

THE LARGEST APPLE CARGO OUT OF PORT WILLIAMS, NOVA SCOTIA AND CONVOY SC-42

By Radio Officer Spurgeon G. "Spud" Roscoe

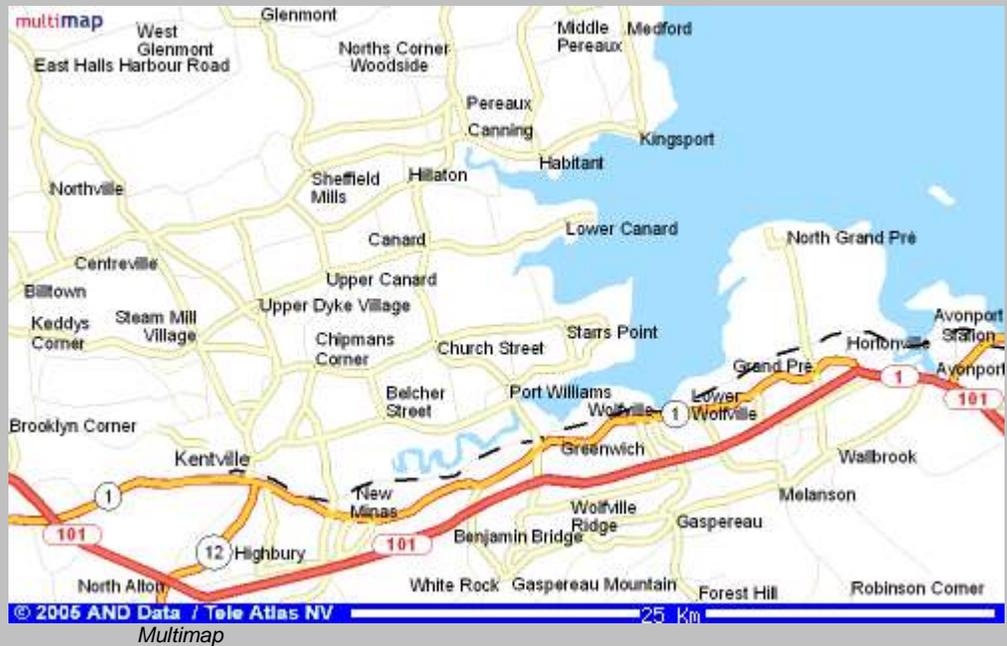
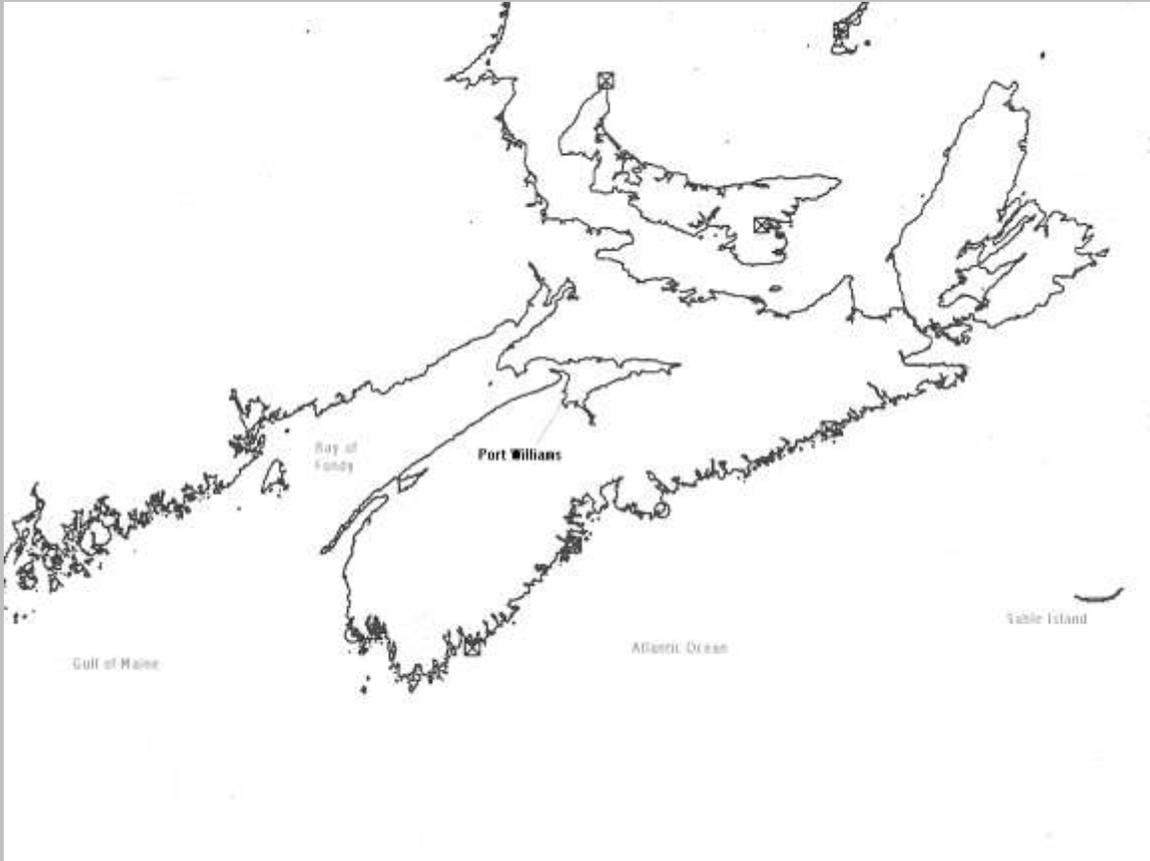


*Holman Studio Middleton NS
Radio Officer S. G. Roscoe*

Port Williams is in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia at the mouth of the Cornwallis River. At one time it was a busy port especially in the fall of the year when loads of apples and potatoes were shipped to far away places. The Danish vessel **Sally Maersk** lifted the largest cargo of apples out of the port. She lifted 32,283 barrels on September 19th, 1935, according to "The Port Remembers" a history of Port Williams. This cargo was loaded in 22 hours and consisted of 600 truck loads according to this history.

Most of these trucks carried 56 barrels. If each truck carried 56 barrels this would be 577 truck loads. My father and grandfather built some of these truck bodies in their Blacksmith Shop at Sheffield Mills. They were all hardwood with high sideboards and the tailgate was nearly as high as the sideboards. They held four barrels across, seven barrels back with two barrels high. The tailgate was hinged so that it could be lowered and held level with the floor of the truck body. Two men normally lifted the barrels onto the tailgate and then two men in the body stowed and stacked them. When the 56th barrel was on board the tailgate was closed and made fast. The tailgate operated with a single chain. One end of the chain was made fast near the top at the back on the highway sideboard. This chain was fed through two rings that held it in place on the underside or back of the tailgate. This chain was fed through another ring near the top of the sideboard on the curb side of the body. The chain and in turn the tailgate could be cinched in any position with one grab hook. I found it rather interesting. As far as I know these bodies were simply weathered hardwood, at least I do not remember one painted. A farmer would never waste money on paint unless it was absolutely necessary.

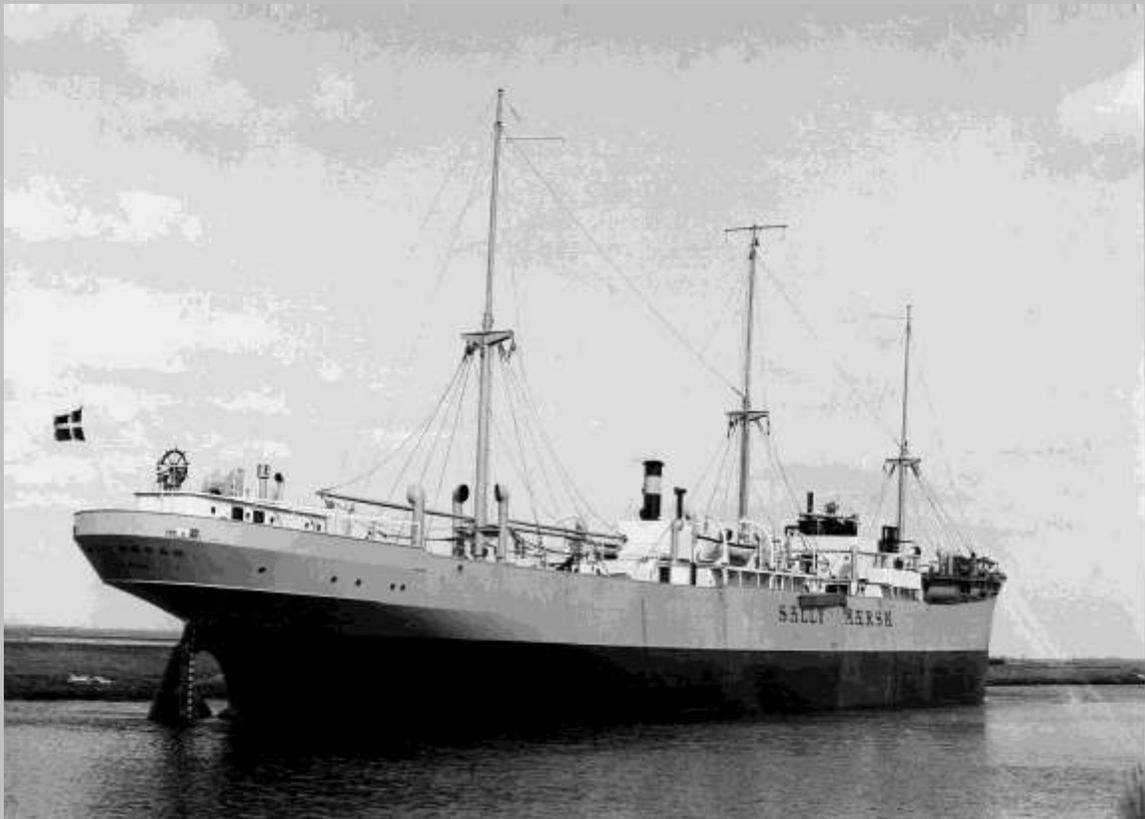
According to this same history of Port Williams there were 16,000 acres of orchard in the Cornwallis Township by 1936.





Rand McNally
The Village of Port Williams

The wharf where these ships were loaded runs parallel to Kars Street between the bridge crossing the river and Terry's Creek.



A. P. Moller

MV SALLY MAERSK

3,252 tons

3 masts, shelter deck type

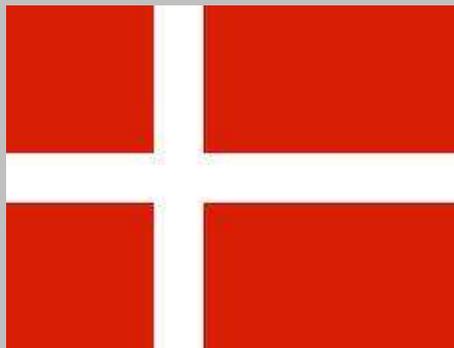
Built Odense, Denmark, 1923

Owner A. P. Moller

332 x 44.2 x 26.2 feet

Port of Registry Aalborg, Denmark

6 cylinder oil Engine



This is the flag of Denmark, one of the world's oldest flags and can be seen in the above photo.

The ***MV Sally Maersk*** was fitted with a spark radio station with international signal letters **OXXA**. The International Telecommunication Union List of Ship Stations listed frequencies in kilocycles with meters in brackets back then. The ***MV Sally Maersk*** was assigned 375 (800), 425 (705), 450 (665), 454 (660) and **500** (600).

375 kilocycles back then was the radio direction finding frequency. That is the frequency one transmitted on in order for another station, either another ship or a coast station to take radio bearings of your transmission. **500** kilocycles was known as the calling and distress frequency. That is the frequency one called another station on and the frequency one used to transmit a distress signal. All stations monitored that frequency when not busy. All the other frequencies listed were known as working frequencies. After one made contact with another station they switched to one of those frequencies in order to pass a message or communicate with the other station.

1935 must have been a good apple year. Following close on the wake of ***MV Sally Maersk*** was the second largest vessel to lift apples from Port Williams. ***SS Schurbek*** came complete with her Nazi swastika flying

SS SCHURBEK

2,448 tons

Cruiser stern and ice strengthened

Built Flensburg, 1930

Owner Knohr and Buchard

307 x 45.5 x 19.7 feet

Port of Registry Hamburg, Germany

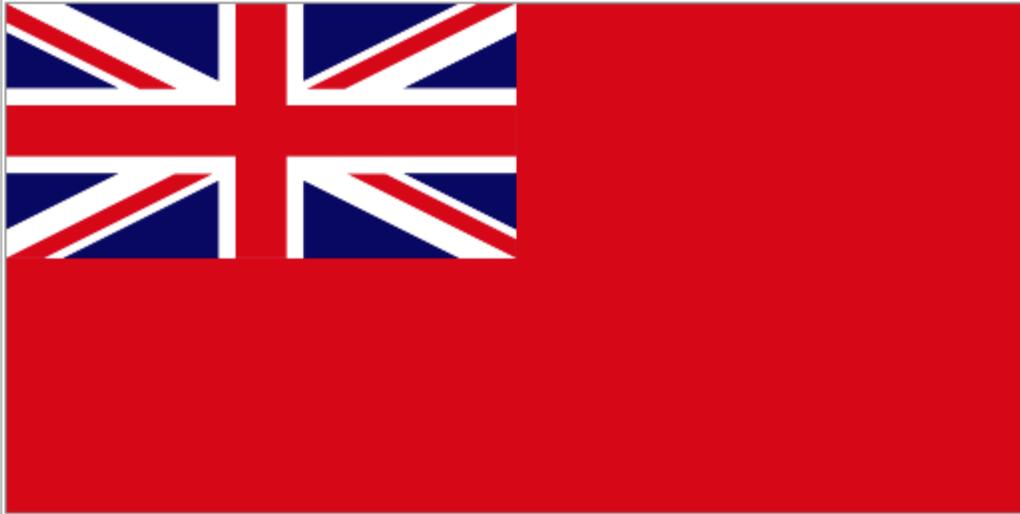
Fitted with radio direction finding



This is the flag flown by ***SS Schurbek***.

The ***SS Schurbek*** was assigned international call sign **DALS** and this was changed in 1933 to **DHUU**. Her radio station was modulated radiotelegraph only, as strange as it sounds. She was assigned the following frequencies listed in both kilocycles and meters in brackets: 375 (800), 410 (730), 425 (705), 454 (660) and **500** (600).

Three of the four gypsum ships using the Bay of Fundy in 1935 were identical sisters. ***Gypsum Empress*** at 4,034 gross tons had been built in 1929 and was slightly larger than the other three that were built in 1927 at 3,915 gross tons each. The other three were ***Gypsum King***, ***Gypsum Queen*** and ***Gypsum Prince***. All four were owned and operated by the Gypsum Packet Company. ***Gypsum King*** was the only one of the four that survived World War II.



All four gypsum ships were registered in the United Kingdom and flew this flag.
This flag is often called the Red Duster.

In 1935 all four gypsum ships were using spark radio stations. The frequencies listed in 1933 for **Gypsum Empress** call sign **GSYM** were: 375 (800), 425 (705), **500** (600) and 665 (450). The frequencies listed in 1933 for the other three gypsum ships were: 375 (800), **500** (600), 665 (450) and 1000 (300). The international call signs of the other three were: **Gypsum King** call sign **GNCK**, **Gypsum Queen** call sign **GNCL** and **Gypsum Prince** call sign **GNCM**.

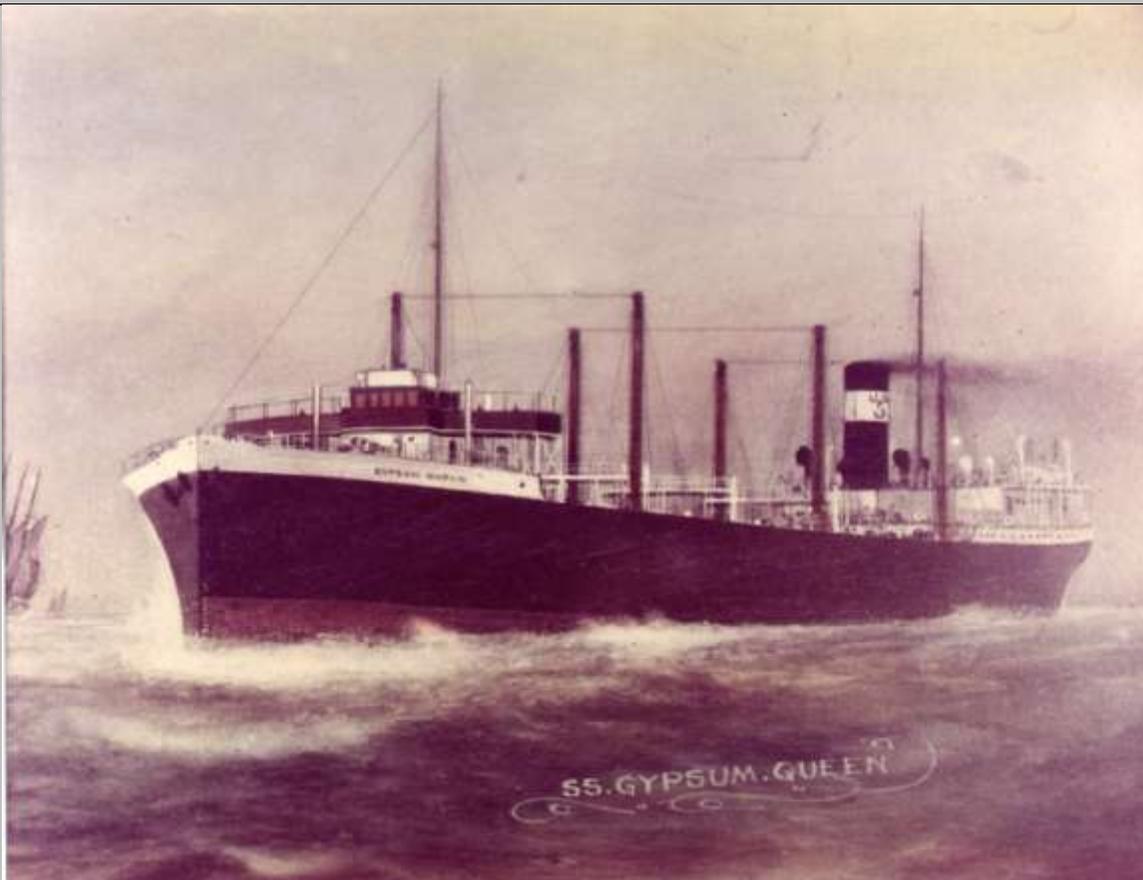


Captain Oscar K. Langdon
This is the SS GYPSUM QUEEN with call sign GNCL and the tug OTIS WACK

My grandfather told me in 1958 that one does not hear Morse code on the radio like they did years ago. The Halifax, Nova Scotia public broadcast radio station **CHNS** went on the air in 1927 and the ships were transmitting right in the same area at the same time. No wonder grandfather heard Morse code with the ships that were running in and out of the Bay of Fundy back then. 665 and 1000 kilocycles, or kilohertz in today's terminology were right in the broadcast band. Actually they were either side of the **CHNS** station grandfather was listening to on 910 kilocycles or 329.6 meters. Those old shipboard transmitters took up a fair portion of the radio spectrum around their assigned frequency. Grandfather's BCL may have been well blessed on occasion. Back then

radio operators referred to broadcast listening as BCL, especially when they were having trouble and creating interference.

The **Sally Maersk** that lifted 32,283 barrels of apples out of Port Williams in 1935 and the **Gypsum Queen** that transported gypsum ore from the Bay of Fundy that same year joined Convoy SC-42 in August 1941. This convoy consisted of 64 merchant ships and sailed from Sydney, Nova Scotia, August 30th bound for the United Kingdom laden with over a half-million tons of supplies. The warships escorting this convoy were four Canadian ships; the destroyer **Skeena** and the three corvettes **Orillia**, **Kenogami** and **Alberni**. The **Skeena** led this convoy with a corvette on either side of the convoy and the third corvette astern for protection from the German U-boats. This convoy was spread out over an area of some 25 square miles of sea as it proceeded up to within five miles of the southern tip of Greenland, then on to Iceland and the United Kingdom.



Captain O.K. Langdon

This is a painting of **SS GYPSUM QUEEN**

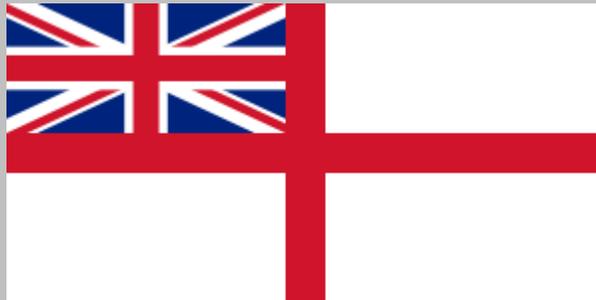
The U-boat commanders at this time were still experimenting with their form of patrol that became known as the wolf pack. U-boats in a wolf pack were strung out in lines rather than a single U-boat on patrol in a defined area. The U-boat, **U-85** made a chance sighting of Convoy SC-42 as she headed for her station on the northern tip of her patrol line within a few miles of the Greenland coast. The ensuing sea battle is well documented in the history of World War II. At least eight U-boats, twice the number of Canadian warships, participated in this attack. Two corvettes, **Chambly** and **Moose Jaw** had been on a training exercise off Newfoundland when they learned of this attack. They steamed at full speed to assist the four Canadian ships escorting this convoy.



This is the flag flown by German U-Boats during World War II.

This sea battle off Greenland terminated with the loss of 16 of the 64 merchant ships in Convoy SC-42. **Sally Maersk** was lost by submarine torpedo and sank at 47 minutes past 2 AM, September 10th. **Gypsum Queen** met the same fate 19 hours later at 19 minutes past 9 PM. Fifteen minutes after the loss of **Gypsum Queen** the only U-boat destroyed, **U-501**, was sunk by the two corvettes **Chambly** and **Moose Jaw** that had been on a training exercise. **U-501** was making her first operational cruise and most of the crew in **Chambly** and **Moose Jaw** were making their first sea voyage. This sea battle convinced the German command that the U-boat packs were superior to the lone U-boat on patrol. The lines of U-boats known as the wolf packs would plague the Atlantic until the termination of World War II.

The captain of **U-501** was not your normal officer found in the German submarine service. **U-501** surfaced, stopped her engines and when **Moose Jaw** ran up alongside she found most of the Nazi crew on deck with their hands up. As the corvette closed, the U-boat captain leaped from his own deck to the deck of the corvette, not even wetting his feet in the process. **Moose Jaw** sheered off to prevent further boarding. **Chambly** put a boarding party on **U-501** and found the Nazi crew anxious to leave, indicating she had been scuttled and was about to sink. The boarding party took the risk of a quick investigation with the hope of obtaining some secret equipment. With a sudden lurch **U-501** began to settle. The boarding party made a quick dash to safety but stoker William I. Brown was sucked into the swirl and drowned.



The ships of the Royal Canadian Navy flew the white ensign from 1910 until 1965.

My father was a blacksmith and took over the operation of the Blacksmith Shop at Sheffield Mills from his father, my grandfather, when he married my mother in 1938. Sheffield Mills is North West of Port Williams and can be seen on the map above. My father joined the navy as a blacksmith in September, 1942, and remained in the navy until pensioned out in 1960. He retired from the Royal Canadian Navy as the Chief Blacksmith and for most of his career was the General Iron Sheet Metal Instructor at the Mechanical Training Establishment, **HMCS Stadacona**. The members of this establishment could make anything. We had a number of items around our home they had made and knives were a big item. A ships badge was another item and a brass cribbage board on a wood base was my favourite. Dad said the guy who asked them to make this cribbage board had been lost at sea. Stamped on this cribbage board is Bill Brown, RCNVR. I would like to present this cribbage board to a member of Bill's family but I have not been able to locate them.



Joan M. Roscoe

The Bill Brown Cribbage Board

The history of Port Williams “The Port Remembers” states: “In 1973 the **MV Eskimo** made two trips to Trinidad and Barbados with apples, carrots and canned goods. In 1975 the German ship **Antares** the widest ship ever to dock here and with a carrying capacity of 6,000 tons brought a cargo of soybean meal from Chicago.” I remember working the **Antares**. She had international call sign **DLXR** and was owned by Schmidt and Company, Flensburg, Germany the same port that built **Schurbek**.



This is the German flag flown by **Antares** on her Port Williams visit.

The **Eskimo** was flying the flag of Denmark the same as **Sally Maersk**. I knew the **Eskimo**. She was a little freighter of 300 tons built in 1969 and about a tenth of the size of the **Sally Maersk**. She was registered in Copenhagen, Denmark but was so small she did not carry a radio officer. We used to work her on radiotelephone speaking to the captain direct. Her international call sign was **OVXB** and she had an 8 cylinder oil engine of 800 brake horsepower with a controllable pitch propeller. She was 187 x 33 x 11 feet. It was hard to believe that the **Eskimo** kept going as long

as she did. With the high cost of fuel and the little cargo she could carry she must have produced a very small if any profit. The port of Port Williams is also so small that it has not been nor will it be of any further use as a deep sea port.

Shipper returns to profit

A.P. Moller-Maersk, a conglomerate that owns the world's largest container-shipping line, reported that it had returned to profit in the first half of the year. Its revenue rose by 20 per cent on a yearly basis to \$27.4 billion. Net income was \$2.5 billion, against a \$540 million loss the year before. Container-shipping activity, a bellwether of the global economy, has risen sharply this year because of surging goods traffic to emerging economies.

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The A. P. Moller group of companies owns one of the largest fleets at sea. Like most fleets they recycle the same names over and over. A recent **Sally Maersk** was a gas tanker of 15,070 cubic metric tons. The Gypsum Company recycled their ship names until a few years ago. I was the radio officer, for a few years, in the **Gypsum Queen** built in 1947 to replace the **Gypsum Queen** lost in Convoy SC-42. The gypsum company built two new ships in 1947 to replace the three ships lost during the war.

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