



Don's Diary:

My life in the Shipping Industry commenced in 1954, following in the footsteps of my Grandfather who held the position of Secretary of the Australian Steamship Owners Federation – a body that represented the interests of Australian flag Shipping Companies. I started as a 16year old in the Accounts Department of MacDonald Hamilton & Co, owned by Lord Inchcape who were the agents in Melbourne for vessels in which P & O had an interest – both passenger and freight. My stay in Accounts was short lived – due in part to my attention to the “wrong figures”- but was fortunate to be transferred to the B.I. and E & A freight section.

Life as a junior was varied and interesting with working hours 9 to 5 weekdays and 9 to 12 on Saturday. Breaks for morning tea usually involved a quick trip to the local milk bar with afternoon tea being provided by the tea lady! Luncheon vouchers to the value of 5 shillings were spent at a tea house.

Duties included the circulation and despatch of mail. Running errands – (including the recovery of Freight Managers from the local hostelry “The London” in Collins Street!, visits to the typing pool and for recreation, a lunchtime game of cricket on the roof of 311 Collins Street – and retrieving the tennis ball from the intersection of Collins and Elizabeth Streets!

A more challenging task was occasional trips out into the Bay to deliver mail to vessels at anchor and conquer scaling ‘Jacobs Ladder’, without falling into the drink – as one agent did – accompanied by the mail!!

Added responsibilities soon followed including collating freight bookings for the B.I. and E & A vessels - plus weekly reporting to Head Office in Sydney. Next was the handling of wool bookings and the distribution of wool orders to the Wool Clearing House which co-ordinated the flow of wool from the wool stores in Melbourne, Geelong and Albury to the wharves. Ironically, many years later I was to become Chairman of the Wool Clearing House!

In my early twenties I was assigned to the role as “Ships Liaison Officer” - initially to discharging vessels. This was followed by attending to the ordering and delivery of cargo to loading vessels under the B.I. flag to India and Gulf ports and E & A vessels to Hong Kong and Japan. Being a young married, the salary was fortuitously supplemented by overtime loadings, particularly during a period which was spent handling P & O passenger vessels at Station Pier. This was my exciting lot during the 1960's which

closed with secondment in 1968 to be part of a team of 12 to promote and launch the new Container venture under the OCL flag. Given the nickname “the coach” my initial responsibility was to monitor and attend to the unloading and loading of trial shipments of containers stowed on conventional vessels. With the planning of the container service now in full swing my next assignment was to move down to the “sand dunes” of Swanson Dock and await the completion of the S.T.L. Terminal and undergo the preliminary trialling of all the many functions integral to the handling of containers prior to the arrival of the first vessel – “Encounter Bay” – on her maiden voyage in April 1969.

The next 2-3 years were immersed in challenges presented by the launching of the service and spending endless hours in trying to resolve truck queues, redirection of rail wagons, reacting to the effects of constant industrial disputes, late receipts of wool deliveries, midnight arrivals of fruit shipments and a host of other challenges.

In 1972 I moved to the city office of OCAL in Market Street to handle the Commercial aspect of the business and this became a rewarding time with the emphasis on training and equipping young staff members. In 1982 the company moved to the World Trade Centre and this saw a further change with a heavy involvement in committees interacting with statutory authorities covering Port Authorities, Customs, Quarantine etc and as mentioned earlier – the wool industry with the introduction of a complete computer system to handle wool deliveries.

A fulfilling and extremely interesting 40 year career came to an end in 1993 and so life’s journey turned to travel, support of grandchildren, continuing interest in the local cricket club, golfing, following the “Bombers” and Church activities.

Don Bienvenu