

IMMIGRANT BOAT PEOPLE

This trip with this ship is fictitious.

by Radio Officer Spurgeon G. Roscoe

Note

When the Canadian government imported 25,000 Syrian refugees, in 2016, I could not help but wonder what the 137,000 Vietnamese boat people that made it to Canada were thinking. I had actually written the first two letters mentioned in this story and tore them up but I did not write the third letter to the newspaper. I felt everyone would have me booked as a nut of some description. I simply kept writing this as a novel and started with the third letter to the newspaper. I have enjoyed putting this together and trust you will find it of interest. Nearly all the incidents I mention were actual experiences with the names omitted to protect the innocent, whoever they are. Nearly all of those that I mention in this exercise crossed the bar and have been deceased for years. They all were still with us and capable of performing this run with this ship in 1978.

Chapter One

The reason

When the Vietnam War terminated in 1975 I was one of the very few people in Canada who held the highest certificate of proficiency in radio. I was told there were just three of us operating radio that held this certificate. A fourth had this certificate but did not get a chance to use it. They claim there were eleven of these certificates only issued during the ninety years this radio communications was in service in Canada. This was technically an international licence that came under the terms of the International Telecommunication Union in Geneva, Switzerland. Radio does not recognize any international boundary or any other boundary for that matter, so has to be governed by an international organization. Three of the highest certificates gives one some indication of the marine services provided in Canada when one realizes the tremendous amount of sea surrounding the country. This licence was supposed to be renewed after every convention of this international organization. It was a mere formality in Canada. The radio inspector providing this mere formality on my last certificate did not have the audacity to sign it.

Canada has sufficient material lying around in the many Moose pastures that make up the country to construct and own the finest Merchant Marine Navy the world has ever seen. The size of the Canadian Merchant Navy is so small and inefficient it is disgusting. By 1978 a friend and I had accumulated a stack of letters pointing out the various infractions made by the few Canadian ships that were able to sail outside the Great Lakes.

Vietnam had suffered from a ten year war from 1965 until 1975. The people fleeing from the communist government that had taken over Vietnam did so in any boat they could find. The television news casts in this area started showing photographs of these poor souls crammed into various boats. The people in these boats were actually from three nations; Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. A thousand United States warplanes had bombed both Cambodia and Laos in 1971. This flow of people became known by the term Vietnam Boat People and continued from 1978 until 1979, although some claim as late as 1995. No one knows how many people at least tried to flee this communist invasion. Some claim 65,000 people were executed after this war, with one million sent to prison as re-education camps. It has also been estimated 165,000 died. We mere mortals find it hard to understand these wars. They make absolutely no sense and it is amazing one group of people would do such grotesque things to their fellow man. It is a shame this old world does not have the one government and all these man made political pastures were eliminated, so one and all could travel and live where they wanted. Greed and religion will not permit such a system in our life time. I find it hard to believe greed and religion will permit it in anyone's life time. It is hard to believe a God is in charge the way some carry on.

I had managed to sail in a total of twelve ships when this boat people incident took place and knew how hard it must have been for these people to maintain any level of personal hygiene in these very over crowded boats. These people shown in the television news casts seemed to me to be very neat and clean. I felt deeply sorry for them and had I been in their shoes, so to speak, would have welcomed a rescue from any source possible. I wrote two letters to the local newspaper stating this feeling but did not forward them to the newspaper. I tore them up. Actually I was losing sleep over it so constructed a third letter and believe it or not the local newspaper published it.

At this time someone had purchased a small German passenger vessel and tried to operate it as a Love Boat registered in the Bahamas under flag of convenience. These vessels are called Cruise Ships today. Love Boat was the 1978 terminology and was taken from a television program with this title. They had financed this purchase through the government of Nova Scotia and this had failed so miserably the Nova Scotia government had recalled the loans and seized the vessel tying it up at Shelburne, Nova Scotia. It is hard to believe the Nova Scotia government acted so quickly on this mess. These things often go on for several years and for all I know this one had been in the works for years as well.

I felt that since the Nova Scotia government owned this vessel we experienced seamen, many were retired, should be allowed to take the vessel and collect some of these people. Nova Scotia is forever claiming we need more people to properly run the province. I also felt that any "wingnut" government official that wanted this vessel converted into an offshore warehouse would have an offshore warehouse in minutes. This third letter really took off and everyone and anyone got in on the replies in a big way including the local religion leaders, government officials and you name it.

One of the first seamen to contact me was a former captain friend who held a Foreign Going Master Mariners Certificate. He stated he would be willing to sail as Captain of this vessel and would help in trying to wrestle it from the Nova Scotia government. I have no idea the number of captains that I served under in those twelve ships. It seemed as though every ship I went aboard another temporary captain was relieving the permanent captain or master.

Of this number I found them all to be good shipmates, except for two. Only one scared the daylight out of us at times. This was in the Royal Canadian Navy and back then it seemed as though one who made the rank of officer simply went to the rank of Lieutenant Commander from time in, as in the number of years they had been an officer. Probably the easiest way to get over the Lieutenant Commander bar was to marry the ugliest daughter of some admiral and let him drag them over. It appeared that part of an officers experience was to act as captain of one of the ships at a certain level. This officer was one heck of a nice guy but my God he knew nothing about sailing a ship and had absolutely no natural talent in that area. It is a wonder he had not killed someone or sunk the ship. Unfortunately the captain he relieved was one of the best. That captain had handled the ship like a hot rod car. We zipped in and out of port and we were always at the top of the efficiency ratings in any naval exercise. We had two writers as members of the crew; an administrative writer and a pay writer. It was the administrative writer's job to go to the wheelhouse and record the various orders given for the various moves to enter and leave port. The writer then typed up this record and held it on file. We had seen him record this record on his cigarette package, there were so few movements to record.

When this new captain came on board we soon realized the administrative writer was getting snowed under with orders and had to get the pay writer to run to the wheelhouse and give him a hand in this record keeping process. This captain actually had the ship crosswise the harbour in Hamilton, Bermuda; to the point the admiral on shore had his signalman flashing nasty notes to one of our signalman via signal light.

We were entering our home port one day when we met an empty cargo ship coming out. I guess this captain felt he was navy, a warship and he had the right of way. It was one scary feeling looking up at a forty foot wall of steel bearing down on us in a small navy frigate. He wrote several letters, apparently, concerning this but we have no idea what reply he received.

We were sailing down along the coast one night when he nearly dragged a fishing vessel down our side. One can only imagine the feeling among the fishermen in that vessel. We had a system in those days where the single men stood watch in our home port leaving the married men to spend time with their families. The married men stood watch in the foreign ports giving us single men a chance to look the port over. I was the ships jeep driver and when in home port I would go to the message center in the admiralty building and collect any messages for the ship each evening. On the way up I would leave an order for fish and chips at our favourite fish and chip restaurant. I would go to the fish and chip shop and collect the order on the way back then go to a local tavern and give anyone a lift back on board that wanted one. This one evening one of our large engineers was in there commencing to put back more than his share of beer. I told him we were sailing early in the morning; he knew it and had better come back with me. He insisted we were not sailing and to have a beer before I went back. I told him he was crazy and carried on back to the ship. Shortly after we sailed there was one heck of a wham and I peeked out to see what was going on. All I could see was steam because number two boiler had blown. I will always believe the engineers had something to do with this because they were as fed up with this captain as the rest of us.

We had to turn around and go back into port. As we came alongside the captain asked for full astern both and then realized we did not have both. We hit the jetty so hard we put a hole in our bow and had pieces of the jetty floating around the ship when I took a second peek. The navy then sent us right to a shipyard that pulled us up on one of the slips. I left the ship at that point and I was certainly glad to see the end of my experience under his command. That ship disappeared from the efficiency ratings under his command.

I really do not know how to describe the other captain other than he was probably plain stupid. He was a merchant ship captain and not navy. This one did so many queer things that those who knew started making up stories. At times the stories were plain crazy but one could believe them all and it reached a point where one did not know the story from the actual fact.

They claim this is actual fact but I find it hard to believe although I had visited Saint John, New Brunswick in these ships. The Admiral Beatty Hotel is a landmark of the city of Saint John. This captain docked his ship in Saint John and after everything had been taken care of he decided to go ashore. He walked down the gangway of his ship and over to a taxi waiting nearby. He climbed into the back seat of the taxi and when he closed the taxi door the taxi driver looked around and said "Admiral Beatty Sir?" This captain replied "No Sir. Captain of that ship, did you think you knew me?" He apparently related this story to one and all.

When this captain went into home port he usually had a good number of replacements within his crew, a good indication his was not a happy ship. After a fairly large crew change he had on board one individual that planned to "goof off" more than work. This individual went looking for a place to hide and managed to get into one of the large storage bins under one of the lifeboats without being seen. There was an assortment of junk in this bin including some old canvas. This individual soon fell asleep and it was not long before they noticed him missing. The captain was advised and he turned the ship immediately and started back over the wake thinking this character may have fallen overboard. The captain had the radio officer notify the coast guard who dispatched one of their cutters to help search.

One of the sister ships in this fleet was coming up to the area and had heard all this radio activity and called the ship giving their estimated time of arrival in the area in order to help in this search. There were a number of father son relationships and a number of brothers sailing in this fleet and the sister ship asked who was missing so he could advise his crew.

The radio officer did not know who was missing, but passed this information on to the captain and casually asked who was missing. The captain swung round and said to tell them to never mind his name. If they see a man in the water to pick him up. No doubt the radio officer in the sister ship understood that answer.

After a while this character woke up and climbed out of the storage bin. The first seaman he met told him they were looking for him and he better get up to the bridge and report to the captain. He went to the bridge and asked the captain if they were looking for him. The captain said no, damn it, I wanted to see you in the water.

This is actual fact. When I was on duty in the radio room this captain came in and simply said that the ship's main station was not as good as his radiotelephone in the chart room. God knows what brought this on. Someone had made a simple chart and taped it to the radio room bulkhead showing the rough settings in tuning the main station. I have no idea why this chart was there or who made it but probably one of the radio officers to pacify this captain.

When he made this remark about the difference in stations I simply told him I found it hard to believe because the main station had the big beautiful antenna and three times the power output. He then went to this chart and stated that it needed to be upgraded. I simply told him that the changes in weather would make a bigger difference than redoing that chart. It was simply a rough idea where to set the transmitter and continue to tune from that point. He would not give up, and when he mentioned the difference in the stations again, I simply said maybe your radio officer did not get it tuned properly. At that he said he tuned it himself. I immediately left the radio room. After a couple of hours I had cooled off and went looking for him. I found him in his office and simply walked in and told him when the ship reached shore he would need a radio officer because I was going home.

I went home after taking the time to tell the office if they put me on board with that stupid bastard again one of us would go off the wing of the bridge and I can guarantee the one it will not be. Believe it or not this captain had tremendous sailing ability and was a good ship handler. A new officer was on board about two weeks when this captain would brag to this new officer about the fact he obtained his masters certificate by giving the licencing inspector a case of hard liquor. By that time one knew it was the only way he could pass the examination for such a licence. After that episode I went aboard a sister ship and after a while this captain asked his chief mate if he knew my location. When the captain was told he made a point of apologizing to the office.

A year or so after this incident the office asked me to make a quick trip south and go aboard his ship again and told me that he was not there. I agreed and made a point of making them promise that he would have a radio officer with him when he returned to his ship. We were in Mobile, Alabama, when the captain came back on board and of course without a radio officer. Oh well, a quick trip to Jamaica and back should not kill me and at least everyone knows how things are. This captain left me completely alone and was the finest kind to sail with. When we returned and I was paid off and sent home he followed me down the gangway and kept making me promise to come again and serve with him. I felt he was going to kiss me good bye but I did not see him again.

Every so often the captain of a ship has to phone the head office for one thing or another and often when something happens to disrupt the routine. When this captain phoned under such circumstances it was always I did this, I did that, until whatever it was that went wrong. After that it was we did this, we did that, and so on. He was something else and left a good many of us with these memories. At least anyone who knew him knew it would be no trouble to become a Canadian captain if one wanted it that bad.

The way this captain treated the black people down south was just plain and simply disgusting. I witnessed that a couple of times. No wonder there is so much complaint about racism with animals like that wandering around.

I believe the most dangerous cargo a ship can haul is wheat. It is even more dangerous than high octane gasoline. Wheat will run like water and for that reason if it is not a full cargo it has to be held in with planks called dunnage to keep it from running when the ship rolls. If it is a full cargo the ship has to be full and once the cargo hatches are full they are closed and the inspection hatches opened and wheat filled into them as well. The added feature that makes wheat so dangerous is if it gets wet it will swell and this can cause a seam or something like that to burst and cause the ship to take on water to the point it will sink.

We were taking on a full cargo of wheat with this captain at Mobile, Alabama one time. I had eaten my dinner and came out on deck to go forward to my cabin. A large black man as big, if not bigger than I am was filling the inspection hatches with this wheat. I was just going to go down on the deck and have a chat with him when I noticed the captain coming down the cat walk. There is nothing like a chat with a man who is working and trying to scrape up three square meals a day and feed a wife and family. One can learn a lot about the native people that way. When I noticed the captain coming I simply waited for him to come back off the cat walk before I went down. When the captain got abreast of this large black man I could not believe it. The captain looked up at me and said loud and clear for all to hear; "Sparks, these niggers are going to fuck around here to the point we will not get out of here at 4 PM". I really did not know what to do. The black man dropped his broom and swung his arms around. I looked at him and tried to convey the point he was welcome to throw the captain overboard if he wanted. He would get no trouble from me and I am sure he could have done it with one hand. This large black man simply picked up his broom and went back to work. He was definitely a real gentleman compared to this captain at least. I walked over to the cat walk on the other side of the ship and went forward to my cabin. That was by far the most disgusting thing I ever heard one human being tell another.

Another time, most if not all of the officers were simply relieving on this captain's ship. In other words we all were moon lighting from our permanent position in another ship. We were in bound to Kingston, Jamaica. Each port was different in that they required different paper work and a different routine for entering and leaving port. The United States was the only place I visited where each crewmember had to be seen by the immigration officer. Going into Kingston we had to file different papers and radio in some coded messages in order to get a clearance to enter the port. I had been in and out of Kingston enough to know exactly what was required and had transmitted all the required messages. Kingston radio kept telling me they had no messages for me when I tried to get the answers to these reports. At one point the radio operator at Kingston radio asked me to switch to an amateur radio frequency in the 80-meter band. I knew then that something was not right but what can I do? So I simply started a letter to the ship's radio accounting authority explaining it all in detail.

I had this letter nearly complete when the relief captain came in and asked me what I was doing. I handed the letter to him and when he read it he asked if he could have it and use it in his correspondence. He said he would appreciate it if I kept the accounting authority out of it, but he was

having more or less the same trouble and wanted to use it with his correspondence. It was quite a relief actually because I did not know how I was going to explain to him that I could not get the required clearances from Kingston radio.

We were light, in water ballast with no cargo when we came up to the approaches of Kingston harbour. I went up on the bridge with the captain who could not contact a pilot. I think we did three complete circles off the mouth of the harbour. It was another experience and the ship rolled and rolled as we went across that continual easterly swell in the Caribbean Sea.

I called Kingston radio on the VHF radiotelephone for a radio check and he stated I was loud and clear. Once we completed the third circle the captain told me to give a security call on channel 16 the VHF distress and calling frequency and see if any ship was outbound; we were going in. Well, this was the first time I had the opportunity to make that transmission and did it by the book, just like all the coast stations did it. There was no answer and we could see no one coming out on the radar, it was at night and quite dark. After a few minutes the captain asked me to do it again but just a simple security call and not all that lengthy transmission I had made. I told the captain this was my first chance to make such a call and wanted to do it by the book. I simply made the second call as he wished a simple security call asking if any ship was on the way out. No one answered me and I think we made that call once more as we went into Kingston harbour.

When we arrived at our loading dock half of Kingston was waiting for us. The first man who came aboard wanted to know who was captain and when I told him and gave him a copy of the crew list he apologized and said they were waiting for the permanent captain. God knows what that stupid bastard had done and he died of old age but I have no idea how he managed that feat. We loaded a full cargo and departed. As soon as we cleared the harbour I called Kingston radio and received all the messages I should have received before we went in.

Another big break from my third letter to the newspaper regarding the boat people was when a former chief engineer friend volunteered to sail as the chief engineer. This chief and I had sailed together several times and the last was a run from Jamaica to New Orleans. The regular radio officer and chief were flown to New Orleans and he and I were paid off and flown home.

This chief was a German citizen and had immigrated to Canada, obtained his Canadian certificates and had worked his way up to chief. He was a wonderful gentleman. When he and I left the ship in New Orleans the junior engineers told me to make sure I checked him for a screwdriver when we boarded the airplane or he would take the plane apart to show us how it worked. He had been in the habit of doing this with the junior engineers. One could not purchase an education like that for any junior engineer.

The big thing, for me at least with this chief, was the fact he was originally German, this ship was German and all her papers and publications were German. If I had any trouble with her radio, electronics and navigational aids he would be able to translate these documents in order to give me some instruction or idea on restoring any defect in this equipment.

All we needed was a skeleton crew to take this vessel to these boat people. We could take along the necessary food, mainly rice for the boat people and they could do their own cooking and so on once on board. No doubt some would have ship handling experience and be an asset on the return voyage.

Chapter Two

Getting Ready

Things were looking up and going well so now let's see if it were possible to wrestle this vessel from the Nova Scotia government. The captain, chief engineer and I made a written request and managed to find experienced help in these matters to make this request.

The two main points in getting the vessel and getting it ready for sea were that we wanted it registered in Canada as a yacht. This would eliminate a lot of red tape, paper work and what have you in bringing on board as many boat people we felt the voyage could safely handle. The other thing is that it would eliminate any union that felt it should be in charge. One of our experienced captains involved had experience with this item. He commanded a ship registered as a Canadian yacht and the owners felt it should have a union crew, and insisted on sending this union crew on board. As this crew boarded the ship the captain sent each member aloft to slap the truck of the main mast. The truck of a mast is the highest point on the mast. Just one of these crew members managed to achieve this feat so this captain told this company to get this crew out of here and let him hire his own crew.

It was unbelievable, but the Nova Scotia government officials agreed to this and registered the vessel as a yacht. Not only that they registered it in Nova Scotia and had the yacht named Nova Scotia. Usually any vessel registered in Nova Scotia has the stupid habit of placing N.S. after the vessels port of registry on the stern. This N.S. is not required and as I say is stupid. It apparently indicates the port of registry is in Nova Scotia but if they wanted the province mentioned it should be spelled out; Nova Scotia so one and all know exactly what it stands for. N.S. means absolutely nothing to anyone and can be twisted around to mean most anything. Naval ship is just one of them.

This was really and truly unreal. The yacht simply had the port of registry, Halifax on her stern. This meant it was registered in Canada and we would be able to fly a large Canadian flag when collecting the boat people. The new Canadian maple leaf flag was thirteen years old at this time and it would be an excellent time to show it off. Each and every one of us could record any number of experiences against a union crew and we would have no time to entertain any small grievance if it took place.

For example, we were at anchor awaiting our berth to discharge our cargo at Baltimore one time. It was the radio officer's responsibility to type up a United States Immigration card known as a 401 for each and every crewmember when a ship entered the United States back then, and it was the radio officer's job to have each and every crewmember report to the immigration officer that came on board for this inspection. All radio officers were known as sparks since Mr. Marconi had installed the first transmitters that were spark and emitted sparks when in use. This immigration officer said to me "Sparks, what is the difference between you guys and the ship at anchor behind you? You guys are in and out of here continually and we have no trouble at all, but half that crew back there will be in jail tonight." It was a

Canadian ship and I simply said "it has a union crew. Our ships are known as flag of convenience and are not registered in Canada but have mainly Canadian crews. They tolerate no foolishness on these ships and they are very good ships to sail in. When we returned home one time our captain wanted a certain crewmember replaced and when the office asked him why he simply replied "I do not like the looks of the bastard". Nothing more was said and the crewmember was replaced. This would be impossible in a union ship. But such incidents keep our ships in top shape."

There are a number of incidents that took place over the years where a fleet of Canadian registered ships were created and were soon gone. The ships that made up these fleets did not last long enough for half of them to get registered in the international publications so necessary for the proper operation of any fleet. The strikes the unions applied to these fleets have not been settled to this day. One Canadian ship owner I know of had a union attempt to take over his ship and he simply hooked a tug to it, declared it a derelict and towed it away. A union with a reason would be a real asset but I have never been able to understand the damage they have managed over the years. I have never seen anything that would indicate a union would be an asset in any way either.

The crew we required or most of it was soon hired to go get these boat people. As soon as we had sufficient crewmembers we went to Shelburne and brought the ship to Halifax for a quick refit and the loading of the necessary stores and supplies. This gave the chief engineer and his engineers a chance to check everything thoroughly and identify anything that appeared to need attention.

Shelburne Harbour is a nice deep long harbour and we came out the Eastern Way, east of McNutts Island. We spent a day and a half on this move and spent it checking everything. I liked the radio room. It was filled with the equipment from Telefunken the great German marine radio company. The components were spread out around the radio room and attached to the bulkheads in their own metal cabinet and not all crammed in the one large cabinet like so many marine radio stations of the day. I did not mind the American stations but the British stations worked well when the weather was good but were hard to maintain. One had to get a seaman or two in the radio room to help remove some of the components for inspection or servicing whereas the American equipment simply folded down and locked down. The British stations refused to work when we were iced up and I found that dangerous. We iced up so bad while with one British station that we had to turn the ship around and back into the seas for a while to help beat the ice off. I had no way to contact anyone at the time because of this icing. The overload relay simply kicked in and would not permit the operation of the main transmitter.

Another time we were iced up and I asked the captain to sail in close to a coast station with a very high frequency radio capability. Our very high frequency radio antenna was high on the mast and was not affected from this icing. I told the captain I would pass our weather observations we had on file via that station then if anything happened they would know that we had passed that station. The American ship stations always worked with severe icing but it certainly threw the tuning out of whack.

The one thing about each component in its own cabinet mounted separately around the radio room meant that all the emergency radio equipment was mounted off out of the way. When everything was in the one large cabinet it meant all this equipment was there and in the way. I feel confident many

radio officers would not agree with me but so be it. The radio station that impressed me the most was a Russian radio station in a small 3500 ton Russian freighter. When one set in the operating position even the transmitter meters were tilted so one could keep an eye on things while operating. The large transmitter was to ones right and two receivers were on the operating position. The rest of the equipment in the radio room was off on another table making an excellent layout.

Our new to us ship went into refit and had her new name mounted on her bows and stern. We, the crew, did not know the politics that were in place to make this voyage possible with the Nova Scotia government. We did not know how much work was in place nor needed to make this voyage possible and there could have been some of the management left over from the Love Boat episode that helped to make this refit as fast as possible. This ship was not repainted; her colours remained the same, all white and simply touched up where necessary. The ship was not taken out of the water so management must have had sufficient information to know that was not necessary. We had the ship alongside the Halifax Shipyards and a group of men from the Halifax Shipyards came on board and went to work.

Another item of interest with this ship registered in Canada was the fact I could register my amateur radio station and take that with me. This was a Canadian thing and the only nation in the world that issued a special radio call sign to an amateur station fitted in one of their vessels. This was first permitted twenty-four years before this in 1954. We would have to be very low key with this amateur station that was permitted in international waters only. We would have to keep rather quiet until after the boat people were on board because we did not know what we would find on our visit to the South China Sea.

Once the crew was in place it was decided that we should be issued uniforms in order for the boat people to know each crew member when seen. How they managed to get this feat accomplished in such a short time was a complete mystery.

The crew was down sized as much as possible and there would be no fancy members one found in a regular passenger vessel. All the fancy fittings such as chairs, piano, sofas and the like were moved ashore and as many bunks, mattresses and life vests that could be found were placed on board. At least we were given as much of this material that it was felt we could handle or would need. The chief mate and second engineer would be kept busy with a few seamen fitting and installing all this equipment that came on board on our way out to the boat people. The ship had a good size cargo hold and that would be converted into one large dormitory.

The officers in the crew consisted of the captain, four mates, the chief engineer, four engineers, chief steward, two pursers, a doctor and little ole me as radio officer. The reason for the four mates and four engineers made it possible for the chief mate and second engineer to do day work and ready the ship for come what may. This meant three watch keeping mates and three watch keeping engineers. This also meant the chief mate and second engineer could keep things running smoothly after we found the boat people and had them safely on board.

Each officer was issued a navy blue uniform including a navy blue officer's cap. There had to be a few seamstresses burning the mid night oil in order to get that amount of clothing purchased, constructed

and ready in such a short time period. In addition to this the engine room oiler ratings, engineers and seamen were each issued two suits of white coveralls with the ships name painted on their backs. The mates and seamen were also issued with a heavy jacket for foul weather. The seamen consisted of a bosun and six seamen.

The officer uniforms were rather nice actually and we were assigned the colours to indicate our trade. This colour scheme was just becoming obsolete for some strange reason. A lot of companies, especially the cruise ships of today issue uniforms with their own rank structure. Some of these ranks are issued some weird and wonderful gold braid that makes no sense to anyone. The chief steward had two cooks and two messmen. The cooks were known as the chief cook and second cook. There was a messman for the officers and one for the crew who ate in separate dining halls.

The officer and passenger dining salon was gutted and all the tables, chairs, and so on were moved ashore. All of these furnishings were replaced with four long tables and standard chairs to sit on in order to accommodate as many as possible. The chairs would not be the best in bad weather but should work well when the weather was not too bad. We officers would be able to eat there with the boat people if we wanted although the officers' messman could bring your meal to you where you wanted. The boat people would be able to eat there or with the crew in the crew's dining area. There should be so many that just about anywhere would do on the return voyage. The cook and second cook cooked for the Canadian crew and the boat people would have their own cooks.

Our officer's uniforms were issued straight gold lace with no curves, waves, rings or diamonds. The diamonds were part of the British and British Commonwealth Merchant Navy uniform rank structure that indicated the officer had a proper certificate of competency. The captain and mates had no colour under their gold rings. The engineers had maroon under their rings. The chief steward and pursers wore white under their gold rings. The doctor wore bright red under his gold rings and mine had the standard green of a radio officer. The two navy blue uniforms were the standard navy blue naval uniform that had been in service for years. They were probably purchased from a company that made these uniforms and had a readymade supply. Either that or they were left over from the Royal Canadian Navy that had ceased to exist ten years before this.

Each officer was issued two white short sleeved shirts. These shirts were probably mass produced and ready available off the rack. The reason they were available so fast. Each white shirt had a white strap on each shoulder. A seamstress could take a piece of navy or black material just as long and wide as necessary. The size was common to each shirt. She would then sew on the necessary gold braid placing the necessary colour under the gold braid. After that she would fold it over and sew it together making a sleeve that simply slid over the strap on the shoulder of the shirt and this became an epaulet. Each officer was issued one navy blue necktie. One wore the shirt and ties with the navy blue uniform and could wear the shirt open at the neck when not wearing the uniform jacket. With these shirts ones rank and trade was still shown or worn when the jacket was removed. This was a lot like the system in use by airline crews today.

There was simply a small strip of colour on each side of the gold ring on the navy blue shoulder sleeve and the same on the navy blue uniform at the cuff of the jacket. This small strip of colour appeared at the top and on the bottom of the gold ring. When there was more than one gold ring; the area between each ring was solid colour. The cap badge on each cap was the Nova Scotia flag boarded by oak leaf clusters. It was a nice looking badge especially on the navy blue officers' cap and was the standard badge that was worn by so many back then. This was probably mass produced as well and the small Nova Scotia flag was simply sewn on the badge between the oak leaves.

The Nova Scotia flag was a banner created in 1858 of the coat of arms of Nova Scotia and had been granted to the Scottish colony by Charles I, in 1625. It had been in use since 1858 and is still the flag of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is Latin for New Scotland and the flag is the reverse of the flag of Scotland. The flag of Scotland is blue with a white cross and the Nova Scotia flag is white with a blue cross. The Nova Scotia flag has the addition of the royal arms of Scotland in the center of the flag. The French people of the province of Quebec are allergic to Latin. They insist on calling Nova Scotia Nouvelle-Ecosse, the French translation of New Scotland in Scottish Gaelic. This has some people infuriated but what the heck, if it pacifies the Quebec French so be it.

The senior purser in our crew was a fairly good artist and he drew a coloured sketch of our rank structure and had each rank described in Vietnamese. He had this posted on the main notice board. The senior purser was a former citizen of Vietnam. The two, the captain and chief engineer were the only two that wore four gold rings. The chief mate, second engineer, chief steward, doctor and I wore three gold rings. I was issued three having passed the first, second and third certificates; the highest a radio officer could go. I could not find a course in Canada for the first class certificate, the highest, so obtained this certificate via a course from the United States. Those who wore two gold rings were the second mate, third engineer and senior purser. The rest of the junior officers simply wore one gold ring but each department had the colour or non-colour included under the ring. It was a very nice uniform and pretty well on the same structure that had been in service for years with the merchant navies of Britain and the British Commonwealth.

The doctor's bright red under the gold was very impressive. The doctor was an Acadian Frenchman who was nearing retirement age and was on board, like the majority of us, to simply give these poor souls a helping hand or leg up on life. His roots went back to the expulsion of the French Acadian's from Nova Scotia way back in 1755 and this may have influenced him to join this crew. There were actually two more officers of this crew that were Acadian. The second mate or more commonly referred to as the navigating officer with years of experience and from one of the Acadian villages found in Nova Scotia. It was the second mate's job to insure all charts and publications necessary for the voyage were on board, corrected and up to date. He also had the charts stowed in the drawers under the chart table so that when we sailed off one chart, whoever was on duty simply replaced it with the next chart, and so on as the voyage progressed.

These charts were available in Halifax and were rented from a certain stationary office that kept them and kept them corrected and up to date. We carried a complete set so that we could sail around the world by going in one direction and once loaded carry on and come back via the same direction.

The chief mate was a friend of the captain who held a master foreign going certificate like the captain. He was an excellent chief mate and of course the captain knew this and the reason he was on board.

The second mate held a second mates foreign going certificate with a home trade masters endorsement. He had a lot of experience, as mentioned, as the captain of small vessels both around our coast and going deep sea as they call it in smaller vessels. He often had his wife at sea with him and at one time they sailed a small ship that was named for his wife. He had taught her celestial navigation to the point she could take a sight as good as the best of them he claimed.

Skipper Bill was our third mate. That should read Skipper Bill and his button accordion were our third mate. Skipper Bill was making quite a name for himself as the captain of the Nova Scotia tug boats and had taken up playing the button accordion as a pastime. His certificate was the same as the second mates.

The second mate stood the chief mates watch; the four to eight. Four in the morning to eight in the morning and four in the afternoon to eight in the evening and that watch was normally the chief mates watch but we needed the chief mate for day work. The third mate stood the twelve to four that was normally the second mates watch. This was twelve at night to four in the morning and noon until four in the afternoon. The fourth mate stood the captain's watch; eight to twelve in both the morning and the evening. This meant the most junior mate was on duty during the time the captain would be around but in this case the captain was needed for day work with the chief mate.

Our fourth mate was a new man fresh from navigation school with a mate's certificate but had several years' sea experience as a seaman. One required a few years' experience as a seaman in order to attend navigation school.

The normal routine, licence style or whatever the terminology was the one holding the licence below was to be qualified to take over the rank, licence or whatever of the one just above them. This meant the chief mate was qualified to take over for the captain should he be unable to continue as captain, the second mate to take over for the chief mate, and so on down the chain of command. This same system or whatever it was known as applied to everyone in the ship. The second cook takes over for the chief cook; the chief cook takes over for the chief steward, and the same down the ranks of the engineers. On one run our chief cook had to have an airlift into a hospital ashore one time and this meant the second cook moved up and finished the run alone. A messman was not capable to act as second cook on that trip.

It did not take someone long to realize one of the seamen had brought along his guitar and he and skipper Bill soon had a welcome get together. There is nothing like homemade music to brighten up a day and these two spent a lot of time together. Their music, mostly old time waltzes seemed to have improved every time one heard it. They claim practice makes perfect and this appeared to be the case here.

One of the junior engineers was also Acadian from another village so needless to say, the doctor, second mate and the junior engineer would often be found together talking in their brand of French. Their

brand of French was quite pronounced, I am told, similar to the brand of English one hears in the southern United States compared to our English. The difference in the French may be more pronounced than the difference in the English.

I will never forget the evening I was on duty in an ore carrier. I happened to notice our chief engineer coming out of the captain's office. Our captain was Acadian and our chief French from the French islands of St. Pierre et Miquelon. They were two more great shipmates that I enjoyed sailing with. The chief was about my age and when he went past the radio room door I simply said "In the shit again Chief?" He stopped and then came in the radio room put his arm around me and whispered to me "Sparky. De Old Man, I wish he would talk to me in da English. His French she be God awful". I simply chuckled and said "that is what I hear" and I have had a good giggle over that for years.

The doctor spent his time organizing a good supply of medical supplies in his sick bay or small hospital. He had brought on board several books that described the various ailments one found among the people of Vietnam and the surrounding area. The doctor spent a lot of time studying these books with hopes of learning how to recognize any strange ailment he might spot among the boat people.

While we were getting ready a senior member of the CAF – Canadian Armed Forces came on board and told us his counterpart on the west coast had orders to send two destroyers to the South China Sea to give us a hand in finding the boat people and help get them on board. We gave him instruction on what we planned to do especially in communications so that he could pass it along to these two destroyers. We also wondered what or who had instigated this. It must have been someone who felt that any boat people we managed to bring to Nova Scotia would soon leave Nova Scotia for the other parts of Canada and therefore the Canadian government should be involved. No one asked any questions and we all felt it would be a big help to have these destroyers meet us. It would also give the destroyer crews an exercise to remember. So we did not look a gift horse in the mouth, so to speak, and ask any questions.

It was some time after this we learned that anyone applying for Canadian citizenship could not be held in any one area of Canada. I believe it was the time one became a landed Canadian immigrant on their way up the ladder to citizenship. Once they reached that level and higher Nova Scotia could not hold these boat people in Nova Scotia. They could move to any place in Canada; British Columbia, Labrador, Yukon, anywhere they wanted to go. Nova Scotia could only encourage any boat people we brought back to remain in Nova Scotia. This must have been the reason for the generous offer of the two destroyers to help.

We were ready to sail after the two week refit and it was truly amazing it was completed in two weeks. They felt we might save as much as a week of steaming by going via the Suez Canal rather than the Panama Canal, so Suez it was.

Chapter Three

The Voyage Out

The captain stopped by the radio room and asked if I was ready and said we would sail as soon as all indicated we were ready to go. Some of the requisitioned stores by the chief steward had not arrived. They arrived around noon and as soon as they were on board we cast off our lines, backed out in the stream, sailed down past George's Island, McNabs Island and on out to the Chebucto Head pilot station.

There were very few people on the dock to see us off. The few that were there to witness this sailing were mainly the families of various crewmembers and a few who happened to be passing by. The provincial newspaper had a small description of our leaving in the next day's issue and that is about all the notice our sailing received.

A few of the captains in this area also hold proper pilot certificates along with their master mariners certificate. Unfortunately this captain did not hold a pilot certificate so we had on board a pilot from the Halifax Pilotage Authority. He had been on board for a short time before the last minute stores arrived. We transferred this pilot into the pilot boat waiting at Chebucto Head. As soon as he was safely off the captain replaced the helmsman with Iron Mike, the pet name we had given the automatic pilot. The captain set the engines so they turned the propellers at the proper revolutions to provide our most economical speed via the engine "joy sticks" located on the bridge. A large instrument mounted on the deck head of the bridge indicated the revolutions each propeller was turning and was visible from all areas of the bridge.

The ship was equipped with two 8050 brake horsepower "main movers" or main engines. These were manufactured by the Masch Augsburg-Nuemburg Company of Germany and we knew them by the acronym MAN. They were a popular engine and probably still are. These engines were controlled by "joy sticks", a simple brass lever about one foot high located in three separate positions on the bridge. One was on the left or port side of the bridge, one on the right or starboard side of the bridge and the other amidships or the center of the bridge making it convenient for those on the bridge. Actually there were two sticks at each position one for each engine. Pushing this stick full forward set the engine at full speed ahead and pushing it full aft set the engine at full speed astern and of course setting it somewhere in between the two positions meant the engine was set at some speed in between full and stopped. The engine was stopped when the "joy stick" was straight up and down. The ship had two fixed pitch propellers, one coupled to each engine and this made the ship more maneuverable than a single propeller.

Every ship is given a chart after it has been built and passes their first sea trial that indicates the number of revolutions on the engines to turn the propeller or propellers at the most economical speed for cruising.

Once the pilot was clear the captain also phoned the engine room and told the chief engineer we were clear and he could stand down leaving the duty engineer and oiler to go about their duties. They simply kept an eye on the gauges to make sure all was as all should be. The chief engineer was always at the engine controls in the engine room when entering and leaving harbour. We were on a mission and it was not going to be any pleasure cruise.

Shortly after we cleared the harbour I called the Halifax radio station, the largest radio station in Canada at the time, the Boston Coast Guard radio station and the large British radio station with a short service message stating who and what we were about. I told them we had a doctor on board, if they heard anything on any Vietnamese boat people to please pass it on and that I would be monitoring their stations for any messages. I also asked Halifax to please pass along our position and request to the west coast navy. I knew the United States Coast Guard would alert all their radio stations including those on the west coast. I also called the two large American coast stations on the east coast just to give them the ships name, call sign and radio accounting authority for their records. The international community just created a system of two letters, two digit codes to signify the authority handling the radio accounts for each and every ship. This was such an efficient system it should have been established years before this. Prior to this code system one had only the International Telecommunication Union List of Ship Stations to go by, either that or ask the ship directly and that took time and was an inconvenience.

The weather was fairly good outside the harbour and we steamed along nicely. We did not see the Russian fishing trawlers that we had seen a few years prior to this because Canada was in the process of extending its economic fishing zone out 200 miles. We were running back to Nova Scotia from the West Indies a few years prior to this and when we went across Georges Bank we put the old pathfinder radar up on the 40-mile range and counted 128 Russian fishing trawlers. Most were fishing but some were large factory trawlers. The factory trawlers had as many as four fishing vessels alongside, two on each side discharging their catch into the factory vessel. At night all the lights from these fishing vessels made it look like we were sailing into a large city, but the thing that attracted my attention was the fact there were no seagulls around these vessels. They were taking everything back to Russia that they caught whereas when one met a small Canadian or American vessel they all had a cloud of seagulls around them catching the fish scraps thrown overboard.

The morning after we sailed the weather had changed around Sable Island that required Iron Mike to be switched off and a seaman as helmsman at the wheel to make the ship more comfortable. There was no need to wear out or wreck the equipment. The ship handled well through this bit of weather. She was a credit to her German engineers and a very good vessel to be sailing in.

I kept checking all the electronics, communication and navigational aid equipment. The port radar did not appear to be as good as it could be and I mentioned this to the captain. He said he had noticed that but was not going to ask me to look at it after the experience we had a couple years prior to this. He said he could live with it the way it was acting.

A couple of years before this I had spent a couple of days cleaning and adjusting, although I knew better, the radar for him. I told him then that when things like this were working one should leave them alone. I was very pleased with the end result of that undertaking and the captain was excited on the outcome claiming he had been in the ship eight years and the radar had never worked that well. When I had finished we went into a port and loaded a cargo at night. The next morning when I walked out on the bridge this radar was shut down cold. When I asked the captain about it he said that they had tried to take a fix on their position with it going into port last evening and the radar went up in smoke. He said they did not tell me for fear I would jump ship and leave them while in port. I spent some more time on

this radar but managed to get a target on the three mile range only. When we docked in New York we had a technician come on board to see what he could manage. He stated he did not know how I managed to get anything on the three mile range and removed a complete section of the radar. He took this section up to his technical workshop where he could work on it properly.

I felt I knew what and where the problem was located with this current radar but to be safe I took the German manual on the radar down to the chief engineer the next morning. After breakfast the chief engineer translated the description of the radar in the area I felt was the problem in English to me. I was more convinced than ever after that and knew I had the spares to replace those components. Once I replaced those components the radar worked and worked well for the rest of the voyage.

I had sailed with this captain quite a lot and he was another good shipmate, good friend and good ship handler. I will never forget the time a few years before this when we were running down the C & D; the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal making for the open Atlantic Ocean. We had discharged our cargo at Baltimore, Maryland. It was supper time on a beautiful summer evening. I had gone to the bridge and there was just the captain, the United States Pilot and I on the bridge. The captain had relieved the duty mate who was down having his supper. It was one of those beautiful summer evenings with all the doors on the bridge open, not a ripple on the water, Iron Mike was on and we three simply stood at the front of the bridge looking down at Delaware Bay lost in our thoughts. No one said anything. After a while the pilot swung around looked at the captain and said "Cap, what is the best thing you all have seen in all your years at sea?" The captain did not bat an eye, did not move, kept looking at the water and answered the question immediately with: "My living room ceiling at home from my chesterfield." It was funny at the time but I must admit he was accurate because I have never seen a better sight.

After a day of the weather around Sable Island the weather improved nicely, the helmsman was replaced with Iron Mike and we were steaming very comfortably indeed. If the ship was pushed to her limit she should have managed nearly 480 nautical miles in one day or 24-hour period of steaming. She was kept down and did a respectable 340 to 360 nautical mile run in a 24-hour period.

Skipper Bill and Seaman Ben kept us entertained with their music as we rolled along towards Gibraltar as much as possible. Like I say, there is nothing like homebrewed music at a time like this and as these two kept at it they became as good as the Doiron Brothers, Lorenzo on Button Accordion and Alyre on guitar. The Doiron Brothers are Acadian from New Brunswick and one cannot help but dance or tap their feet to their music. One wonders if they realize how lucky they are to be that musical. Lorenzo seems to play most any instrument; button accordion, guitar and mandolin are the three I have seen him play, and play all three well.

The captain had me file an AMVER report. This was an automatic reporting system with the United States Coast Guard so that in case of an emergency they would know what ship was in any area and what was on board the ship. It was a volunteer system and several captains I had sailed with could not be bothered filing a report. This was my first experience sailing with a doctor and meant I had to keep an ear on the radio for the signal wanting to know if a doctor was on board.

We radio operators communicated mainly with three letter codes in radiotelegraph even when talking to a friend. These three letter codes were such that we could have solid communications with anyone whether they did not speak your language or you did not speak theirs.

We also filed weather observation reports, the standard report consisting of a couple of lines of coded figures. I liked these reports and transmitted everyone I was given. The Canadian Atmospheric Environment Service presented the ones sending in the most reports with a nice book. I have several and one is an excellent large dictionary one would never get around to purchasing. I'll never forget the time a few years before this that I transmitted a weather observation and the operator in a sister ship gave me a quick snap and told me that report had our position fixed in downtown Hartford, Connecticut. He was probably interested in it to see the weather that was in our position. I simply said be quiet we have swung in for a cool six pack on our way north. There was no point in trying to correct it although I told the duty mate that had taken it so he could correct it in his weather log.

When we crossed the half way point of the Atlantic Ocean I made a point of having my last contact on the amateur radio. A few members of the Halifax Amateur Radio Club and I had a chat on the twenty meter band and I then shut it down and did not expect another contact until we had the boat people safely on board and were well on our way back to Nova Scotia. We felt that then and only then it would be safe to communicate with that station because one never knew who might be listening.

Late one evening when we were around two thirds the ways across the Atlantic Ocean towards the Strait of Gibraltar I heard a ship tune his transmitter for maximum output we often called "maximum smoke". I was thinking that he must be near with a signal that strong. Once he was happy with the tuning I was surprised to hear him call me. He said he had been told we had a doctor on board and they had an injured man their captain would like for our doctor to see. I confirmed our doctor was on board and asked him to shift and listen for me on one of my two megahertz radiotelephone frequencies, and asked him for a similar frequency that I could listen for him. Once communication was established the captain of each ship would be able to communicate and take the necessary steps.

Our transmitters back then were "rock bound". In other words, crystal tuned and one was restricted to the frequencies assigned the station by the governing authority and in our case the federal Department of Transport in Canada. A British ship was restricted to the frequencies assigned by the Post Master General in London, England.

The very high frequency radios that have become known as bridge to bridge intercoms were just being fitted in ships. These first units were some of the best junk I ran into and several were a nightmare prior to leaving the drawing board before they had been fitted in a ship. A friend, an electronic technician actually refused to work on one of them one time. I always tried to do what I could to get one to work properly. Some of the ships were still not fitted with these radios and the reasons I went for the old radiotelephone frequency. I called the bridge and managed to catch the captain before he had turned in for the night.

He came to the radio room and we operators soon had communications established and turned it over to the captains. This ship was British so we did not have a language problem. One of their "black gang"

or engineer staff had badly damaged a hand from getting it caught in some equipment. They had the injured man sedated but that was all they could do. He was probably more sedated from booze than any type of medication. Fortunately we were sailing towards each other so we would not lose much time in the transfer. The position and time in steaming would make it possible for a transfer at first light in the morning.

I put the receiver on the speaker to the bridge, the one I used to pass a time signal to the bridge and turned on the automatic alarm and called it a day and turned in. I told the duty mate to call me if the other ship called and I had told the other ship we would monitor that frequency all night. The automatic alarm had been created from the 1912 Titanic disaster and would ring a bell on the bridge, the radio room and the radio officers bunk if it received a distress signal. A time signal was sent to the bridge in order to check their clocks and assist in solar navigation, although at this late date a lot of navigation was from the electronic navigational aids.

I went straight to the bridge when I woke up the next morning. There had been no radio communication during the night, but the British ship was now in sight and had stopped. They had put the injured seaman in one of their lifeboats and were in the process of lowering it. We simply sailed up to the lifeboat and stopped. Our chief mate had made a boson chair and was back at a cargo derrick that was used to hoist things on board back near the stern. The boson chair was lowered to the injured seaman who was tied into the chair with his sea bag tied to the chair and hoisted aboard. Once safely on board we got under way to continue our voyage. The lifeboat rowed back to their ship and was soon hoisted back in its davits and they were under way and back on course. We called each other on radiotelephone and the two captains exchanged pleasantries while both ships got under way.

Our seamen carried the injured man into the hospital so our doctor could work on him. Our doctor had no X-ray equipment or any fancy equipment, just years of experience to do what he could for this injured man, plus lots of medication to relieve pain. He simply treated the injury the best he could.

At our noon meal on the day after this incident the doctor mentioned to me that this seaman would like to see me. I retrieved a signal pad and pencil and went to see him right after my meal. He wanted me to send a message to his family stating what had happened and tell them where he was and was heading. We agreed on the wording of this message and I said I would enjoy transmitting it. He wanted to pay me but I said the charges would be a couple of dollars and I would look after that. I told him I had some Canadian money with me and would gladly give him some if he felt he would need some money. I said the bank in Gibraltar or at home in England would gladly exchange the Canadian money for British Sterling. He said he had sufficient money and wanted none. This gave me another excuse to work the large British station at Bristol, England. This was one of the world's finest coast stations that we all enjoyed working. It took little time or effort to transmit this message. The injured man was a Geordie from the Tyneside region of North East England. I had sailed with a few of these guys over the years and found them good shipmates.

This injured man was on board for a few days before we arrived at Gibraltar. He had received a message back from his family stating they would look forward to his arrival at home. He enjoyed and looked forward to skipper Bill and his music.

We were one week from Halifax to Gibraltar.

A merchant vessel has an agent for each and every port. The captain is given a list of these agents with their street address and mailing address and a registered telegraph address for every port. Each and every message transmitted, either sent or received was charged for by the word. A registered telegraph address was two words to save charges for these messages. A registered telegraph address would look like "Simpleton Halifax" or whatever, and the first word was usually the company name. A merchant vessel never left home without this list of agents. Quite often it would be the same company with an office or representative in each and every port.

The captain gave me a message for our agent at Gibraltar stating we had this injured seaman on board and he would have to be removed on reaching Gibraltar so he could be repatriated home to England in the next British ship bound for England. He also gave our agent our estimated time of arrival for this removal and a request for fuel, fresh water and the chief steward's request for a few fresh vegetables, milk and bread. He also requested a flag.

Many ships one sees today are so large it is hard to see the flags they are flying but if one looks really close you can see them. They appear to be very small. The flags are the same size but the ships are now so big they look small. When the St. Lawrence Seaway opened in 1959 ninety percent of the worlds shipping could sail right up to the lake head. Ships have increased in size so much that only five percent can go up to the lake head today. This is the reason one sees large bulk carriers anchoring on the St. Lawrence River with as many as four bulk lake ships discharging their cargo into the large vessel. These lake ships are the maximum size that can sail between the lakes.

When a ship enters port she flies the flag of the country in which she is registered from a small flag pole on her stern. She also flies the flag of the country she is entering from one side of her foremast as a courtesy. She will fly flag letter H on the other side of her foremast if she has a pilot on board. One rarely sees this anymore, but on occasion especially a warship she will fly her four letter international signal flags in a vertical line from her foremast. Years ago when flags were about the only means of communication, a ship would fly the flag of the last country she visited on entering her home port.

Most companies have a house flag as well; simply a company flag and all their ships will fly this flag from the top of their mizzen mast, the last mast back on the ship, the one nearest the stern of the ship. We flew a Nova Scotia flag as our house flag on this run.

When a ship enters a small nation or some area she has not visited or has not visited for years, she will have the agent send out a flag with the pilot. The little expense involved makes this a wise move because these flags are changed often around the world. We had no idea what flag was the proper flag for Gibraltar so it was a wise move to have our agent send one out with the pilot.

The Gibraltar pilot boat came out and we transferred the injured man to that boat after a rather sad farewell. We all had taken a real liking to this injured man and wished him the best. The doctor had done his best with what he had and we all felt it a good job. One cannot beat experience and the doctor had plenty of that.

Once the pilot boat was clear we went alongside a fuel barge and a water barge and topped up our fuel and fresh water. Once that had been done we went back to our economical cruising speed and proceeded across the Mediterranean Sea towards Port Said, Egypt. It took us nearly six days to make that run. We asked our agent in Port Said to send out a flag with the pilot and requested fuel and fresh water to top up our tanks for the run to Singapore. After that had been completed we entered the Suez Canal. That slowed us down until we managed to clear the canal and enter the Gulf of Suez. We left the gulf and ran down the Red Sea and entered the Gulf of Aden, which took another four days. Was it hot or was it hot? I felt the Old Bahama Channel was hot until we went through this heat.

One of the mates I sailed with a few years back was hung up on the Old Bahama Channel and felt we would gain a tide by going that way from Kingston, Jamaica, to Jacksonville, Florida. We had to enter port on the high tides to make certain there was sufficient water under our keel. The old man had heard the Old Bahama Channel so much that he finally said if you want to go that way dig out the charts and we will go. It was in the summer and so hot one could hardly breathe, but I'm sure this heat was even hotter down through the Red Sea than the heat found in the Old Bahama Channel. At least we made that tide at Jacksonville and I am sure someone would have thrown the mate overboard had we not. At least we heard no more about the Old Bahama Channel.

Chapter Four

Finding the Boat People

Two Canadian destroyers must have been able to buy, borrow, or steal a few buckets of fuel; at least they made good time coming over from western Canada. The two destroyers were 13 years old, the same age as our ship. All three had been built in 1965. The destroyers had slid into Tokyo for a couple of days of R & R and picked up a few supplies. They topped up their fuel and water tanks so were in good shape for spending some time looking for the boat people. Each destroyer had on board a former Vietnam citizen. We made a point of advising the armed forces that I had my amateur station on board and the frequency I planned to stand by on. I had heard nothing so the destroyers did not have an amateur radio station as they sometimes did.

The duty radio watch in each destroyer paid special attention to the radiotelephone so called distress and calling frequency of 2182 kilohertz in addition to their regular duties. When they heard something of possible interest the former Vietnam member would be called in to monitor the conversation. This member often spent time in the destroyer's radio room just listening to see if they could hear something of interest. As far as I know they did not hear a thing of interest.

I had felt there would probably be a radiotelephone or radiotelegraph transmission from some of these boats. I had both of my electronic radiotelegraph keyboards with me. These were an electronic Morse

code or radiotelegraph unit that transmitted perfect Morse but the big advantage was that they could be slowed down, or in other words adjusted to transmit at any speed. They could also be set to continuously transmit any message at very slow speed. I felt if one of these boats was able to transmit radiotelegraph it would be someone that learned Morse in something like the boy scouts and had little if any practice. Therefore one would have to transmit very slowly in order to make contact and maintain communication.

Not only that but the CAF – Canadian Armed Forces had terminated instruction in Morse ten years before this and had switched their equipment from radiotelegraph to radioteletype. Our communication with the destroyers when we were some distance apart would have to be in radiotelegraph because we had no radioteletype. There were no excellent navy radio telegraphists like there had been ten years or so before this. The senior radio man in each destroyer should have been left over from the days of radiotelegraph and I would have to wait for him to contact me. Trying to contact him would be a waste of time and the only other alternative was to contact their coast station with a service message asking them to contact me on a certain frequency at a certain time. At least I knew they could use any frequency.

The only way to contact their coast station was to use the commercial station at Vancouver in radiotelegraph and have them relay a message to the naval station. Radiotelegraph was dying a slow death unfortunately. So I simply sat back and waited for one of the destroyers to call me on the distress and calling frequency. They knew I was the only one on board and my hours of watch keeping from the instructions given them before leaving. They also knew the detail on my amateur radio station and how we intended to treat that, just in case one of the destroyers had an amateur radio station on board.

The captain had me transmit a message to our agent in Singapore mainly for fresh water, fuel, a few fresh groceries and a Singapore flag. We came in through the Strait of Malacca and stopped at Singapore and topped up our supplies, mainly fresh water and fuel again. We did this via a fuel barge and water barge and did not take the time to go alongside a dock. The ship had a distiller for making fresh water from sea water but filling our tanks with fresh water made it easier. The distiller was not the fastest way of obtaining fresh water.

Just before our arrival in Singapore I contacted Vancouver radio and sent a few weather observations and an update on our Amver reports. I also sent a note to the supervisor and asked them to advise any information on any Vietnamese boat people. I also contacted the United States Coast Guard radio station at Honolulu and gave them our location, told them I was monitoring their station for any message and asked we be advised if they learned of any vessels loaded with Vietnamese boat people.

We were sixteen days from Port Said to Singapore and shortly after leaving Singapore I heard one of the destroyers calling me, we established radio contact and exchanged positions. At this time I asked them to stand by on a 6 megahertz radiotelephone frequency. I could place this frequency on speaker for the bridge and this would now give us more or less continuous radio contact. This made it possible for the captain to more or less maintain contact with the captains of the two destroyers. The destroyers could

tune in and use my “rock bound” radiotelephone frequency on 6 megahertz because they were capable of tuning in any frequency.

These boat people were in any vessel they could find and the majority were fishing vessels. All the vessels in this area were in the habit of using a lot of radiotelegraph, the reason I felt we may make contact with one in that mode of transmission. It was not to be, so the destroyers decided to make a fast sweep using long range radar to see if they could find a vessel of interest.

Chapter Five

The Loading of the People

One of the destroyers soon advised they had a vessel of interest in sight and were proceeding towards it and of course gave us their position. The engines in our ship poured on the power and we headed towards this position at maximum speed. One of our crewmembers claimed we had a vapour trail flying off our stern. Not likely, but it was a good description of our maximum speed. The second destroyer soon found a vessel of interest.

This was great news and meant that I did not have to transmit a slow request in radiotelegraph to see if I could find or locate these vessels in that fashion. I was prepared to do just that if all else failed. Actually the first destroyer found two vessels overloaded and crowded with boat people and the second destroyer found three smaller vessels also overloaded and crowded with boat people. The Vietnam members in each destroyer soon made it clear to the boat people that if they wanted to become a Canadian citizen they would stand by them until loaded on our ship and would protect them accordingly. They had these overloaded boats follow them slowly towards us.

It was then we learned the reason there was no radio communication. The boat people were afraid the communist government would find them from these transmissions, it was illegal for them to leave their country and this communist government would likely take them back or simply drown them if found.

It did not seem to take long for us to come up to one of the destroyers. The destroyer simply sat in the water and lowered its motor cutter. We simply came up close to the over loaded vessel and sat in the water letting the over loaded vessel come alongside. The chief mate was in charge and supervised this operation and in loading the boat people from the over loaded vessels. They were taken on board via our starboard accommodation ladder. We were fortunate the weather was nearly perfect with just a bit of swell running that permitted the loading via the accommodation ladder. The Vietnam member of each destroyer had done his job because the boat people were not long in coming on board and more than one got down and kissed our deck. They all appeared to want to be a Canadian citizen; at least no one refused to come on board.

We moved over to the other destroyer as soon as we had finished with the two overloaded vessels with boat people, and the process of transferring the boat people to our vessel continued. It took roughly the same amount of time to unload these three smaller boats as it had the first two boats. Thank goodness

our vessel was no longer a passenger vessel but a yacht. Every rule in the book would have been broken as a passenger vessel because we had a full load.

Once all five vessels were unloaded a decision had to be made for the disposal of these empty vessels. It was made clear there was no one on board each vessel; everything had been removed of value so the destroyers decided to convert each vessel into an artificial reef for the fish living below our keels. They simply fired a couple of shots into each vessel at the water line and each vessel soon sank. While sinking these vessels we got underway for our return trip to Nova Scotia. The two destroyers soon had their boats back on board and were soon free and clear. The two destroyers had their motor cutters in the water in case they might be needed and they brought their former Vietnamese citizen over to our vessel with them. These two former Vietnamese citizens would be a big help for our pursers and were no longer required on the destroyers.

Chapter Six

The voyage Home

The decision was made for the two destroyers to travel with us just in case some member of the communist government happened to come along and get a bit foolish. All three ships were flying large Canadian flags and each was making her number by flying her four letter international signal or call sign in a vertical line of signal flags. We had our four letters flying on the starboard side of the main mast and our large Canadian flag flying from the top of the mizzen mast on the halyard for our house flag. The destroyers had their large Canadian flags flying from a yard arm as they would when they were entering a battle. The destroyers had one mast only and had their signal flags flying from an arm of this one mast.

The captain and mates had been wrestling with the distance of going east or west and decided this distance was so similar that we would go east to the Panama Canal and make it a true around the world voyage. Not only that, it would give us an escort with the destroyers to Pearl Harbor. While the two destroyers were sinking the five empty vessels we had turned and headed towards Manila, Philippines. The two destroyers soon caught up with us and steamed alongside, one on each side.

I made a mental note that I did not feel I would ever be comfortable with our navy in green uniforms. A green army uniform in a ship looked a bit foolish to me. It was a shame they did not have the character that terminated our army, navy and air force identify the aliens from other planets that were among us, rather than create the Canadian Armed Forces. A navy, army and more recent air force is created from years of experience and many young men, some of the finest, have died to create these organizations. No one should be permitted to change anything within these organizations that are created and hold so much tradition, other than those who are members of the organization.

About the time the destroyers had caught up to us the chief steward and chief cook had the senior purser find several experienced cooks from the boat people. With the senior purser translating they gave these cooks a detailed description of the galley, the equipment in it, and the location of their food supplies. They were soon at work creating meals for this mass of humanity. I feel certain cooking in the galley continued steady for the rest of the trip. They ran the galley like a restaurant. One simply ate

when they felt like eating there was no other way. There were just too many people to put them in shifts.

Around this time the captain had me transmit a message to our agent in Halifax stating we were loaded with boat people and we were now bound for Halifax. I transmitted this message via the Vancouver coast station. I also sent a note to the United States Coast Guard station Honolulu and told them we were loaded and bound for Pearl Harbor after a quick pit stop in Manila.

The uniforms and colour code in the ranks was a welcome asset. You would notice one of the boat people looking at one of the epaulettes and then see them work their way over to the notice board through the mass of humanity and consult the senior purser's sketch of the ranks. One could see their face light up when they recognized the rank or position of the one they had seen.

The doctor was wandering among these boat people looking for any sign of interest. He soon noticed one young lady was pregnant and appeared to have been pregnant for some time. He had the senior purser bring her to his small hospital so he could examine her and have the purser translate for the doctor. He found she was married and her husband was with her and in addition her husband's mother. He found her to be in pretty good condition considering what she had apparently gone through, but now she would get good care and all should be well. The doctor was a laid back kind of guy one could not help but really like whether he spoke your language or did not speak at all. He was a typical Acadian and it is hard to find an Acadian one does not like. In other words, this young future mother soon relaxed and appeared to enjoy the doctor's company.

The two pursers and the two former Vietnamese citizens from the destroyers were kept very busy recording each person on board. They had cases of three ply forms that had been printed for them and each had a serial number. These forms required an answer to a multitude of typical government questions: Name, age, sex, and date of birth, place of birth, parent's names and whether their parents were living and living with them. They also wanted to know any work experience, trade, education, and a multitude of questions as found on all government forms. Once each form was typed up and completed the one on the form was given a business size card with the corresponding serial number found on that particular form. They were told to guard that card well or they would not get ashore in Canada without it. Then the various forms were filed for arrival.

It was definitely a mass of humanity. It took several days to complete all the forms but once complete we knew we had 1,720 boat people and this was more or less the size of a typical Nova Scotia village. Good Lord it was crowded and there had to be many "hot bunks" in use among the boat people. In other words, as one finished sleeping and crawled out of a bunk another would get in for some sleep. Everyone had to have one of these cards with a serial number including the children and the parents or guardians of the children had to protect their card. It was a rather neat and organized way to identify everyone on board and maintain contact with them for years or until they passed away from old age. Anyone who had been issued one of these forms would also be required to pay a fee for this service after they had settled in to the Nova Scotia community. The Nova Scotia government had worked out a scheme to see that they paid for the trip in order to recover as much as possible of the cost incurred in

this voyage. The Nova Scotia government also gave each boat person a couple of hundred dollars to give them a start in their new home and this had to be repaid as well.

We were not long into making this crossing when the doctor felt he would soon deliver another baby. The doctor claimed he had no idea how many babies he had delivered over the years. As the time drew near he had the young mother move into his hospital, with her husband and his mother living near the hospital. When the time came the doctor claimed it was a good routine birth considering all things and that the mother and baby boy were doing fine. This now brought our head count up to 1,721 boat people and this boy would now have a story to tell. He may be the first Canadian citizen among these boat people. I am not sure a baby born on a Canadian ship with foreign parents would make the baby a Canadian citizen. It is a good trivia question for someone if nothing else. The captain would have recorded the birth, date, time and position of the ship in the ship's log.

The senior purser, the former citizen of Vietnam was without a doubt the hardest working and busiest person in the crew. He had brought along a few copies of a publication called "Dreamer's and Doers Guide" that was produced by the Nova Scotia tourist information bureau. Each evening he would give at least one lecture, in Vietnamese using these guides and the corresponding map that came with them. He did his best to describe to these boat people what they could expect on their arrival in Nova Scotia. They all seemed to enjoy the photographs in these guides and very few knew much of the English language. All these boat people had each other only and not one of them approached me to send a message to a friend. I found this rather nerve wracking or uncanny. They all appeared so grateful to be alive that there was no friction from the mass of humanity. They simply slept or sat around. There were several board games and a number of decks of cards on board that they used for entertainment.

These boat people did not appear to be very happy. It took some time for them to loosen up a bit and Skipper Bill's accordion and Ben's guitar seemed to loosen them up more than anything else. Some of the better dancers of the Canadian crew had trouble in getting some of the girls to dance with them. Once they managed to get a few, mostly the older women to dance the others started to join in.

Our agent had the pilot bring out a Philippine flag for us with the pilot. We entered Manila Bay and went alongside the fuel barge and water barge that were waiting for us. In addition to the fuel and water the chief steward had ordered some more fresh food and had included quite an order of local produce for the boat people. The two destroyers went alongside a fuel dock one at a time and topped up their fuel and water tanks.

We were soon in and out of Manila Bay and on our way to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Manila pilot remained on board and acted as our pilot on our way out of Manila Bay. The two destroyers remained alongside our ship all the way and we said our good byes at Pearl Harbor. The destroyers remained at Pearl Harbor for an exercise with the United States Navy. We were fifteen days from Manila Bay to Pearl Harbor. We topped up our fuel from a fuel barge and fresh water from a water barge and a few more fresh groceries. Like I said, we were on a mission and not a pleasure cruise and it was impossible to go alongside with all these boat people on board so once the fuel, water and groceries were aboard we set

off for Panama. No doubt a few of the lads in the two destroyers were from Nova Scotia and longed to go home with us.

It took us another fifteen days to run across the Pacific to Panama and we were nearly out of fuel again. I had seen some good storms in the Pacific but this thirty day crossing did not run into one. The Pacific lived up to its name and was peaceful, apparently the reason it is named Pacific. There is nothing like a nice warm sunny day with all the doors and ports open cruising in calm weather with nothing but a bit of swell running. When the weather is bad I often tell myself that somewhere around the world a ship is sailing just like that. That seems to help me tolerate the bad weather at the moment.

It was shortly after Pearl Harbor that I set-up my amateur radio station and made contact with a Canadian station in British Columbia and told him I would hang around this frequency on twenty-meters whenever I had the time. I asked him to pass this information along to those in Nova Scotia. It was only a day or so before I had contact with Nova Scotia via amateur radio. One of the old timers in the Halifax Amateur Radio Club contacted me. I told him the number on board, it was a real mob and that I would continue to hang around that frequency but we were quite busy and I could not get on as much as I wanted.

Amateur radio provided a telephone patch service then and we would often get a patch to our home telephone for a chat with the family. Any crewmember that wanted one of these phone patches would give me his home address and phone number. If this crewmember was not from the Halifax area I would notify any amateur in Nova Scotia to try and round up some amateur within the area of the crewmembers home for a patch. There were very few times we had to make either a long distance telephone call or have some amateur relay a message for a crewmember.

The weather during this crossing of the Pacific Ocean made it possible for quite a few to wander around outdoors on the upper decks. Quite a few actually spent their nights out on these decks.

When we arrived at the western entrance of the Panama Canal that is farther east than the eastern entrance, we were told we would be able to transit the canal during daylight hours only. The Panama Canal was still in operation with the United States Government and known as the Panama Canal Zone. They were working on the canal and it prevented transit at night. Because of our cargo and overcrowding we were given priority and went to the head of the line and right into the canal. I had mentioned to the captain that it would probably be wise to transmit a message to the Canal Zone stating we were overcrowded with Vietnam Boat People headed for their new home in Nova Scotia and would appreciate a quick passage through the canal if possible. We sent this request while several days out from the canal entrance. We had to radio in and get a number via radiotelegraph in a line of ships to go through the canal once we were close to the entrance.

I'll never forget the time we approached the canal and the young United States Navy radio operator had found a semi-automatic Morse key. The only thing he could transmit real fast was his own radio call sign. I managed to get the necessary information and behind me was a Russian ship. The Russian operators were very good from continual use. Apparently their crews were given a few free messages per voyage and that kept their radio officers busy on the radiotelegraph key so that they all could transmit fast clear

Morse. This young Canal Zone radio operator answered this Russian as fast as he could. The Russian simply answered in a blast of high speed Morse. I said to myself that you may learn my friend because I felt he was on his hands and knees begging this Russian to slow down so he could copy his Morse. The Russian simply gave him a high speed blast several times before slowing down. I feel one and all listening to this enjoyed it as much as I did.

When a ship enters the locks of the canal the ship is towed through the canal via small railroad type engines that travel on rail tracks on the topsides of the lock walls. This is the only place in the world where the captain of a ship is not in command of his ship as it is towed through the locks and travels through the Gatun Lakes to the locks on the other end of the canal. This has prompted several captains to go ashore and take a train across the Isthmus of Panama. In other words, they were not going to stay aboard their ship if they were not in command.

Another point of interest is that the owner of a wooden vessel likes a run similar to going through the Panama Canal. A wooden vessel will accumulate worms from the salt water and the fresh water, as in the Gatun Lakes will kill these worms.

We topped up our fuel from a fuel barge and fresh water from a water barge at Balboa that our agent had arranged along with a few fresh groceries. Our pilot was an American and had boarded the ship just before we entered the canal. I had mailed my wife Joan a couple of nice long letters at Balboa several years before this. She had chewed me out for not writing so I made a point of these two letters to pacify her. We have never seen or heard of either letter so needless to say I was chewed out but good the next time I phoned her. I hope whoever received those letters enjoyed them.

We transferred this pilot to the pilot boat when we reached Colon, Panama, on the eastern end of the canal. Once the pilot was off and clear the captain set Iron Mike, cruising revolutions on the propellers, told the chief engineer to stand down and we were off to Nova Scotia. One year after our passage of the Panama Canal on this voyage steps were taken within the United States government to transfer the Panama Canal to the government of Panama.

There was a lot of colour or maybe emotion is the better terminology back then. A merchant ship would dip to a warship. In other words, when a merchant ship met a warship she would lower her ensign or national flag flying at the stern of her ship. The warship would pipe the still via a bosun pipe over her public address system that would echo for quite a distance around the ships and lower her ensign or national flag at her stern. The warship would replace her ensign or national flag back in its proper position and then the merchant ship replaced hers as they steamed on by. It was quite a sight or experience to witness this.

Another similar emotion or experience was when two merchant ships exchanged their three blasts on their whistles when they met. We had a couple of merchant ships exchange this greeting with us especially when meeting or passing several ships around and in the Panama Canal. Our ship must have resembled a true boatload of Vietnamese Boat People with so many visible on board simply watching the sights as we went along. The ship greeting us would blow three long blasts, we returned the three long blasts on our whistle, the greeting ship would then blow a short blast and we would return the

short blast. The three blasts stood for “Good Bye”, “Good Luck”, and “God Bless”. It was quite a sight and very loud and it did not take the boat people long to enjoy this as much as we. Many would put both hands over their ears to protect them, the noise was that loud.

I had a chance to get back on amateur radio as soon as we cleared the Panama Canal and soon contacted Nova Scotia and gave them our progress. This of course was relayed to the local news media in Halifax. We were permitted to use amateur radio on the high seas only so we were not available while transiting the canal. We proceeded up through the Jamaica Channel, Windward Passage and Great Bahama Bank.

We met one of the Del Monte banana boats going towards the Jamaica Channel among a number of other vessels. I found the Del Monte vessels some of the nicest looking vessels I saw. They were all white with dark green trim. A dark green funnel with the red and gold Del Monte crest as found on a can of their fruit one can purchase in any grocery store.

I feel everyone on board was as fascinated with the fires on shore in Cuba as I was. Apparently these fires are used to burn off the unwanted growth in the sugar cane fields in order to assist the machinery in the harvest of the sugar cane. It makes for an impressive sight at night just off the coast a few miles. We went up along Cuba just off the imaginary line known as the international three mile limit.

We passed what appeared to be a large Cuban molasses tanker. It actually called one of the nearby Cuban radio stations in radiotelegraph at one point. Cuba often names their ships after dates. If my memory serves me correctly this one's name was the 19th of April.

We sailed on up past the state of Florida and the eastern United States towards Nova Scotia. We were six days making the run from Panama to Nova Scotia. As we sailed past southwestern Nova Scotia we adjusted our speed to arrive during the morning of the next day. There would be a welcome committee to meet us and they wanted it timed so one and all could be at or part of this committee. That last evening at sea the chief cook, second cook and the boat people cooks all got together and produced a great Vietnamese meal for everyone on board. That was a meal to remember.

There were two naval vessels with the crew in their green uniforms, and a good size crowd waiting for us in small boats at the pilot station off Chebucto Head where we met our pilot and transferred him from the pilot boat via a pilot ladder. The accommodation ladder takes quite a bit of work to install. It was getting on into September towards October when we arrived and we officers were all in our navy blue uniforms. Once the pilot was safely on board we moved slowly up the harbour for pier 21 where the real crowd was waiting. Pier 21 had been the immigration pier in Halifax from 1928 until 1971. Over one million immigrants came to Canada through Pier 21.

The captain had orders to turn the ship and lay her alongside starboard side to the dock which meant the ship's bow was pointing out the harbour, and that he had to turn the ship in a complete circle. When the captain gave the order for hard left or port he also put the left or port engine full astern and the right or starboard engine full ahead to help the rudder swing the ship hard left or port. He blew the whistle one long blast, extra-long this time to alert one and all that we were turning left or port. He did

this; I am sure for several reasons. This would be his last run and he wanted this last move to be a good one and feel the slight vibration of the ship as she turned and stirred up some white water in the harbour. Once our ship was pointed out the harbour the captain stopped both engines and had the helmsman bring the wheel/rudder back amidships. The captain then placed both engines dead slow ahead while we came in alongside the pier. The mates and seamen had all the lines ready and threw them ashore once we came alongside. There were a number of men waiting to catch the lines and place them over the bits and bollards for that purpose. The captain stopped the engines when the lines were secure and phoned down to the engine room telling the chief engineer that we were finished with the engines and to shut them down. This, as you can see, was the first time we were alongside a dock since leaving Halifax when the voyage commenced.

The two naval vessels that were with this mob of pleasure craft formed up on either side of us and that seemed to help in making the armada of personal civilian small craft behave as we proceeded up the harbour. The two naval vessels and all the small craft simply stopped while we made this turn into pier 21. One would have had to be many miles from Halifax harbour to not hear the racket the horns and whistles made in greeting us. The two naval vessels proceeded on up Halifax Harbour once this turn into pier 21 was made.

The premier of Nova Scotia and the mayor of the city of Halifax were the two main speakers along with a former citizen of Vietnam who translated all that was said in Vietnamese at pier 21. No mention was made of my third letter to the newspaper and it was just as well. All I wanted to do was help these poor souls and did not need any credit for the undertaking.

The baby was the big attraction. I am sure he could have travelled the whole way in someone's arms. He was one more reminder to the married men that it would be nice to be home with our families. His parents were very proud of the fact he received so much attention and were always within sight of the baby. For that reason they more or less had the run of the ship. The captain had the baby sleeping in his very own baby basket on the chart table on the bridge at one point; his very own baby basket was an empty pasteboard box of just the right size filled with towels. The towels served as both mattress and blankets. The chief steward found the box among his stores and it was reinforced with some of the chief engineers duct tape. Several girls among the Boat People had been a seamstress or were very good at sewing. They had made the baby a wardrobe of clothing including diapers from an assortment of things found on board. Most of the crew had some thread for emergency repairs and the doctor supplied some from his closet of stores.

Some on board felt that the officers should draw lots to see who carried the baby ashore with his parents and grandparent. We soon agreed that the doctor had earned that right and they were the first to go ashore. Our families were there to see our return. Spotting Joan and our two young boys in the crowd ashore was a great feeling as always.

Chapter Seven

We were Right

It took a couple of days to discharge one and all from the ship. Several crewmembers within the boat people were mechanics or had a mechanical interest and spent most of their time in the engine room with the duty engineer and his oiler. The chief engineer enjoyed these fellows and spent some time with them. They managed to do a lot of odd jobs for each duty watch and I am sure the ship was in better shape when we turned it back to the Nova Scotia government than when we had taken delivery.

There were six members of the boat people with an interest or experience in navigation. These six spent a lot of time on the voyage following the duty mate around on watch. He had them practicing celestial navigation, chart work and all the things a duty watch keeping mate undertakes while on watch. The coast guard was very interested in those six who were soon on board the coast guard ships. Their first run through ice must have been quite an experience for them. They had never seen a snow flake let alone ice.

The word welfare did not appear to be part of the vocabulary of these people. Those interested in fishing or with fishing experience were soon absorbed within the fishing fleet. There were a few of them who soon had their own fishing vessel. Those with farming experience or an interest in farming spread out over the arable farming land in the province and were absorbed within the farming communities. No one could remember such a quick and expert harvest of the Annapolis Valley apple crop that took place that first harvest season.

Many were soon attending the schools and universities around the province and it was not long when the province had an increase of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and so on. Many became nurses, school teachers, and mechanics, and so on down the list of trades. Those 1,721 new citizens were well worth any expense involved in bringing them over. There were a couple of instances where some greedy crooked so and so tried to exploit them. The boat people had been forewarned of this and this meant it was soon caught and terminated.

As soon as my job on the ship terminated I reported back to the coast guard to learn I still had my position within that organization and had been on temporary leave without pay. At the time I joined this undertaking I was prepared to resign if need be and take my chances on employment when we returned.

The boat people had spent a lot of time and elbow grease in making the ship as clean and ship shape as possible. All the equipment that had been moved ashore was returned and installed in its proper place. All the extra equipment in the ship that we had taken for the trip was returned ashore. The ship had been returned to the province by the time my position terminated and the ship soon appeared on the pre-owned list of ships for sale. The ship was soon sold to a company in Germany and given a new German name different from the German name it had originally. It went back under German registration with a German crew.

Fifteen years after this voyage the position of radio officer was terminated in all the merchant ships of the world. One wonders if there has been any change in the number of accidents in this fleet. When Mr. Marconi first fitted ships with wireless there was a big decrease in the number of accidents. One captain I was talking to recently claims the hardest thing for him today is to keep the email service running in his

ship. He said nearly everyone in the ship uses email. It is a different world today. One of the captains in my day asked the office to ban all cell telephones from his vessel when they first came out. These were the captains who would permit no one to use the radiotelephone including the radio officer and more than a few insisted on being in the radio room when the radio officer transmitted radiotelegraph. It is indeed a crazy world.

End – December 26th, 2016