

JOHN WILSON By Jim Cleary

John was employed by the Vacuum Oil Company from 1946/1948 and proceeded to London where he worked for 12-18 months then returned to Melbourne and rejoined Vacuum, resigning in May 1950 to join Shaw Savill & Albion co. at their Melbourne Office. In early 1954 John was transferred to the Perth Branch Office of Shaw Savill where he remained until early 1957 when he transferred back to Melbourne.

Later in 1957 John applied for and was accepted for a position as Deputy Manager of Matson Lines in Melbourne.

Matson being an American Company, based in San Francisco operated two [2] first class passenger ships which plied between the West Coast USA and Australia. Mainly Sydney although a few calls were made at Melbourne.

In addition Matson also operated four [4] cargo vessels which called at Melbourne on every voyage with additional calls at Tasmanian ports from time to time. John also visited these ports as the necessity arose.

John really came to the forefront with these cargo vessels and introduced some cargo operations that were quite new to Matson Line. John was later referred to as "SIDE PORTS WILSON" One of several "Additional Names " John earned during his illustrious shipping career. The other names John earned were "CAPTAIN MATSON" and just plain "WILLOW ".

John, as did all the staff, loved working at Matson because of the family orientation that Matson portrayed.

1972 saw Matson sell their Australian operations to Pacific Far East Line [PFEL] another American Company. Their company motto was "ROUTE OF THE BEARS" as all funnel markings on their vessels had a LARGE GOLDEN BEAR. John transferred directly from Matson to PFEL where he retained the role of Deputy Manager. PFEL almost immediately introduced a totally new concept in shipping called "LASH". Because of the new Lash concept John was instrumental in paving the way for the smooth cargo operations of these vessels with ongoing negotiations with the various waterfront unions such as the Painters and Dockers, WWF , Stevedore companies and the Melbourne Harbour Trust, Harbour Master and Chief Engineer.

Unfortunately PFEL was not the success everybody had hoped for as the line was sold to Farrell Lines in 1976 which was also an American Company. At this point in time John moved over to the Wilh. Wilhelmsen company who were Agents for Farrell Lines in Australia. John spent only a short time at Wilhelmsen's before taking up a position as Victorian Manager for the newly opened office of McArthur Shipping

& Agency [Vic].

One of the main principal owners that McArthur Shipping acted on behalf of was Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha Ltd["K"Line] of Tokyo Japan. This company operated bulk cargo vessels which were also used for the carriage of fully assembled motor vehicles & knockdown vehicles from Japan to Australian ports.

John was by now an excellent negotiator in obtaining new business for principals. He was able to negotiate the best possible outcome for the vessel principal, the client and also the stevedore companies. This was most essential in ensuring any new found business would be successful for all parties.

One of John's early successes in the vehicle trade was obtaining the first vehicle contract in 1979 between "K" Line and the Ford Motor Company of Australia for the shipment of the Ford Econovan vehicles from Hiroshima to Australian Ports. This was the start of a long and successful business arrangement between "K"Line - Tokyo and the Ford Motor Company of Australia.

It is worth noting here that John being also known as "Captain Matson" when he joined McArthur Shipping had Ken Williams appointed as John's assistant Manager of McArthur shipping - Melbourne. Believe it or not he was also known as "Captain Marvel". It is difficult to imagine of any other shipping company / Agency that had two [2] SAID dry land captains working together in the same office. Neither had a Master's or Mate's ticket and most certainly could not have navigated their way out of the Yarra river, however they could both navigate very well on dry land and without radar in all types of weather , heavy or otherwise.

In the early 80's John became more heavily involved with the car companies Ford Motor Company of Australia and General Motors Holden and through John's untiring efforts and strong negotiations between "K"Line - Tokyo, both of these vehicle companies and Australian stevedoring companies, successfully secured the Ford / GMH contracts exclusively for "K"Line for the carriage of their complete built and knockdown cargoes from Japan ports to Australian ports .This really was the commencement of a very strong ,lasting and wonderful relationship between "K"Line, Ford, GMH, John and the respective Australian Stevedore companies.

At the same time John also strengthened ties with the other major vehicle companies in Melbourne, these being Toyota, Honda, Mazda ,Suzuki and others. In addition John also negotiated successfully with Bond Motors at the time for the carriage of the first Hyundai vehicles from Korea to Australian ports exclusively by "K"Line.

To cover this newly obtained business for "K"Line John successfully

negotiated with the Port of Melbourne Authority to lease 28-29 South Wharf exclusively for the “K”Line vehicle cargoes and later the leasing of 22 Victoria dock when 28-29 South wharf became insufficient for the amount of vehicle cargoes being discharged.

Prior to July 1st 1985 it was decided by “K”Line -Tokyo that after 70 odd years the “K”Line Agency held by McArthur Shipping and Agency Coy. was to be terminated as of 30th June,1985 and that ANL were to be appointed “K”Line- Tokyo Australian Port Agents as from the 01st July,1985 for the “K”Line Bulker and Pure Car Carrier vessels . At the same time Kawasaki Australia was formed to oversee the ANL Agency operations on behalf of “K”Line - Tokyo and to also strengthen the “K”Line name in Australia.

John departed from McArthur Shipping on 30th June, 1985 and commenced with Kawasaki Australia on the 01st July, 1985 as Managing Director and so a new era was to begin for John

At this point in time John was instrumental in negotiating and setting up of PRIXCAR which was a vehicle detailing, storage and Distribution Company of which “K”Line was the major shareholder.

Come 1989, and after lengthy negotiations between “K”Line - Tokyo, ANL , John Wilson and the resident “K “Line - Tokyo representative in Australia at the time ANL were granted permission to operate a PCC vessel within the “K”Line Car carrier vessel fleet. The vessel allocated to ANL was the “A”Class vessel “Alps Highway”, Carrying capacity was 2,500 units. The vessel was taken to Singapore for drydocking and alterations to bring the vessel up to Australian crewing standards. This vessel was renamed “Australian Searoad” and remained In the Pcc fleet until mid 1990’s.

John as always was never still and continued looking for new business for “K”Line. Such new business John was strongly involved in was as follows:-

- 1] Arrangement and Shipment of the GMH steel coil cargo from Japan to Adelaide
- 2] Arrangement and shipment of GMH plant cargo from Japan to Adelaide in late 80’s
- 3] The successful bid in obtaining the Contract for the carriage of Ford Australia Capri car from Melbourne to Benicia on the US West coast.

I guess all good things must come to an end and after a long and very successful shipping career John finally decided enough was enough and made that painful decision to retire from “K “ Line around 1993. His Melbourne staff were stunned at the time as a working life without John was going to be very hard to take indeed. And believe you me it was.

It has already been said earlier on that John was a wonderful person and manager to work with which really is an understatement.

With his retirement John could enjoy his passion for cruising and keeping in touch with his many, many friends he made during his long and most successful working career. If he did not have a lunch or dinner to go to there was always a breakfast.

John may not be here with us today in person, he is however in all our thoughts and prayers. I guess you would all agree that there was only one John Wilson and that John Wilson we would agree was a LEGEND and will remain so and not be forgotten.