

Not Knowing What to Expect

My voyages as an Apprentice with The Bank Line

By Geoff Walker



(Fotoflite)

MV Weybank captured ca early 1960s, looking every bit as good as the day I joined her.



A day etched in my memory. Despite being summer, the weather was overcast and cool as I remember it. The telegram had simply stated, join **“Weybank”** as Deck Apprentice, Immingham Dock, 21st June, and report to Master. Pre-paid rail ticket is available for your collection from Heyward’s Heath Ticket Office. Typical Bank Line as I was later to discover, short and to the point.

Upon my arrival at Hull station I was met by the company agent, who advised me that I would not be joining the ship until the following day once she had been refloated from the dry dock. I was taken to a hotel for the night. I do remember being kept awake for some hours by whom I assumed were drunken Hull fishermen, all dressed in their then fashionable garish suits with bellbottom trousers. I watched their rowdy behavior and antics from the safety of my upper floor room, the window overlooked the courtyard of the adjacent pub. There were more than a few scuffles I have to say. Anyway, it passed the time as I was otherwise unable to sleep due to nervous excitement and not knowing what to expect the following morning.

The drive seemed longer than it really was but eventually we pulled up at the designated dock and there she was, freshly painted black hull with red boot topping, riding high, just out of dry dock. A few minor rust stains about the white upper works and the buff masts and derricks, but really quite smart in appearance. After all, she was a working vessel, so this was to be expected. The ship was just as I had envisaged. I had learned from the agent that the vessel had arrived from Bunbury in Western Australia with a cargo of Rutile/Ilmenite sand, prior to entering dry dock for periodic surveys and maintenance.

It was planned that she works her way, towards the Far East by way of various ports and carrying different cargoes, according to the agent. To me this appeared the perfect scenario.

I was met at the top of the gangway by a youngish fellow, perhaps a year or two older than I, dressed in overalls. He introduced himself as the "senior apprentice" with a tone of authority to his voice, "welcome on board". He shook my hand, "please follow me". He took one of my bags. I was ushered to what was to become my communal cabin, where I placed my kit and was introduced to a fellow apprentice. There were three of us in the cabin. The cabin was situated on the officer's deck, starboard side, with two portholes, quite large, three bunks, one stand alone and a two-tier arrangement. The showers and toilets were adjacent to the cabin. The accommodation was sparse but clean and livable." You are the junior, so the top bunk is yours and so is that locker" he said gesturing with his hand. "Gather your thoughts then I'll take you to meet the Old Man and Harry Tate" (who the hell is Harry Tate I thought to myself). I followed without question and as directed.

I was feeling somewhat nervous as the senior apprentice knocked on the captain's cabin door. A moment later the captain appeared at the door." I am the captain" he stated, offering his hand. "Welcome on board – do come in". John departed and left me alone in the captain's presence.

My eyes wandered and I was impressed with the highly polished woodwork and brass fittings about his accommodations. The Old Man was in his mid or late forties, graying hair and wearing horn rimmed reading specs parked at the end of his nose, he was clean shaven and of slight to medium build; I thought I detected a faint Australian accent but never did discover if he was an Aussie. I passed over my passport, and discharge book for safe keeping. Being an Indentured Apprentice I was not required to sign ship's articles. Sea time, total earnings and length of service were all recorded on the back of my parchment testimonial. The meeting was quite brief but included a quick beginner's guide to the rules and regulations applying on board, what was expected of me and how I should conduct myself. I was warned off drinking as I was under legal age. Then directed to go and see the Mate. I later discovered the captain to be a very mild-mannered person, despite the glare over the rim of his glasses.

The senior apprentice introduced me to the Mate (his name I really did think was Harry Tate up until then). Not much was said other than to tag along with the senior apprentice who would instruct me what to do. My first meal on board was reasonable and sufficient in quantity – at least I would not starve if all else failed I thought to myself.

The ensuing days consisted of deck work and more deck work from 7 to 5. We were tasked with sorting and stacking pile upon pile of discarded dunnage. After a day or so we sailed from Immingham for Bremen, where we were to load a cargo of coal for Noumea, New Caledonia. Our stay in Bremen was

quite an education for me as to the ways of a sailor. One evening I was on cargo watch with the 3rd Mate. It was about 1am and I was walking down the main deck proceeding aft to cook the traditional bacon and eggs. As I passed the hospital porthole, I noticed the light was on, this struck me as being odd at that time of night. The deadlight was down but sitting on the porthole lugs rather than being in a fully secured position. This left a large gap, through which I could see clearly, right into the hospital. My curiosity got the better of me and I peered in. I had not bargained for what I saw.

All our crew were Hong Kong Chinese, amongst them was a Pantry Boy who did minor food preparation, the cleaning and washing up of cooking utensils and crockery for the officer's saloon. He was about 20 years of age. There he was, heavily engaged in aggressive lovemaking with two of the most hideous looking Whores imaginable. He was totally oblivious to me eyeballing him. I stood there spellbound for about 5 minutes taking all this in, before I rushed back to inform the 3rd Mate. Needless, to say who did the eyeballing for the remainder of the watch!

Time started to pass quickly as I settled into my new job. We sailed from Bremen bound for the Panama Canal and although always busy on board, boredom soon started to set in. Shipboard routine did not help me, I only remembered the days of the week by the meal menus.

Having transited the Panama Canal, we set off across the Pacific Ocean towards Noumea, eventually arriving 56 days after having departed Bremen. By this time, I was starting to become accustomed to life on board a Tramp ship.

From Noumea we went to Nauru for phosphate which we took to Cairns and Newcastle (NSW). It was at Newcastle I became the organizer for ship's parties with the Nurses from the local Hospital. I can still remember the phone number and whom to ask for, more than 50 years later.

Our next fixture was coal from Newcastle (NSW) for Nagoya in Japan. It was great for me being back in the Far East (I resided in Hong Kong). Japan was a great experience for me, never to be forgotten, but after a couple of weeks at Nagoya we departed and sailed right past Hong Kong bound for Singapore, where we bunkered and stored, on our way to Calcutta.

Actually, I did not mind India. Although we were in port 4-6 weeks at a time, we at least could attend the "Swimming Club." I remember suffering from a Verruca (Plantar Wart) on my right heel, it was very painful. I guess picked up by walking on wooden decks bare foot. I had visited the doctors a few times previously but lotions and ointments they prescribed did little to improve my anguish. In desperation I collared one of the Indian medicine men who ventured on board and asked if he could do anything, he shook his head from side to side in confirmation and acknowledgement. He sat me down and brought from his bag a small animal horn. He placed the wide end over the painful spot and began to suck. After a few minutes of pain, the Verruca was out, complete with its roots. I paid him off with thanks and an additional bonus, a few packs of "Lucky Strike", and then rushed to the medical locker to clean and douse the small wound in antiseptic and cover with a dressing. After all, the surgery had not been conducted under the most hygienic of circumstances, nevertheless it cured me, the condition never reoccurred.

We then did several voyages on the India Africa run, between Calcutta, Madras, Colombo and East African Ports, mostly Mombasa and Dar-es-Salaam. We usually carried cargoes of Sisal, Gunnies, Jute and sometimes raw Cotton in bales with a smaller quantity of mixed generals. Mombasa was my favorite, mainly because of the excellent Mariners Club, numerous BBQs, soccer matches and on Sunday

Eggs and Bacon provided by the Padre following church service. Dar-es-Salaam was another great spot in those days for apprentices with empty pockets.

It never ceased to amuse me each time upon our arrival in Calcutta; I always had a good laugh when a leaflet was received from the Port Authority for posting on our notice board – it basically discouraged crew from bathing in the cool waters of the River Hooghly as it was infested with numerous sharks and crocodiles...going by what I observed it was so polluted and if one was stupid enough to swim or fall into that river a stomach pump would be needed urgently...otherwise curtains, no need to worry about sharks and crocodiles!

Eventually, we were taken off the India-Africa trade. On our last trip to India, before sailing from Calcutta, we received on board a Stowaway. This was an “Official” Stowaway. He was a Hungarian national, and about 25 years of age. Apparently, he had stowed away on another one of our ships from Australia, wrongly assuming it was bound for Europe. Unfortunately for him he ended up in India instead. Anyway, the Indian authorities decreed he be deported back to Australia on the first available ship that was Australia bound – that so happened to be the “**Weybank**” as we were scheduled to load Phosphate at Christmas Island (Indian Ocean) for East Coast of Australia.

The Stowaway was a nice guy, hardworking and no trouble. He worked with us every day, was well looked after and well fed. Everyone took pity on him and after the day’s work he was generally slipped a couple of cans of beer, mostly by the engineers. At night he was locked in the Hospital and the door key deposited with the Duty Officer on the Bridge in case of emergency. Having loaded at Christmas Island we departed for Australia, south bound, crossing the Great Australian Bight.

A few days out from Flying Fish Cove the ship suffered a significant explosion and fire in the Engine Room. Some problem with the thrust pads melting. This occurred around 7am as I was just about to start the day’s work. I was in the vicinity of number 2 Hatch at the time when there was a sudden almighty explosion and a cloud of dark smoke loomed somewhere aft of the bridge accommodation. Fire parties successfully contained and quelled the fire and started to vent the engine room. The fire had been quite extensive, and the normally immaculate engine room was a sad sight – we apprentices along with all the other deck crew were assigned to scrape off all the blistered paint and clean up the mess whilst the engineers concentrated on repairs. It was all quite a frightening experience and one that I shall not forget.

To cut a long story short, after some 4 days drifting in the Indian Ocean, the engineers got the job going again but we were instructed by our Owners to proceed to Albany for more permanent repairs.

Once our Stowaway heard we were calling at Albany he became very subdued. We later learned it was from Albany he had stowed away after having allegedly been responsible for one of the Town or Port Official’s daughter becoming an expectant mother. Upon our arrival, he was taken into custody by the local police. However, we did later learn that if he had returned to any other place in Australia, except Albany, he would likely have got off scot free. The last we saw and heard of him was being marched down the gangway under police escort.

By this time, I had managed to survive as a Bank Line apprentice for almost 10 months, and I must say that whilst it was hard work, it was a happy ship, and I was enjoying the job. Time passed quickly and every day was a new experience with something new to learn. There had been several crew changes on board, the senior apprentice had finished his time and signed off in Calcutta and one of the engineers was promoted and transferred to another ship whilst in the same port. Other than that, the original crew remained intact, and I must say it was quite a jovial throng. I was fortunate, the Hong Kong Chinese

crew proved to be great friends to me, they taught me a lot about seamanship, which was all made easier by the fact I could speak Cantonese having been brought up and residing in the Colony. Little did I know I was to sail once again with the same Chinese crew on my next Bank Line ship?

Eventually we discharged our cargo in Newcastle (NSW). In those days port stays were typically about a week or more so we had ample time for partying again. We ended up doing 3 or 4 more round trips to Nauru and Ocean Island on the phosphate run. It was not bad because we had a good variety of discharge ports, amongst which were Bluff and Lyttelton in New Zealand, Risdon in Tasmania, as well as the Australian mainland ports of Newcastle, Port Kembla, and finally Melbourne. We apprentices could earn some additional cash by assisting the stevedores sweeping up in the tweendecks as they were always short of trimming and cleaning labor, especially in Bluff.

Upon completion of discharge at Melbourne we washed down the hatches then lay idle awaiting orders. This was most unusual and was the cause of many rumors and speculation such as imminent crew change since we had been on board well over one year by this point in time. But it was not to be.

During our stay in Melbourne, we received a visit from two Chinese businessmen whom I was instructed to meet at the gangway and escort to the Masters' Cabin, as they had been expected. They were from Hong Kong and were impressed to learn of my fluency in Cantonese when I was delegated, along with the Chief Officer, to give them a tour of the vessel. Their visit was very discreet as no one on board was advised by the Master as to the nature of their business. This obviously fueled even more speculation amongst officers, during evenings gathered in the Dining Saloon. The consensus was that we may next be bound for China. We were to be proven wrong however when, after some two wonderful and relaxing weeks in Melbourne, tied up at South Wharf doing nothing, we received orders to proceed to our well-known stomping ground of Newcastle (NSW), to load coal for Singapore.

To our great surprise, upon arrival at Newcastle, the Master informed all of us that the vessel was to be sold and once having completed discharge at Singapore we would be proceeding to Hong Kong where the vessel was to be delivered to her buyers. Obviously, this was music to my ears, especially since I learned I would be taking my leave in Hong Kong. Needless, to say our Chinese crew was also delighted. This also explained the visit of the two Chinese gentlemen in Melbourne.

There were no parties in Newcastle this call because most wanted to save their money for shopping in Singapore and Hong Kong. The loading was uneventful and soon we departed for Singapore. We transited the spectacular Great Barrier Reef and Torres Straits before entering the Java Sea. The weather was fine and there was an air of excitement about the ship, a sort of Channel Fever.

As we navigated across the Java Sea, I recall the sea being like glass, distant smoke wisps from active volcanic islands, the occasional shipwreck stranded on isolated coral atolls or indeed the fingers of smoke pointing skywards on remote horizons depicting the hull down location of another ship. It was a classic tropical voyage and so hot inside the accommodation that I took to sleeping on the boat deck under the stars.

It was not long before we made landfall, the mountainous terrain of the Karimata Straits, which separates the Indonesian Island of Bangka from what was then called Borneo (modern day Kalimantan). The Karimata straits signal the southern approaches to the South China Sea and only a couple of days steaming from Singapore Straits, at the western end of which lies the Horsburgh Lighthouse, standing guard like an ancient sentinel. The small island of Pedro Branca on which the lighthouse is situated makes for an excellent fix when entering the Singapore Straits. The Islet of Pedro Branca lies

approximately 30 nautical miles to the east of Singapore. In those days there was no VTSS in the Singapore Straits and it was a bit of a free for all with ships going every which way.

I have clear memories of our last port before signing off. Arrival at Singapore was late afternoon, and our British Pilot took us to anchor in the Eastern Working Anchorage, not far from the Amber Beacon Light, located on the Eastern Causeway of Singapore. The anchorage was somewhat crowded with not a lot of swinging distance between ships. The lights of Singapore, quite close to hand, were always conspicuous and comforting, the coming and goings of all the small craft with the distant sound of their "put put" engines disturbing the stillness of the night and the wafts of smells and occasional noises drifting seaward from the shore.

The host of vessels, both old and new, at anchor close by to us; ships owned by Blue Funnel Line with their names derived from Greek mythology, John Manners all named something "Breeze", Jardine Matheson - names prefixed by "Eastern", Williamsons, "Inch" something or other together with numerous ancient tramps sold off to the newly emerging collection of Far East operators. The list was endless. Amongst others, the Straits Steamships' "Raja Brook" a small vessel that used to run a passenger cargo service exclusively between Borneo and Singapore, with her slightly larger sister "Kimanis" engaged on a similar trade to Malaysia, Singapore, and Borneo. It felt as if I was almost home.

Following completion of port formalities, the lighters started to arrive alongside, together with hordes of stevedores, and the odd bum boat with the usual milk girls peddling their wares. Someone must have given the local tailors a wink as we had several visits, all offering cheap suits stitched in 24 hours. This mostly appealed to the junior engineers, who ordered readily. The finished product looked quite good but with what I assumed single stitching due to the fast tailoring, durability had to be questioned. The Sew-Sew ladies also arrived, generally more elderly women who came on board to offer sewing, laundry, and repair services. They were useful but, they seldom spoke any English. However, they knew what was needed of them when it came to sewing and were all affectionately called "Mary" or "Aunty Mary" if language or name problems became an issue.

At Singapore I was placed on anchor watches (6pm to 6am) which suited me fine and allowed me a bit of free time to go ashore during the day. I spent many memorable hours of solitude mulling through my thoughts, this, coupled with those rapid Oriental sunrises, awakening sounds and now too familiar fragrances that aired with the rising sun, all made for a very good start to every day, and I was thankful that Asia was my home. I just could not imagine living anywhere else and so far, enjoying my chosen career.

Whilst at Singapore I managed to spend the best part of one day ashore; I meandered around the spots that were favorites amongst seamen at that time; Change Alley and the Straits Settlement Cabaret in Anson Road but being relatively early in the day it was closed so I wandered further down the street to Toby's Paradise Bar which opened early most days. Following a swift Tiger there followed a quick visit to look at the notice board in the Cellar Bar, just across the road from Clifford's Pier. Whilst the Cellar Bar had an unobtrusive entrance once having descended the front steps it was quite large inside and was famous amongst seafarers at that time for its notice board advertising jobs. If anyone needed a job in Singapore it was unnecessary to write letters of application, all that was required was a phone call to the

various numbers that corresponded to the advertised vacancies on offer. It covered all ranks, from 3rd Mates to Masters, from Junior Engineers through to Chief Engineers, Electricians and Radio Officers.

I recall, after posting a few letters to friends from the GPO (now Fullerton Hotel) I then proceeded to enjoy a delightful lunch of my favorite local dish - mixed Satays on wooden skewers with Banana Leaf fish head curry. I bought the latest "Sandoz" slim line, Swiss wristwatch, with my money earned from helping stevedores in New Zealand but since time was marching on I did not have the chance to visit the "Worlds" as was my original plan. I quickly returned to Clifford Pier just in nice time to board the prearranged launch back to the anchorage, very satisfied with myself and my outing.

We weighed anchor one afternoon after we had delivered all the cargo, we moved slowly to the eastward leaving Singapore to fade in our wake. Soon, we had dropped off our Pilot and were proceeding at full sea speed towards Horsburgh and the South China Sea. Hong Kong was only 4-5 days steaming away.

By late afternoon, the following day we could clearly see the mountainous terrain of the Anambas Islands, off our port beam. We headed northeasterly into the South China Sea enjoying moderate conditions. The ship was alive with activity, everyone doing last minute things, whether personal or job related, in preparation for our arrival in Hong Kong. Telegrams were being sent to families advising of imminent return. I could say with confidence, most crew on board were happy at the prospect of being home in a very short period of time, not least of all yours truly. Even our Chinese crew was joyful and chattering away with big grins on their oval faces. There are some who declare that the only time a Chinese will smile is when they are either eating or counting money, the situation that prevailed on board dispelled that theory.

Upon our arrival at Hong Kong, our Chinese Pilot boarded us from his sampan like motorboat exactly on time and navigated us through the last of the eastern approaches of Lye Ye Mun to Hung Hom immigration anchorage that was located in Kowloon Bay close to the Kai Tak airport runway. We were surrounded by the breathtaking views of the moment. We had truly arrived. Many on board had not previously been to Hong Kong and were frankly awe struck by the panorama.

Within two hours Pratique had been granted and we were underway again heading for one of the Typhoon Buoys that had been allocated to us and to which we would make fast for the last time. Our anchor chain was lowered to the water and the boatmen that were in attendance did the needful for us. I was home at last, after 16 months and 10 days. It was 30th October 1962. I stood on the bridge wing motionless for what seemed like an eternity eyeing the scene that lay before me, the changes during my absence seemed endless and my excitement at being home started to boil over

After we had been at the buoys about two hours a group of officials arrived on board, they represented the new owners. Along with them came their joining officers and crew. We spent, a few hours showing them around the ship, and familiarizing them with the various aspects of the old lady, she was now almost 20 years old after all, but still as solid as a rock. There was a new European Captain and Chief Engineer. As the sun was dipping all officers and crew signed off ships articles and were ferried ashore. Officers sent to hotels and crew to their respective abodes. The ship had officially changed ownership.

As I boarded the launch that would take me ashore, I looked over my shoulder to say a last farewell to my old friend; her funnel by this time had been painted all black, looking like an inverted dustbin and a new name painted on the stern "**Silver Moon**" – **Hong Kong**, which I could just make out in the fading daylight. A new house flag fluttered atop her signal mast. In retrospect, the time I spent on board was some of the happiest and most productive days of my life. I owe much to those who devoted time and effort in passing on their knowledge and helping mould and prepare me for future voyages. I was no longer a first tripper!



The end of the road – a tired looking "**Weybank**" sold 30th October 1962 to Hong Kong interests for continued trading. With her newly painted all black funnel she quickly faded into obscurity and became just another "Hong Kong Dustbin", with an all-black funnel.

I enjoyed a happy leave in Hong Kong, before being instructed to join the "**Leverbank**" at Hong Kong on. I was fortunate since the "**Leverbank**" was engaged on the Orient – Africa Liner Service which meant frequent home calls at Hong Kong.



The "**Leverbank**" I served on was built at Harland and Wolff and delivered to the Bank Line Ltd, in mid-1961. The ship was a later derivative of the "**Cloverbank Class**". Being mid-way through my apprenticeship, and following 8 weeks home leave in Hong Kong, I joined her at Yau Ma Tei anchorage on 1st January 1963. At this juncture, the ship was relatively new, and I distinctly recall thinking to myself what a picture she looked, as my launch approached the accommodation ladder.

I had been informed by the Bank Line office in Hong Kong that the ship would be engaged permanently, in the Orient – Africa Liner Service. This suited me well because it meant regular calls at my home port of Hong Kong. I was also pleased to learn that the crew was Hong Kong Chinese; in fact, the same crew I had sailed with for 16 months on my previous ship **“Weybank”**.

At the time of my joining the Master was Captain Holland, whom I found to be a true gentleman. He later handed over command to Captain Louis Wigham, who was subsequently relieved by Captain Williams. I served under all three master’s for the duration of my time on board until completing my indentures and signing off, again in Hong Kong, on 6th October 1964, a voyage of some 22 months. However, I must confess, the prolonged period was no real hardship since I was regularly calling at my home base and the scheduled run was fantastic – very few wanted to leave or sign off the ship and a number of the officers requested to extend their time on board when crew changes were planned.

The result was, having spent little time ashore whilst an apprentice, I completed my sea time quite early at the age of 19 years and 10 months.

The ship itself was easy to work and she always performed well. She was relatively fast (16 knots) but we generally averaged about 15 knots whilst in the OA Liner Service, to maintain a schedule. Accommodation was comfortable and being senior apprentice, I had my own, good-sized cabin, located on the port side of the boat deck. Two other deck apprentices were situated in a double berth cabin, which was separated from my cabin by the apprentice’s study. The bulkheads were all adorned with light teak veneer and furnishings such as curtains, Bed, and Settee cover’s, etc., tastefully color coordinated.

The Chinese crew were great and good to work alongside, especially so because I was able to converse with them in their native dialect which I had been taught as a kid. The ship was a good feeder with decent variety, no shortages of provisions, because due to our frequent port calls, we were always able to top-up with fresh produce. Obviously, we had our weekly Chinese extravaganza, which was highly relished by all, but the cooks also produced some mighty curries which always went down well. I do not recall hearing a single complaint about the quality or quantity of food during my entire time on board. The mates and engineers were all Brits, mostly Scots or Geordies, except for our long serving chief engineer who was a Kiwi. Also, one of the electricians was South African, from Durban.

The run was great, if not a little hectic at times. Departing Hong Kong (which served the Company’s Regional Head Office and Far East Hub) we would proceed northbound to Taiwan after which we would spend one month calling various ports around the Japanese coast. Southbound, we would proceed to Hong Kong, with prior calls at Manila or North Borneo ports if cargo inducement so required.

We usually spent 3-5 days at Hong Kong loading before proceeding southwards to Bangkok, Singapore and Port Swettenham. By the time we sailed from Port Swettenham the ship was generally well laden.

The voyage across the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean to Mauritius (and occasionally Reunion) was the longest stretch. Dar-es- Salaam was our next port followed by Beira, Lorenzo Marques, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London and Capetown. The port of Capetown was our southern limit, where we started

to backload progressing our way back up the same African coastal ports, with additional load ports of Mtwara, Tanga, Zanzibar (typically high revenue cargo-chests of Cloves or Tea and bags of Coffee) and Mombasa, on the northbound sector.

We always seemed to spend a decent number of days loading at Mombasa. From Mombasa it was to Port Swettenham, with an intermediate call at Mauritius (usually to load bagged sugar). From Port Swettenham we would proceed to Singapore and Bangkok, prior to calling Hong Kong and Taiwan before spending another month traversing the Japanese coastal ports.

We did not use our deeptanks for liquid cargoes during my tenure on board, but rather they were usually full of rice, latex, packs of timber or bagged sugar or coffee. Occasionally we may fill deeptanks with bulk maize for Japan, from one of the African ports. Tweendecks were usually reserved for mixed generals, which were carried in abundance, whilst the bagged or more bulky cargo was stowed in the lower holds.

I well recall we would occasionally load pallets of stinking cow hides, mainly from East African ports for Singapore. Smelling so awful they were usually loaded in one of the after hatches, segregated as much as possible from other cargo to avoid tainting due to their odor. Shipping the cow hides was the only downside to the round trip, and we always disliked loading them.

Nevertheless, going by the volume of cargo lifted, both North and Southbound, it must have been a profitable enterprise for Bank Line because the cargo plan was like "Liquorice Allsorts" because there being so many different parcels of cargo – large and small. The cargo plans produced by the 2nd Mates were true masterpieces. Obviously, this was before the onset of containerization. The ship was also fitted with reefer lockers which were always in demand, especially when northbound from South Africa. We apprentices were always tasked with separating and marking the various parcels of reefer cargo, which were numerous in number. Apart from the **Leverbank**, three other Bank Line ships were regularly engaged in the OA service, namely, **Garrybank**, **Riverbank**, and **Cloverbank**.

Many friendships were forged with us being on a regular service over a prolonged period and the crew became well known, gaining "squatters rights", at many of the Pubs, Bars and Hotels (and sometimes places of less repute) along the route. The result was that few of the officers had much saved when payoff time arrived. It did not matter to us apprentices because, we didn't earn enough to save much anyway.

A great ship engaged on a great run. I was genuinely sad to leave the vessel when the time eventually arrived. Completion of my indentures was a little unexpected; it lacked the excitement I had anticipated and for several weeks thereafter I felt somewhat deflated until I came to grips with the fact I was now on my own in the shipping world. I was deeply saddened, some years later in 1973, when I learned of her loss at Matarani, after striking an uncharted obstruction, whilst navigating in fog. What an unbecoming demise for such a graceful lady of the seas.



MV Levernbank in heavy weather

(A Painting by Tony Westmore from the author's collection)

End

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