

## RECOLLECTIONS OF MY EARLY DAYS IN STEVEDORING

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I was born in Melbourne in June 1939 and we lived in a lovely old home in Mercer Road Malvern that was built by my Great Grand Father. Great grandfather died long before I was born and subsequently my grand father died before I was born, so our family consisted of my Mother and Father together with my two younger sisters and my paternal grand mother who survived until I was ten years of age.

After my grandmother died, my Father sold the house in Malvern and bought a house in Great Valley Road Glen Iris. At this stage my parents were growing apart and we seldom saw Father to stay at home overnight and if he did, his return to the house was very late. On the occasions when he was at home, I was lucky enough to get a ride to school as I was at this stage attending Melbourne Grammar at St Kilda Road.

On one of these occasions my Father asked me what I was planning to do after I left school. Strange that I had only recently had a conversation with a family friend that had asked me a similar question. The family friend had a wholesale carpet importing, selling business and as he was about 50 years of age but did not have any sons to venture into the business, he asked me if I was interested in joining his company and learn the business with the aim of gaining experience and if all went well to gain a controlling interest eventually when he was ready to retire. I had not at this stage given him an answer but was considering my position.

I related the tale from our family friend to my Father and he was not impressed.

I got a history of our family involvement in shipping. From Great Grandfather, Captain John Ogilvie who landed in Williamstown and commenced a pilotage business from his home which later developed into The Victorian Stevedoring and General Contracting Company. His son Laurence carried on after Captain John but died at an early age and the company was now owned by some of the managers. According to my Father, it was time for an Ogilvie to go back to the Company and his choice was ME. Furthermore until I was 21 I would do as I was told!!!

As I was only 16 years of age at the time, I could see that I did not have much of an argument although I did complain and object but to no avail. There was a small compromise however, if after 12 months I was not happy, we would relook at the situation.

As for the remainder of my schooling, there was no argument about my scholarly capacity, I was not cut out for medicine, law or banking so as

Father said get out into the workforce now and by the time you are twenty you will know twice as much as those nerds!!

So after Christmas holidays in 1955, on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1956, I started work at the Victorian Stevedoring and General Contracting Company Pty Ltd. On the grand weekly wage of 8 pounds 6 shillings a week.

Father bought me a new suit from Myer and a hat from Buzoli's so I looked the part on the first day.

My first day was at the River Store, which was on the corner of Piggott Street and Cowper Street opposite the West Melbourne Gas works and next to the entrance gate to the Victoria Dock.

The first people I met were Mr. Bob Metcalf, Captain Frank Grose and Mr. Harold Birch who were the Directors of the Company. Head Office of the Company was at 439 Flinders Lane and Mr. Birch as Company Secretary was stationed there.

Messers Metcalf and Grose talked to me for a while and explained a bit about what the company did and what shipping lines it operated for and a brief outline of what they wanted me to do. Next I was taken to meet Captain Jack Wallace who was the senior stevedore supervisor and responsible for the allocation of supervisors to vessels for stevedoring and at the same time I met Captain George Smith who was outside Manager for the Company. There was also an elderly gentleman present in the room, a Mr Charles Harsley, an Associate Director I later found out but I never discovered why!

Also under the supervision of Captain Wallace and in the same room were the "timekeeping staff", Peter Morwood, Des Heskett, Arthur Leith, Alec Dart and Alan MacLean. These were to be my colleagues and I was to learn from them.

Captain Wallace asked the boys to take me around the dock and show me the compound. so Morwood and Heskett donned our hats and set off through the Dock Gate and proceeded to walk from 5 Vic Dock to 24 Vic Dock. The wharfies all got a good shock to see a new face wearing a hat walking up the road and the cigarettes went out in a great hurry to the amusement of my two mates. Smoking on the wharf in those days was a significant offence and the police were very strong in penalizing.

We walked back to Piggott Street and then set off for the Compound. This area was at the bottom of Piggott Street on the corner of North Wharf Road and was a big area where the wharfies gathered to collect their pick up notices from the Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (ASIA) who ran the pick up centre. In those days there were no permanent waterside workers as we have today, it was a casual

industry and labour was requested and allocated on a daily basis handled by ASIA.

Our major competition in Melbourne was The United Stevedoring Company and they had their River Store next to the compound and both United and The Vics had an office in the Compound as well. The smaller stevedores, Strang, Patrick, Fraser and the other small stevedores also had office space in the Compound.

Having met some of the people from ASIA and the other stevedores, we made our way back to the River Store, having completed a very busy and interesting day. Next thought was how to get back to Glen Iris? Fortunately I did not have a bag or anything to carry so I walked to Spencer Street Station and caught the train to Gardiner which got me home in about 1.5 hours close to 7pm. Thank goodness for daylight saving! Captain Wallace had told me that the hours of work were 7.30am start at the compound for labour pick up and we could finish about 5.00pm unless on duty at night for the evening pick up which would keep you till about 10pm. Anything over 5.00pm was overtime. I shudder when I look at those hours today, but at the time thought nothing of it.--- AMAZING. We worked every Saturday morning and were rostered for pick up duty of Sundays from 3.00pm to 9.00pm.

## DAY 2

I was gradually working myself into some sort of a routine. I rose at 5.30am, showered and dressed by 6.00am and by 6.15am was walking to the Gardiner station to catch the 6.35am train to Spencer Street station, arriving at about 7.00am. The walk to the compound was about 10minutes and that got me to the Compound by 7.30am all being well.

The reason all the timekeepers gathered at the compound office early in the morning was to write up the time sheets for all the labour that had been employed.

As mentioned earlier, the industry was casual and the process was that supervisors were required to submit requisitions for labour to the ASIA the night before and the ASIA staff would work on allocating labour through the night to fulfil each requisition before issuing any labour dockets to we timekeepers. Each waterside worker was identified by a plastic docket on which was written his number and name. Many of the workers had formed themselves into "gangs" usually of about 15 members. The dockets for these 15 gang members were held in a "pouch" a small leather receptacle with a press-stud cover that held the 15 dockets together.

Many individual waterside workers were very good at certain aspects of their job, deck hands, winch drivers, fork lift drivers etc. and

supervisors might ask for some of these special workers to assist in the load or discharge of certain aspects of the vessel's cargo.

However, as mentioned, requisitions were required at ASIA the previous evening and ASIA staff would allocate the labour to the requisitions by 10.00-10.30pm that night and the allocations would then be forwarded to 2 radio stations and 2 newspapers for publishing and made available to waterside workers prepared to work that day.

At 7.30am that morning we would collect all the dockets from the ASIA office and take them back to our Compound office and start writing up the pay sheets for all the labour we had picked up. This often mounted up to a lot of labour. We could have about 10-15 vessels in port, some working 3 shifts of 6 gangs day, 4 gangs twilight and 3 gangs midnight or greater. That vessel alone would have a complement of in excess of 200 men allocated.

Once all the time sheets were written up, the dockets are all kept in the compound office in "pigeon holes" for each vessel and the time sheets then taken back to the River Store and held by the timekeeper looking after the vessel.

Generally Alec Dart and Alan McLean looked after Port Melbourne vessels and Arthur Leith looked after the vessels on South Wharf and Messrs Heskett, Morwood and I looked after Victoria Dock and North Wharf. If we had a vessel at Williamstown, a timekeeper with a vehicle usually looked after that.

Having completed our duties at the Compound at about 10.00am we would return to the River Store, have a cup of tea and gather together our time books and prepare to visit our vessels. At each vessel we would speak with the supervisor and find if there was any specific detail he wanted us to note because the detail we were collecting would form the basis for the stevedores account rendered to the principal who contracted us - the resident shipping company or agent or sometimes another stevedore.

We would also speak with each foreman and get delays incurred which interrupted work such as rain, equipment break down, changing decks waiting for cargo or variations in stowage. Any delay brought on by the vessel would be documented and brought to account against the vessel by our costing personnel at Flinders Lane.

Having spoken with the foremen on day shift, we would then make for the stevedores office on the berth where the evening and midnight foremen leave their time sheets and delay books. We copy their notations and acknowledge that we have taken a copy so they are aware that we have caught up with their records.

Having completed this process for each of the vessels we are responsible for we make our way back to the River Store and then type up in quintuplicate the details of the records we have just collected for the previous day and last night. With 3 or 4 vessels to process this task may well take the rest of the day.

At about 4.30pm if you were rostered on to the Compound for duty, which was twice a week, it would be time to head down to the Compound Office and after about 7.00pm start writing up the pay sheets for the next days labour being picked up. And so the circle starts again.

The detail of writing out time sheets for very busy and large vessels with a lot of labour working 3 shifts is a very tedious business and can be very boring. I found it very interesting as it brought me into contact with a very different group of people that I would never have the opportunity to come in contact with under other circumstances, get very close to “the art” of stevedoring, seeing for myself the sad waste of time and effort by labour in the preoccupation of spurious political argument, particularly in the days of Communist dominance of the W.W.F in the 1950’s, but after my Father’s words “until you are 21 you will do as you are told”. I must say that after 18 months of the aforementioned, stevedoring was in my blood and I loved every minute of it.

During the 1956 Olympic Games, I was very fortunate my Father, through Gibbs Bright and Co managed to obtain a spare ticket to the opening ceremony and the second day of the athletics to which he offered me the opportunity to attend if I could get some leave. I approached Mr. Charles Harsley who spoke with the Directors and I received 2 days leave to attend. Two wonderful days at the Olympic Games which I am sure I will never have the opportunity to do again.

Towards the end of 1957, Alan McLean, who was a Second World War prisoner in Changi and had one artificial leg, was in his 50’s and expressed his desire not to travel to Port Melbourne in the future and Alec Dart, an older man and not enjoying the very best of health, opted to retire. As a result the Company asked me to take over the duties of the Port Melbourne Office. This meant timekeeping for up, to sometimes, seven or so vessels working there.

In those days, the VSC Office was next to Barnes Panel Beating Works in Beach Street Port Melbourne on the corner of Princes Street. Beach Street ran from The London Hotel on the corner of Princes Street, alongside the bridge over Station Pier to the Port Melbourne railway station. Nowadays, the bridge has gone as have all the other buildings and been replaced by “Beacon Cove”.

From the goodness of their hearts, VSC management gave me a bicycle to get too and from the two piers, Station and Princes. I was excused Compound duty at night and morning but was required to roster on Saturdays and Sundays if not working at Port Melbourne. No more money but a heck lot more work.

I think my early working days at Port Melbourne were a highlight of my early working life. United Stevedores also had an office at Port Melbourne on Station Pier and was managed by John Wiegard and Freddie Doodah. We saw a lot of each other and we became firm friends.

Most of the cargo vessels that berthed at Port Melbourne were those loading Australian cargo for shipment back to the U.K and Europe. Other vessels using the berths at Port Melbourne were generally, what were called, "Mail Boats". Passenger vessels, many of which, at that time, brought out migrants from Europe and sailed back to Europe with paying passengers.

A small group of Italian Liners, "Oceania" "Australia" "Neptunia" "Toscana" were frequent visitors and I frequently managed to get aboard for a lunch. Became very partial to home cooked Italian food which endeared me to Italian food for life. The Dutch had two vessels which were frequent visitors and had names that I would never forget. "The Johaan van Oldenbarneveldt" and the "Marnix van St Olden Honder" I can't vouch for the spelling after all these years but they were very large vessels bringing 1000's of migrants to, for them, a brand new country. Some U.K. vessels doing the same job were the "New Australia" "Dominion Monarch" "Southern Cross" and "Northern Star". The United Stevedores also had the P & O. and Orient Liners, "Arcadia" "Iberia" "Orsova" "Orcades" "Oriana" etc. which were regular visitors to our Port.

The cargo Lines we saw most of from the VSC viewpoint was "Blue Star Line" "Blue Funnel Line" "Transatlantic Shipping Company" of Sweden "Shaw Savill Line" and the "Danish East Asiatic Line". Some of these vessels would come to Port Melbourne to load large quantities of cargo, refrigerated, general, wool sheepskins, sometimes as final port in Australia and often end up with cargo stowed on deck and covered and lashed for the voyage home.

One of the more competent and active ships agents in Melbourne was a Mr. Rex Parker of Blue Star Line. He had a deal of difficulty collecting accurate information from incoming vessels of his Line concerning the space remaining aboard for him to book the correct amount of cargo to fill the vessel. The ship after loading in Northern ports in Australia and then coming to Melbourne as final homeward bound port invariably inaccurately estimated the measurement of the cargo already loaded or underestimated the space in the holds after the cargo had been stowed and invariably settled, particularly flour. Mr. Parker, to his credit,

because on a number of occasions, he had ended up with space remaining after loading the final cargo decided that for those vessels on final loading in Melbourne, would be remeasured before loading started in Melbourne. He approached his stevedore, which was VSC to do the remeasure. This was not only a check against the vessel but an actual factual measurement of the space remaining that could be filled with cargo.

The task of re-measurement was allocated to me.

Generally, the vessel would berth a day before work was to start. I would report to the Chief Officer, who had his instructions and sometimes a chip on his shoulder at the agent doubting his figures, but he would allocate me an apprentice or a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> officer and together we would climb down each hatch and check out and measure the space remaining in each deck.

By this time I was 18 years of age and having saved every penny for a car, I had the sum of 400 pounds. I managed to buy a second hand 1939 Chrysler 2 door sedan that had belonged to a Mr. Eric Solis, and employee from Gibbs Bright and who had recently passed away. The car was in excellent mechanical condition with low mileage but the leather upholstery was somewhat the worse for wear, however beggars can't be choosers and I shared the car with my Mother who did not have a car of any sort at that stage. Being mobile was a great advantage meeting ships as they berthed, as it was often at a weekend.

Some of the apprentices I met were the same age as I was and have become life long friends. Some have died, others have gone to other shipping companies and others have left the sea when containerization took over. The friendship usually started the day we met to do the measure up. Having gone through a 6 hatch vessel in about 4-5 hours and then coming back on deck for a wash and a drink, I often invited the apprentice home to meet my Mother and 2 sisters and have a home cooked meal, a rarity for many of those at sea. As the vessel was often in port for 2-3 weeks, this routine was often repeated and we would also play squash and tennis as well as frequent favourite restaurants and bars. We always had a great time and it was very sad to say Good Bye when the vessel finished loading.

From Mr. Parker's point of view he was always delighted, for many times I proved the vessel wrong with its measurements and Blue Star Line did very well out of the extra cargo the vessel lifted and shipped home.

Word spread and before long Mr. Ken Lord from Shaw Savill asked me to do the same for Shaw Savill as I was doing for Blue Star Line. Shaw Savill did not have as many vessels using Melbourne as last Australian port fortunately as I would not have enough time to do my regular routine work.

Working at Port Melbourne was a joy for me; most of the WWF labour was older retired men who operated on the wharf as “receivers”. They would manhandle the cargo off trucks and rail as it arrived and stack the cargo on the berth ready to be loaded on the vessel when it arrived. They were ex foremen and wharf labourers who were still fit enough to carry out a days work and they were a wonderful group of fascinating people.

Receiving cargo can sometimes be extremely busy and sometimes very quiet. To have half an hour chatting to these guys during a quiet time is enthralling, stories of earlier times, tales of some that have passed on. Wonderful stuff and a magnificent education for a young bloke longing to learn more about his trade.

When I turned 19 years of age in June 1958, I had saved enough money for a deposit on my first brand new car, a 1959 model brown VW beetle sedan. My Father went guarantor and I did a deal with Custom Credit. I think so much a month for 5 years and the car cost, I think, about 900 pounds.

HCC815, my very own first new car, at last I was travelling independently and I could drive to work, meet vessels on weekends and be quite an active individual.

The office at Port Melbourne had a front door that opened onto Beach Street and just inside on the left was a small office which I used. A short walk down the corridor was a small kitchen with basic tea and coffee making facilities and I think a small fridge.

There was another door on the Princes Street side that opened onto Princes Street as well but internally; the Princes Street side of the building was vacant. One day towards the end of 1960, I had a visit from Captain George Smith who was our outside Operations Manager and an Assistant Director of the Company. He came to have a look at the vacant space. Apparently one of the supervisors, a Captain George Robert Spencer Aspinall who was a senior supervisor had approached the Company on behalf of his daughter who had recently finished her schooling at Korowa girls school and was now completing an arts course, I think, at RMIT. Her art specialty was screen-printing and she needs a workshop of some length to lay out bolts of material on wide tables to be able to screen print.

Captain Smith asked me what I thought, I had no objection, Lyn would have her own entrance and although there was no internal security and we would share the facilities, I did not have any valuables and I didn't think she did either. On occasions I would have some meal monies delivered on a Friday for delivery on Sunday but they always stayed on my person until issued on Sunday. So the arrangements were agreed



and when Lyn finished her course at RMIT, tables and other furniture arrived and Lyn took up her position in early 1961.

Lyn was a very busy girl, she seemed to have a lot of work on her plate and she worked long hours day and night to complete her tasks. We usually stopped for a tea of coffee and a chat when we were both in the office.

Also as was my custom on a regular basis, I would go over the road to Mrs Gregson the wife of the owner of the London Hotel and buy a couple of her excellent counter meals which I would take back to the office for Lyn and I to have a good lunch.

As time went by we became quite friendly, Lyn had a boy friend called Ian Mason who was battling through architecture and not yet finished, and I asked Lyn one night would she come out for dinner with me and she agreed. We went to Chevron and had a very nice meal and a very pleasant night. I didn't have a girl friend at that time, with the hours of work that I kept, time for the fair sex was not possible. However, Lyn got an invitation to the Oaklands Hunt Club Ball, a very swank affair and she asked if I would like to go. Lyn was to be partnered by Ian and she suggested a school friend of hers, Ann Cole, who did not have a boy friend at that time and might like to come with me if I was interested. It was not the first blind date I had been on and as it sounded like a swell affair so I agreed to go.

I had to go and hire a dinner suit complete with shirt and shoes and as it turned out Miss Ann Cole lived in Albion Road which is only a stones throw from Great Valley Road which was where I lived. Very convenient. So right on time I rang the doorbell and Ann and I met for the very first time. Mother had armed me with a small posy of flowers which were gratefully received and pinned to her dress. I thought we would get lost trying to find Oaklands but we did not and ended up having a super night and when I took her home, I promised to take her out again if she would like to come, and she did. Little did I know then that five years later I would marry her, have two boys and spend the rest of our lives together.

The Hunt Club Ball, I think, was in February 1961 and I found out that Ann was going overseas in April with two of her close school friends, Jan Norton who lived in Brisbane and Noreen Downey who came from Glen Waverley. They were booked to go on the "Southern Cross" a Shaw Savill Liner that we stevedored.

On the February or March Sailing I managed to organize to get the family aboard to inspect their cabin etc. Very excited Mother Ruby and Father Eric and Ann and I had a wonderful tour of the vessel for about an hour well before the passengers boarded. The family were thrilled to see as much as they did and to see that the vessel was all one class.

Ann and I became very friendly over the three months before she sailed and I had decided that I was very much in love with her and she with me. It was a very sad farewell at Station Pier that April night in 1961 when we said good-bye.

Ann was away for twelve months and although we exchanged letters, Ann was a much better letter writer than I, there would be three letters from Ann to one of mine. Ann had a lot more to write about. I would be a regular visitor to Ruby and Eric at Albion Road and we would sit and chat over Ann's letters and gossip about the neighbours and Ann's school friends that Rube used to see a lot of, so there was always news to pass back to Ann and the girls.

Although your love has moved out of your life albeit on a temporary basis, your life must go on and work does not stop and there is much to be done. The goal ahead for me was to save enough money for me to go to U.K. and Europe when Ann got back. I needed about 500 pounds for a one-way trip on P. & O "Arcadia". So that was the aim. I wanted to go alone and copy what Ann had done by tying up with two girls and me a lone male, purchase a small car and the male does all the driving, erects the tents and packs the car. The girls do the washing, ironing and shopping and all share the costs.

It seemed a very successful operation and was working well for Ann, why not me?

However that is a story for another day, Suffice to say Ann returned in March 1962 and I departed a bit later in 1962 and returned home in June 1963.

After Ann left in 1961, I devoted my self to lots of hard work and overtime to raise the funds I was going to need to purchase the P & O fare and to have some spending money.

I also spoke with Mr. Charlie Harsley and Captain Frank Grose, who was now Managing Director of the Company following the passing of Bob Metcalf to see if it was possible to get 12 months leave of absence to go to the U K and Europe and possibly work for some of the stevedores of our Principals over there to gain some experience.

My aim had always been to become a stevedore supervisor but management had always told me that it would not be possible because I was not a Master Mariner and the Companies Insurance would not allow me coverage even if the VSC agreed. However I never aborted my aim and gaining further experience in U K and Europe, I thought, would be no burden to carry and should stand me in good stead.

To my great delight, I had a very good hearing from Frank Grose, who agreed to grant me twelve months leave of absence and also organized letters of introduction to Shaw Savill in London and Nor Deutscher Lloyd in Bremen, Germany and my Father organized a letter of introduction to Port Line in London. I thought that if I could get some work with those three major cargo Lines, then I would be very satisfied.

Planning my trip from Melbourne and with only twelve months at my disposal, I would try and do the touring bit with the three girls over six months and leave six months to work.

I did meet up with three girls from Brisbane and Sydney on board Arcadia and they agreed to my plan of six months touring starting on our arrival in London. On arrival we wasted no time in purchasing a small Austin A40 hatch and set off across the English Channel to France. The three girls were all ardent Roman Catholic girls, so every notable Catholic Cathedral was on the visiting list to be explored by them. This took a bit more time than we had planned, but apart from Lourdes, which I visited as well, the trip went mostly to schedule and largely within budget.

After nearly six months I got the girls back to London and my cousin had arrived and was living in Highgate. I moved in with him and started looking for some work.

I had very good reception from the letters of introduction, but all the Companies were prohibited from employing me due to restrictions on foreign workers. Shaw Savill was kind enough to "employ" me on a gift of 8 pounds a week for a month, which as they said, would help with the rent. The Marine Superintendent was , at the time, Captain Tommy Marsden. And he asked his deputy Captain Owen O .Thomas, the author of "STOWAGE" to look after me for the month.

It was a wonderful experience, we saw a number of major British ports and included a trip to Brussels to extract the "SUEVIC" off the sand in the Scheldt, And a feasibility study on the Port Of Sheerness as a possible future Container Port. The experience gained with Thomas and that month with Shaw Savill was tremendous.

I had a week at Port Line but did not learn much and did not receive any pay so I had to live off savings.

One important aspect of my short time with Port Line was they offered to get me a berth aboard one of their cargo vessels for the trip back to Melbourne in early 1963. That was pleasing and I accepted with joy.

I still had the car from being with the girls so I then drove over to Bremen and met with Nor Deutscher Lloyd management, who once again could not employ me but offered to put me up in a boarding house

that they had used for other ex pats from Australia. Mutti Ullhorn was the lady in charge, she had absolutely no English but somehow we managed to converse with sign language and with the odd hours I was working with the stevedores, meals were a bit of a gamble anyway.

NDL Stevedoring put me in the care of Horst Barnkovski a stevedore superintendent with a lot of experience and quite good English. For a small Port, Bremen is a very busy place and we worked three shifts on a regular basis.

Barnkovski was a good stevedore, competent and capable and the men respected him. He also had a very stern approach to discipline and the labour always listened. It was very interesting being in his company and to watch the results of his actions.

Bremen uses a lot of mechanical equipment, and receipt and delivery of cargo goes on eighteen hours a day so there was never any congestion or queuing of vehicles. Too soon the month was complete and I had to say my good byes and head back to London.

## **1963**

Having completed my twelve months overseas, I returned to Melbourne on board the Port Lincoln, a voyage that took six weeks from London to Melbourne via Capetown, Durban, Adelaide and finally Melbourne. This was one of the last voyages around the Cape after the war in Egypt and the closing of the Suez Canal had disrupted shipping around the world for some time.

The Victorian Stevedores were very obliging in keeping a job for me on my return and on resumption I was placed with Mr. Charlie Herbert who was responsible for allocating the stevedore book clerks who were responsible for locating inward cargo being discharged from the vessel into the shed and eventually accounting for the quantity of packages nominated on the Bill of Lading. Mr. Herbert was also responsible for the repair of any damaged cargo damaged by stevedores in the receiving or loading process, particularly damaged cartons of tinned fruit or similar where the cartons can be repacked with undamaged tins and sealed for export. Any damaged tins were taken back to the office and the shipper notified who could then replace parts of the shipment and bills the stevedore for the damage. Mr. Herbert had an off sider Mr. Doug Monroe who between them could cover most of the tasks so leaving me very little to do.

During 1964 I had spoken with my Father saying that I was very disappointed in not making any progress at the Victorian Stevedoring Company and how difficult I could see making any progress was likely to be. He was sympathetic but said he could not see anyway around the

problem at this time but to persist and he would explore some other possibilities.

In May 1965, Ann and I had planned to marry, we had been engaged since the previous October but having just returned from overseas I certainly did not have any money and Ann had only recently returned to Malvern Grammar where she was teaching.

About a month before we were to be married, my Father rang and asked me to meet him at the Australia Club as there was someone he wanted to introduce to me. I met Father at the Club and he introduced me to Mr. C. H. Bridgford, commonly known as Bill. Mr. Bridgford was Governing Director of Bridgford Sons and Company, the major tallying company in the Ports of Melbourne, Geelong and Portland.

Mr. Bridgford explained that he and his brother Les were the two remaining family members left in the Company and when they retired, they would be selling their shareholdings to the remaining Directors of the Company. As there were no family members interested in taking up their shareholdings, he asked me if I would be interested in joining the Company and spend some time in the ruck was his phrase, and become a supervisor and if it all worked, eventually a director.

I was extremely flattered by his offer as it provided a much more progressive path than my current position.

Father was enthusiastic and so was I. I did explain to Mr. Bridgford that I was about to get married and he did not have a problem with that and said to contact him on my return from our honeymoon some three weeks later.

I returned to work and wrote out my resignation to take effect from my wedding day about one month from that time. I think, in hindsight, my resignation was welcomed by V.S.C. Management as they really did not have a future for me and with the Ogilvie name may well have considered me a future threat.

After our marriage and honeymoon, returning about 6<sup>th</sup> June, I made contact with Mr. Bridgford and started work for Bridgford Sons and Company, being picked up through the AEWL pickup centre and sent to 32 South Wharf on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1965.

The vessel I was working on was a German vessel owned by Hamburg Sud and had discharge a full cargo in the berth.

The Chief Clerk and for whom I was working was Mr. Wally Brown, an experienced clerk in the discharge process and well known around the waterfront and a specialist in European cargoes.

In those days Bridgfords controlled well over 100 permanent and casual "guaranteed" clerks.

Unlike the Waterside Workers Federation controlled by the Communist Party, the clerical labour force was part of the Federated Clerks Union with strong allegiance to the Democratic Labour Party after the split in the Labour Party of the 1950's

As mentioned earlier, all waterfront labour was casual, and the casual clerks were administered and picked up through The Association of Employers of Waterfront Labour (The AEWL). Their task was similar to that of the ASIA for wharfies. The AEWL had all casual clerks but at Bridgfords, they had permanent clerks, guaranteed employment every day, and guaranteed casuals, who were guaranteed a certain number of hours per week or month providing they only offered themselves for work with Bridgfords.

That way Bridgfords always had enough clerks to man their jobs and the guaranteed casuals were always in work. A very satisfactory arrangement all round.

All the Bridgford "In charge Clerks" for both loading and discharge vessels are permanent and the guaranteed clerks make up the balance of the job manning.

Typically the manning would be for a loading vessel:

1 In charge Clerk, 1 x Off sider, 1 x Receiving Clerk, 1 x tally clerk per gang

Similar for twilight and mid night shifts except for receiving clerks.

For a discharge vessel:

1 x in charge clerk, 1 x delivery clerk, 1 x gate pass clerk, 3-4 interim pass clerks, 1 x book clerk for at least every 2 gangs.

The chit clerks provide the carrier picking up cargo with an interim pass giving the mark of the packages and the quantity, the carriers name and truck registration number so he can present this detail to the delivery clerk and acquit the Bill of lading and give the truck driver a gate pass to leave the wharf area.

When I joined the Company at Bridgfords, apart from the two family shareholders there were other directors, Mr. Jim Considine, Mr. Jack Taylor, and Mr. Alf Dyer, The CFO was also a director Mr. Chris Payne.

I was enjoying my time in the ruck and making a lot of very good friends along the way. I was making good progress in the various jobs I was allotted and learning all the time. The experience gained at the V.S.C. was no burden to carry and stood me in good stead when dealing with the documentary side of shipping. During the discharge process I met a number of Master Mariners whom were operating as Cargo Surveyors

and standing alongside these experienced Mariners was an education listening to a broad range of knowledge and experience regarding cargo damage and the division of liability and cause.

One of the surveyors was an ex Vics Stevedores Supervisor, Captain Peter Goodson who was very switched on and together with Captain Tom Fairbairn, Captain Jim Clark and others, were a very formidable crew.

I graduated to a delivery clerk and an off sider to a chief loading clerk and eventually was asked to be a permanent chief discharge clerk. At the time the chief Discharge clerk for the Holland Australia Line and operating through John Sanderson and Company was a Mr. Bob Howie. Bob unfortunately was not enjoying the very best of health and was considering retirement. When he did retire Mr. Jim Considine asked me to look after the Line.

One afternoon in December 1968 I was in the office at about 4pm when the phone rang and it was Phil Kelly the new Manager at Trans Ocean Containers, a new company just starting up. Phil had worked with my Father for many years but at this time Gibbs Bright had lost Port Line as they were joining the container consortium to be called ACTA and Phil was to be the new Victorian Manager of that organisation.

However he rang to tell me my Father had just passed away in the office he had taken over in Temple Court as the Manager of Westralian Farmers. He was 54 years of age.

Interesting times, although we are talking late 60's and containers had not started in earnest yet but the Lines were trying to carry more cargo and turn the ships around in quicker time. The Dutch and the Swedes were modernizing their fleets with "Skandia" type vessels, five hatch vessels with engines aft and massive wide hatches and flat tween decks able to take forklifts below and stack palletized cargo. The Dutch had three of these type vessels, "Waalekerk" "Wisserkerk" "Westerkerk"

Each hatch had two cranes one fwd and one aft and could be joined for heavy lifting occasions. All cargo was stacked and secured on massive 8 x 4 foot pallets made of oak, almost indestructible. The discharge of the vessel was very quick, in the case of Melbourne turnaround time was about 36 hours and the vessel was gone. However we needed stevedores back for at least three days to break down some of the pallets which had mixed cargo marks aboard. – LCL if you like. I as chief clerk, was left to collect the empty pallets and try and balance the shipment. Empties in the shed at completion of delivery and those signed for by drivers and taken to their warehouse.

I was at this time in my mid thirties and still fit enough to man handle these large pallets, but after a day of dealing with that, the old back

really told a tale. It was really very hard work. Eventually the pallets had to be returned to Holland Australia Line Gear Store for reuse on the homeward voyage or to be shipped back to Europe empty.

Over a period of time some of the pallets did get damaged, but they were much easier to account for than the old 46 inch x 46 inch standard pallet we had been used to and the ships turnaround times had improved markedly.

Bridgfords, at this time had two outside supervisors, Bill McLoughlin and Jack Bloomfield, who assisted the directors in the clerk's allocation and liaised with each berth we had a vessel working to organize on a daily basis, the coverage of overtime using the labour manning the day shift. This was called doing "double headers."

About two years after I started handling the "W Kerks", Bill McLoughlin expressed a desire to retire. I was asked to take over his role as supervisor. The promotion came with a car, which was a nice surprise, albeit a small Torana sedan but ideal for getting around the wharf.

Part of our job was to check on attendance of the staff on evening and night shifts as we had had some reports that some clerks were missing on duty, going home early on either shift.

So Jack Bloomfield and I started a twilight and midnight blitz, checking each vessel at odd hours during the night, sometimes checking two or three times during the shifts. We still had to carry out our normal duties during the day, so if you lost a bit of sleep, Bad Luck.

I carried out this task with enjoyment, caught a couple of lazy buggers, docked their wages and found that was all that was needed in most cases to cure the offenders. One smart lad by the name of Des Burke, who was not an offender christened me with the nickname "Lurkin Laurie" and it stuck.

I was a supervisor until about 1979 when Jim Considine, Jack Taylor, Alf Dyer and Chris Payne asked me to the office. They announced that Bill Bridgford was about to retire, Les had retired earlier due to ill health and Jim Considine wanted to retire as well. Bill and Jim had jointly agreed with the other three Managers how their shares would be divided. A sizeable share would go to Jack Taylor, Alf Dyer and Chris Payne with Jack to be the senior Shareholder and there was a small portion for me if I wanted to become a partner.

I certainly did not need to think twice. I agreed and we had a great embrace and a drink to celebrate. Everyone was delighted and very Happy particularly me. Laurie Quinn, our lawyer, from Oswald Burt and Co. was called in to draw up the shareholding agreements and in a couple of weeks it was done and I was a brand new director and



partner in the new Company B.S.C. Pty. Ltd. Which were the initials of the previous company name. Bridgford Sons and Company.

Jack, Alf, Chris and I were great mates at work and we cooperated very closely in running the business, containerization was on our doorstep and we could see the massive changes taking place in our industry. Many of the old conventional shipping Lines were departing or ceasing to exist and many of the old methods of documenting shipping the way we were used to were disappearing. As a company we needed to diversify and we could see the days of supplying clerical labour to the industry were not going to be with us for much longer.

As a start, Jack Taylor had set up a small one-man cooperage business based on the fact that there were two other run down cooperage businesses in the port and he thought there was room for a more modern and enthusiastic operation to survive. BSC Cooperage took its name from the barrel makers of old, but on the waterfront a cooper was employed to act with a surveyor to inspect cargo for customs inspection and also to repair damage to cargo on discharge.

We found it difficult to make inroads into the inspection business as the customs agents were loathed to move their custom and so it was only when Bushells Tea asked us to repair their chests of tea from India which were a regular conventional shipping service at this time, that the cooperage started to make some money. Unfortunately it was not long before the tea was containerized and we lost that business as well. The cooperage was a one-man vehicle business and it struggled to make money for most of its existence.

At about the similar time as we started the cooperage service and following our policy to diversify away from the clerical backbone of our business, we negotiated with the Victorian Railways and The State Electricity Commission to take over a totally open sided narrow shed with a rail siding running along its length. The shed was used previously by the SEC for briquette storage and with the advent of oil heating briquettes had gone out of fashion. The situation of the shed was in the Montague Rail yards.

Our reasoning for the shed was to bring in wool from both road and rail and unitise the bales into units of six ready for transport by road to ship's side then shipment on conventional and Skandia type vessels.

We used one and two metal straps drawn together around the bales using air pressure and held tight by metal clamps. The units were excellent and were very successful as a form of shipping wool.

In 1979, the first total container vessel arrived from UK and Europe into Melbourne. The P.& O. vessel "Encounter Bay".

Unfortunately the usual P.& O. depot which was run by Seatainer Terminals was on strike. The labour there was Storemen and Packer Union labour and as we had the same labour that was not on strike at our Montague depot, P.& O. asked if we could unpack and deliver the LCL cargo from the "Encounter Bay." at Montague. We agreed, but why I will never know. It was a mammoth task as 90% of the cargo was LCL which meant it all had to be unpacked and delivered through the very limited facilities of our Montague operation. It took about five weeks to unpack the containers and at the same time about five weeks to deliver the cargo with a good deal of congestion trying to serve multiple carriers over a ten-hour day. We finally completed delivery and got rid of the last of the empty containers back to the terminal and one week after the completion, our chief clerk, Mr. Charlie Duigude, who had organized the discharge and delivery of the vessel passed away. A very tragic end to an exercise we promised would never be done again.

In 1980-81, we were approached by Shaw Savill to participate in a 50/50 joint venture to build a new warehouse and Bond Store on some Melbourne Harbour Trust land that had become available at the new Appleton Dock area on the old Dudley Flats situated on Footscray Road in West Melbourne.

The warehouse was completed in 1982 but was starved of cargo, other depots were opening up in the port, Seatainers, Freightbases, Liner Services and Strangtainers and they all had their own bonded cargo areas so there was no requirement for a separate bonded warehouse. We employed Mr. Harold Irwin, the retired Manager of Dalgety Shipping to run the Bond Store, which we named Australian Warehousing and Bond Store. Harold had a fountain of knowledge of the shipping and business interests throughout Melbourne and was a valuable contact for what business we could generate.

Just at this time in 1983, Shaw Savill took a decision in London, to repatriate all their investments in Australia, which included the 50% interest in AWB Bond, so we were looking for a replacement partner for the AWB Bond business. Fortunately, as we had been working fairly closely with P & O Terminals through the auspices of Mr. Brian Baillie the Managing Director in Sydney, and in discussion with him on one occasion, the thought was ventured that P & O might be interested in taking over the Shaw Savill 50% joint venture. Mr. Baillie was interested but wanted to include the Montague depot as well as Appleton Dock.

His idea was to join the two depots together and form one large container packing and unpacking facility called Container Depots B.S.C. Pty Ltd. 50% owned by BSC and 50% owned by P&O. Further he wanted me to Run the business.

The aim was to have a 50/50 (50% WWF 50% Storemen) labour force at Appleton Dock and all Storemen at Montague. However the WWF

would not hear any of it and took us to Court. The Court agreed with the Union and we were obliged to 100% WWF labour at Appleton Dock and all Storemen at Montague.

The productivity and the cost of the WWF labour at Appleton Dock was prohibitive and woeful and impossible to show a profit no matter how much work we got. Montague was a bit better, most of the work was packing wool into containers for export and also filling containers of cheese for Kraft which was constant and the labour handled the work well. We battled on against mounting opposition from the other depots in the port and found getting additional work very difficult and terribly competitive given that two of the other large depots were manned with Storemen as against Our Appleton Dock warehouse that was manned by WWF labour.

During the 1980's we lost Jack Taylor to retirement and then tragically Alf Dyer died of Cancer in 1990. Then in 1993, although retired, Bill Bridgford, the last of the line passed away.

By this time there was only Chris Payne and I left as Directors and the business was shrinking rapidly. We took a decision to wind up the business while we were still solvent. The last thing that either of us wanted was to go out of business owing people money.

The last client of the clerical business we had was the Government of Tasmania where we supplied clerical staff to look after the Trans Bass Strait ferry service from Melbourne to Launceston.

Most of the rest of our clerical business had been taken away by the Hawke Government reforms of the industry by making all labour permanent to the stevedores and the terminals and totally doing away with casual or semi casual labour. There was a small pool of clerical labour left and that was run by AEWL.

So in late 1992 we moved what clerks we had left back to the AEWL pool and paid AEWL our obligations regarding the clerks holiday, sick leave and LSL pay. Sold our assets, handed our 50% share of the depot business to P&O Terminals and drew down the blind on 140 years of an historical business in the Ports of Melbourne Geelong and Portland.

Both Chris and I had a bit of a holiday break and took some satisfaction in the fact we left the industry with a very good farewell party and as we had paid all our debts, our reputations were intact.

Chris managed a sideline occupation of a friend importing abrasive sand from China for the construction business so that kept him busy.

However, at 53 years of age I was still too young to retire. I kept the cooperage business running for a while from home, but this was never

going to be enough to feed the family so after a few months our cooper required an operation so that was the time to close that business.

The manager of P&O Container, which was the shipping agency for the P&O Lines vessels, Mr. Len Sheedy , inherited the transport business from P&O Terminals which was part of Container Depots BSC Pty Ltd. Mr. Sheedy was having trouble with the current Manager of the transport company and he asked me whether I would be prepared to come back and take over the managership of the transport again.

I was happy to return and take over the transport again, a role I was very familiar with, and more particularly because I was earning a wage. We pushed the transport along, gradually increasing its revenue for six years and then when I turned 61 in June 2000 I decided to retire.

So came to an end forty five years of an occupation I thoroughly enjoyed.