may have to lighten it by removing things like the ballast water, which helps keep ships steady when they're at sea. Fuel could also be unloaded.

The Suez Canal Authority hasn't commented on the work or given any indication of when traffic could resume.

The canal is among the most trafficked waterways in the world, used by tankers shipping crude from the Middle East to Europe and North America, as well as in the opposite direction. On Wednesday 185 vessels, mostly bulk carriers, container ships, and oil or chemical tankers, were waiting to cross the canal, according to shipping data compiled by Bloomberg.

The blockage highlights a major risk faced by the shipping industry as more and more ships transit maritime choke points including the Suez and Panama Canals, the Strait of Hormuz and Southeast Asia's Malacca Strait. Such occurrences could become more common as ships get bigger and waterways get more congested.

Oil companies are starting to prepare for the worst. On Wednesday, there was an uptick in interest from oil companies looking to book tankers with options to avoid the canal, according to a broker, and several bid for space on the pipelines that allow bypass of the waterway completely. For now, that's a just-in-case move. Container ships will most likely have to wait it out, as the main alternative is the unattractive option of sailing around the southern tip of Africa.

The disruption comes at a time when oil prices were already volatile. Crude surged above \$70 a barrel earlier this month on Saudi production cuts, only to slump close to \$60 this week due to setbacks in Europe's coronavirus vaccine program. Brent crude rose more than 5% on Wednesday.

*Ever Given's* crew are safe and accounted for, and there have been no reports of injuries or pollution, according to the ship's manager, Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement. The vessel is carrying cargo for logistics company Orient Overseas Container Line Ltd., according to Mark Wong, a spokesman for OOCL.

—With assistance from Alex Longley, Julian Lee, Anthony Di Paola, Javier Blas, Sergio Chapa and Robert Tuttle.

Source gCaptain 210324

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About 12% of global trade goes through the canal, making it so strategic that world powers have fought over the waterway since it was completed in 1869. For now, all that traffic is backed up with the *Ever Given* aground in the southern part of the canal, creating another setback for global supply chains already strained by the e-commerce boom linked to the pandemic.

"The Suez Canal blockage comes at a particularly unhelpful time," said Greg Knowler, European editor at JOC Group, which is part of IHS Markit Ltd. "Even a two-day delay would further add to the supply chain disruption slowing the delivery of cargo to businesses across the U.K. and Europe."

The incident began on Tuesday when strong winds blasted through the region and kicked up sands along the banks of the 120-mile-long the Red Sea in the south. The waterway is narrow — less than 675 feet wide (205 meters) in some places — and can be difficult to navigate when there's poor visibility.

But *Ever Given* stayed its course through the canal, on its way to Rotterdam from China. As gusts that reached as high as 46 miles an hour swept up dust around it, the crew lost control of the ship and it careered sideways into a sandy embankment, blocking nearly the entirety of the channel. It's still in the same position as when it ran aground, according to Inchcape.

At the heart of all of this is the ship's massive scale.

Container vessels have nearly doubled in size in the past decade as global trade expanded, making the job of moving such ships much harder when they get stuck.

Even while key routes — including the Suez Canal — have been widened and deepened over the years to accommodate the mega-sized vessels, the work to dig them out after they get stuck takes enormous power.

## Tugs Work to Refloat Ultra-Large Containership Blocking Suez Canal

By Yusri Mohamed, Jessica Jaganathan and Florence Tan

CAIRO, March 24 (Reuters)

The shortest shipping route from Europe to Asia remained blocked on Wednesday as eight tug boats struggled to free one of the world's largest container ships after it ran aground in the Suez Canal.



FILE PHOTO: A container ship which was hit by strong wind and ran aground is pictured in Suez Canal, Egypt March 24, 2021. SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITY/Handout via REUTERS/File Photo

GAC, a Dubai-based marine services company, said authorities were still working to free the ship mid-afternoon on Wednesday, and that information it had received earlier claiming the vessel was partially refloated was inaccurate.

The 400-metre, 224,000-tonne *Ever Given* ran aground on Tuesday morning after losing the ability to steer amid high winds and a dust storm, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said in a statement.

Pictures posted on social media appeared to show the ship positioned diagonally across the canal, blocking its full width. Photos shared by the SCA showed a digger removing earth and rock from the bank of the canal around the ship's bow.

The SCA's chairman told local media that, despite the blockage, a southbound convoy was on the move and that the authority was trying

to keep traffic flowing between waiting areas as best it could while salvage efforts continued.

"Once we get this boat out, then that's it, things will go back to normal. God willing, we'll be done today," Chairman Osama Rabie said. The authority was considering compensation for delayed ships, he said.

Tracking maps had shown the ship grounded in the southernmost stretch of the waterway, between the Great Bitter Lake and the Red Sea port of Suez.

At least 30 ships were blocked to the north of the *Ever Given*, and three to the south, local sources said. Several dozen ships could also be seen grouped around the northern and southern entrances to the canal.

### REBALANCING EFFORTS

The SCA said it was trying to rebalance the ship, and local sources said efforts could shift towards digging the ship out if the tug boats were unable to release it.

Dutch marine services company Boskalis said its subsidiary Smit Salvage had been hired to help with the operation and was sending 10 people to Egypt.

In such cases, "you really have to do the calculations to understand how solidly she (is) grounded, and how much power you can exert without damaging the vessel," Boskalis spokesman Martijn Schuttevaer told Reuters.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM), the ship's technical manager, said the *Ever Given* had run aground in the canal at around 05:40 GMT on Tuesday. It said an investigation was underway.

BSM, which handles the ship's crew and technical issues, said all the crew were safe and there had been no reports of injuries or pollution. It said it had notified the authorities and "interested parties," but that it could not confirm the ship's owner.

Taiwan's Evergreen Marine Corp, which is leasing the vessel, said the shipowner had told it the ship "was suspected of being hit by a sudden strong wind, causing the hull to deviate from (the) waterway and accidentally hit the bottom."

The ship is likely to have been insured for around \$100 million, said Marcus Baker, global head of marine and cargo at insurance broker Marsh in London.

### SUPPLY CONCERNS

Tens of ships carrying crude, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and retail goods were unable to sail through the canal on Wednesday, potentially disrupting supplies to global markets, shipping sources said.

Oil analytics firm Vortexa said ten tankers carrying 13 million barrels of crude could be affected. Oil prices rose more than 2%.

As of Wednesday, five laden LNG tankers were unable to pass through the canal due to the grounded container ship, according to data intelligence firm Kpler.

Of the five, three were bound for Asia and two for Europe, said Kpler analyst Rebecca Chia. She said that if the congestion persists until the end of this week, it would affect the transit of 15 LNG tankers.

During 2020, nearly 19,000 ships, or an average of 51.5 per day, passed through the canal, according to the SCA.

"It increases the risk that we might see additional port congestion in European ports in the next week," said Lars Jensen, chief executive at SealIntelligence Consulting.

(Reporting by Yusri Mohamed in Ismailia, Egypt, and Jessica Jaganathan, Florence Tan, Roslan Khasawneh, Gavin Maguire and Koustav Samanta in Singapore, Yimou Lee in Taipei, and Yuka Obayashi in Tokyo; Additional reporting by Carolyn Cohn and Jonathan Saul in London, Mahmoud Mourad in Cairo, Anthony Deutsch in Amsterdam; Writing by Aidan Lewis; Editing by Simon Cameron-Moore, Tom Hogue and Jan Harvey)

Source: gCaptain 210324

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## Norway Gives Green Light for World's First Ship Tunnel

Mike Schuler March 18, 2021

Norway has given the green light to begin preparations for the construction on what is expected to become the world's first ship tunnel.



An illustration of the Stad Ship Tunnel. Image credit: Norwegian Coastal Administration

The Stad Ship Tunnel will cut through the Norway's Stad peninsula allowing ships up to 25.5 meters wide to avoid one of the most dangerous routes along the Norwegian coast.

The Norwegian Coastal Administration has received an assignment letter from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, which gives a 'green light' to start preparations for the construction of the tunnel.

"Based on the allocation letter, we will now start the processes of acquisitioning properties in the area where the ship tunnel will be located, as well as put in place a project organization, prepare a tender basis and initiate a tender," said Terje Andreassen, a temporary project manager for the Stad Ship Tunnel at the

Norwegian Coastal Administration.



Illustration courtesy Norwegian Coastal Administration

The entire project is estimated to cost NOK 2.8 billion (USD \$330 million) with a construction period of three to four years. The Norwegian Coastal Administration is aiming to acquire the land and select a contractor sometime this year, which will



Illustration courtesy Norwegian Coastal Administration

allow construction to start in 2022.

The Stad Ship Tunnel will be blasted through about a mile (1.7 km) of rock at the narrowest point of the Stad Peninsula.

The tunnel won't actually shorten the distance around the peninsula, rather it is intended to allow ships to bypass the Stadhavet Sea where the North and Norwegian seas meet, an area that is considered one of the most exposed and dangerous areas for vessels along the coast of Norway.

The idea for a bypass route through Stad has been kicked around in Norway for decades, but the idea has picked up steam in the recent years following studies pin-pointing the best route. Norway officially launched the project in 2017.

"If everything goes according to plan, the world's first full-scale ship tunnel will be completed in 2025/2026," says Terje Andreassen.

Source: [gCaptain 210319](#)

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## German Research Vessel Explores Giant Calved Iceberg in Antarctica

Mike Schuler March 18, 2021

A German research vessel exploring East Antarctica found itself at the right place at the right time last month when a massive iceberg broke off from the frozen continent.



*Polarstern* close A74. Photo : Alfred Wegener Institute/Tim Kalvelage

The calving of the iceberg, dubbed A74, made headlines across the globe in late February when it broke off from the Brunt Ice Shelf. With an area of nearly 500 square miles, the iceberg is about the size of Los Angeles.

The Alfred Wegener Institute's *R/V Polarstern* happened to be exploring nearby in the Weddell Sea region when the calving occurred and immediately headed for the area. Researchers then waited for favourable weather before entering between the iceberg and the Brunt Ice Shelf to document and take samples from the seafloor that has been covered by hundreds of meters of ice for decades.

Experts say calving events like the one that created iceberg A74 happen only about once every 10 years, so being on-hand to study the event is rare.

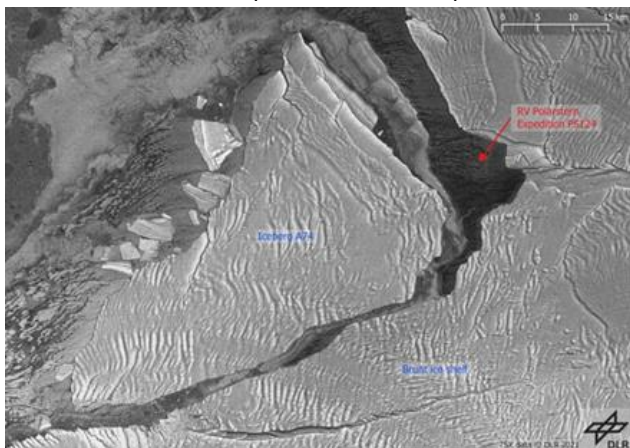
The first images reveal an amazing level of biodiversity, according to the Alfred Wegener Institute.

“It’s extremely fortunate that we were able to respond flexibly and explore the calving event at the Brunt Ice Shelf in such detail,” says Dr Hartmut Hellmer, a physical oceanographer at the AWI and head of the expedition.

The sediment samples gathered are expected to provide more detailed insights into the ecosystem, while a geochemical analysis of the water samples collected provide new details regarding the nutrient content and ocean currents.

“It is a unique opportunity offered to researchers on board *Polarstern* to explore the Antarctic Ice Sheet,” said German Federal Research Minister Anja Karliczek. “I am grateful to the crew of the *Polarstern* for taking on the associated hardships and also risks. Polar research makes a decisive contribution to better understanding and foreseeing climate change and its consequences for our earth. We need this knowledge in order to be able to take effective countermeasures against climate change. The effects of climate change in Antarctica, among others, are worrying.”

Below are some more photos from the expedition:



Satellite image of the A74 iceberg. Image credit: Alfred-Wegener-Institute



Photo credit: Alfred Wegener Institute

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## A Shipping Puzzle

by Kent Stewart

Do fourteen ships constitute an industry? That’s my current tally of the number of ships in the Australian shipping industry. You can even name them all – the four LNG tankers, six ships on the Bass strait run, an ageing cement carrier and some small Seaswift ships in North Queensland.

If you throw in a couple of FPSOs, a handful of struggling offshore industry boats and Seaswift’s small fleet of landing barges you’d still be hard-pressed to call this an industry. It’s like a farmer calling his sheep a flock when he knows them all by name.

It doesn’t serve any purpose to say how we got to this sorry point. Suffice to say that it’s the result of global market forces (read thirdworld crew wages), Australia’s minute slice of world shipping, government indifference and an intransigent union movement that has alienated the general public and helped successive conservative governments indulge in Union Bashing 101.

No company in their right mind would invest in shipping in Australia, even if it was to guarantee delivery of their own cargoes. There’s massive risk and there’s just no money in it. As a consequence, all the ships mentioned above are about 25 years old and at the end of their economic life. There is little incentive to invest in new tonnage. In other words, we’re likely to lose what we’ve got.

The whole complex issue of the rejuvenation of Australian shipping has been discussed, *ad nauseum*, in government white papers, Senate Enquiries, “Blue Highway” fantasies and queries as to why federal budgets shovel money into road and rail transport and leave shipping to drown in its own demise.

The downfall of Australian shipping is an historical study in itself. But even in its heyday our “Australian” fleet was tiny by world standards. At best we had just over 100 trading. By comparison, in 1950, British Tankers Ltd (later known as BP Tankers) had 140 ships alone, British India had 94 ships, and then there were the likes of Cunard, P&O, Blue Star, Blue Funnel, Port Line, Bank Line and others.

In Australia, BHP had seven ships, ANL’s forerunner, the Australian Shipping Board, had a few ships. Australian shipping has always been small. This has a lot to do with our tiny population. On a world scale we are still a small country, many foreign cities have bigger populations than our entire country.

How did the demise of the Australian shipping industry come about? Well, Australia tenaciously clung to its British roots and as a consequence the ships were run like their British cousins. Conditions were atrocious. British ships had a reputation of poor pay, long swings, insufficient leave and dreadful food. It used to be easy to pick out a British ship – it had only one seagull flying behind it and that was only on one wing, it had a cut-lunch under the other.

Up in Glasgow, old Andrew Weir used to stand on the breakwater watching the Bank Line ships come in. Any ship that had sea-gulls flying behind it, the Chief Steward got the sack as soon as they got tied up – “far too much waste on that ship!”

So, it's fair to say that we got the unions we deserved. Australian unions, through bitter and unbending tenacity, turned all those poor working conditions around. And gradually the ships became unaffordable.

So, did Australia ever have a viable shipping industry? Many coastal trades were never expected to turn a profit, they carried their own cargoes to guarantee supply. Our steel works and our oil refineries were a case in point. BHP operated a fleet of bulk carriers for the benefit of its steelworks in Newcastle, Port Kembla and Whyalla. Caltex, HC Sleigh and BP operated coastal tankers supplying fuel to Australian ports. ANL had a few profitable trades for a short while until cabotage was abandoned and operating costs knocked them out of contention.

The other intriguing thing was Australian ship registration. The British Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 saw all Commonwealth ships, including Australia, registered in Britain.

This situation continued until 1982 when the Australian Shipping Registration Act (1981) was introduced. So, prior to 1981 every ship in Australia was registered in Britain even if it was built here and never visited the country of registration. But by 1981 the Australian shipping industry was already heading south.

It's confusing, to say the least. Every ship in Australia had its homeport emblazoned across its stern. “Melbourne” seems to have been the favoured port for ANL and BHP, both having their head offices there. But these weren't the Ports of Registry. These ships were all entered on the British Ship Registry. The names on the stern, at the very best, only signified the vessels' home port (although few BHP bulk carriers ever visited Melbourne).

And at the same time, they proudly flew the Australian Red Ensign signifying they were ships of the Australian merchant fleet. Confusing? It was more than that. This vague situation meant that prior to 1981, very few people, including our trade ministers, were sure if we had a shipping industry at all.

It explained a lot of things. For example, it explained why Masters, Mates and Engineers tickets were accepted without question by British shipping companies. And why Certificates were granted by the “Commonwealth of Australia” and why much of the ship's documentation was the same as British ships. Remember the Discharge Certificates, exactly the same as in Britain.

Then there was the puzzling activity of changing “Articles”. This inexplicable ritual often occurred in the middle of a swing in some obscure port where you were paid out all the money owing to you, then at the same time you were re- engaged on new “Articles”.

I once did a “change of Articles” in Portland, a tiny rural port in Victoria. The Second Mate virtually cleaned out the Bank of New South Wales of all the cash they had and we all ended up with piles of twenty dollars notes in our cabins (this was before the \$50 note came along). So, we all trooped off to the Bank of New South Wales in Portland and opened savings accounts.

There was even confusion as to which flag to fly – the red or the blue ensign. In fact, the concept of “Ships of Shame” (the so-called “flags of convenience”) only came about after Australia had its own Shipping Registration Act in 1981. Coincidentally, about this time the British shipping industry was on the skids as well. British shipyards were closing down, companies (like BP Tankers) were changing their registry to the Isle of Man or elsewhere and Margaret Thatcher had her picture on dartboards in every union office the length and breadth of the UK.

Source: *Shipshape February 2021*

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## ‘Flying Ship’ photographed off Cornish coast by walker.

Images of what appears to be a hovering ship have been captured as the result of a rare optical illusion off the coast of England.



David Morris took the photograph from the hamlet of Gillan, near Falmouth

David Morris took a photo of the ship near Falmouth, Cornwall.

BBC meteorologist David Braine said the "superior mirage" occurred because of "special atmospheric conditions that bend light".

He said the illusion is common in the Arctic but can appear "very rarely" in the UK during winter.

Mr Morris said he was "stunned" after capturing the picture while looking out to sea from the hamlet of Gillan

Mr Braine said: "Superior mirages occur because of the weather condition known as a temperature inversion, where cold air lies close to the sea with warmer air above it.

"Since cold air is denser than warm air, it bends light towards the eyes of someone standing on the ground or on the coast, changing how a distant object appears.

"Superior mirages can produce a few different types of images - here a distant ship appears to float high above its actual position, but sometimes an object

below the horizon can become visible."

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-56286719>

## 220 Chinese Militia Vessels Invade Philippines EEZ

By Enrico Dela Cruz (Reuters)

The Philippines expressed concern about hundreds of Chinese military vessels it said were spotted this month in the disputed South China Sea, the latest example of tension in the crucial waterway.



Some of the about 220 Chinese militia vessels reported by the Philippine Coast Guard, and believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel, are pictured anchored at Whitsun Reef, South China Sea, March 7, 2021. Picture taken March 7, 2021. Philippine Coast Guard/National Task Force-West Philippine Sea/ Handout via REUTERS.

The Philippine Coast Guard reported that some 220 vessels, believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel, were seen moored in line formation at a reef on March 7, a cross-government taskforce said late on Saturday.

Asked whether he would file a diplomatic protest over the ships' presence, Foreign minister Teodoro Locsin told a journalist on Twitter: "Only if the generals tell me. In my watch, foreign policy is the fist in the iron glove of the armed forces."

The National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea expressed concern about overfishing and destruction of the marine environment, as well as risks to safety of navigation.

China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Sunday, and calls to the Chinese embassy in Manila seeking comment went unanswered.

An international tribunal in 2016 invalidated China's claim to 90% of the South China Sea, but Beijing does not recognize the ruling. China in recent years has built islands in the disputed waters, putting air strips on some of them.

Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei all claim parts of the sea.

In January, the Philippines protested a new Chinese law allowing its coastguard to fire on foreign vessels, describing it as a "threat of war."

The United States has repeatedly denounced what it called China's attempts to bully neighbours with competing interests, while Beijing has criticized Washington for what it calls interference in its internal affairs.

The Chinese vessels were at the Julian Felipe Reef, also called Whitsun Reef, in Manila's exclusive economic zone, the task force said, describing the site as "a large boomerang-shaped shallow coral reef at the northeast of Pagkakaisa Banks and Reefs."

"Despite clear weather at the time, the Chinese vessels massed at the reef showed no actual fishing activities and had their full white lights turned on during night time," it said in a statement.

The Philippines vowed to monitor the situation and "to peacefully and proactively pursue its initiatives on environmental protection, food security and freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea.

*Related Book: Pacific: The Coming Collision of the World's Superpowers by Simon Winchester*

*(Reporting by Enrico Dela Cruz in Manila; Additional reporting by Yilei Sun and Ryan Woo in Beijing; Editing by William Mallard, Reuters)*

Source: gCaptain 2103243

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## Ode to Celestial Navigation

A tragic tale I do confess,  
 I put my faith in GPS.  
 Then one day screen went black,  
 I had no way of coming back.  
 Recalling then in my despair,  
 I heard the tale of St Hilaire,  
 Who, when he knew where he was not,  
 Could figure quickly where he'd got.  
 That's it, I cried. I am not done,  
 I'll use the Moon & Stars & Sun.  
 Like men of old I'll find my way,  
 It's history will save the day!  
 Remember back in '92  
 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.  
 He missed the east, but don't be mad.  
 The latitude is all he had.  
 Old Harrison was a crafty dude,  
 He helped us find our longitude.  
 If Shovell had that H4 clock,  
 He might have missed the Scilly rock.  
 Of course, we can't forget Neville;  
 The almanac we're using still.  
 So sailors then could find their path,  
 He made the scholars check their math.  
 Newton, Lecky, Meyer, Moore;  
 Nobles in Celestial Lore.  
 The universe in endless motion,  
 Guiding us upon the ocean.  
 Inspired thus to find my way....  
 I've Bowditch here to save the day.  
 Ok...he borrowed much from Moore  
 But all is fair in love and war.  
 Here within this volume bound,  
 The key to find your way around,  
 If, of course, you can unwind  
 The workings of Nathaniel's mind  
 Read too much this epic tome  
 You're ready for a happy home.  
 But, if you somehow find it clear,  
 You might find a course to steer.  
 Our sextant mirrors do reflect,  
 A little error we correct,  
 On or off the arc we get,  
 Our index error then is set.  
 With sextant clutched within our grip,  
 With height of eye, we find the dip.  
 Next, of course, there is refraction;  
 Bending light and its reaction.

Then, with altitude, we're done,  
 At least with planets, star or sun.  
 But for the moon we can't relax;  
 There's horizontal parallax!  
 Now, of course, we must relate  
 Our sight to what we calculate.  
 The solution here, you see in full,  
 Is calculation spherical?  
 With almanac and tables too  
 And cosine laws to see it through.  
 If we split to angles that are right,  
 Short tables solve our sextant sight.  
 With two oh eight or two four nine  
 I can create a Sumner line.  
 Poor Captain found the English coast..  
 Then CNAV turned his brain to toast?  
 With GP of the body found  
 (Transfer the zenith to the ground)  
 Then I can pick an AP spot;  
 We may be there or maybe not.  
 Finish up with pole to guide  
 The local hour angle wide.  
 Of course, to find this you must know  
 If Greenwich Time is fast or slow.  
 Three great circles now combined,  
 A triangle is thus refined.  
 A smaller circle is defined,  
 Which, of course, we call a line.  
 No real problem here, you see,  
 Preserving pure geometry,  
 Approximation is ok.  
 The tiny segment saves the day,  
 It shows an azimuth from me  
 And altitude above the sea.  
 From sextant sight we find our way  
 That is toward or away.  
 Thus ends here my tale of woe  
 Of how to figure where to go...  
 A study of the sky in motion  
 Charting me upon the ocean.  
 With sextant pointed to the sky  
 And scholars that could make me cry.  
 With mathematics in profusion,  
 At last, I reach my sad conclusion.  
 I figured out I can't be lost  
 Alone upon the ocean tossed.  
 It's home that's lost, I now do fear.  
 But I'm certain that I am right here.....  
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