



After reading Hugh's fascinating account of his time in Port Line, commencing with his time in Leadenhall Street Head Office, I was reminded of my own walk up that well known thoroughfare ten years earlier, also in search of employment, but unlike Hugh, without any appointment or letter of introduction.

The following is my recollection of my first – brief – and only venture into the world of passenger ships.

## ORIENT STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY LTD.

I served my apprenticeship with Turnbull Scott & Co., an old established family owned tramp shipping company, similar to many others of that era. The company of Thomas Turnbull and Son was first formed in the Yorkshire port of Whitby in 1840, and subsequently became Turnbull Scott and Co. in 1872, based in London. Their first steamship, HIGHGATE was launched in Whitby in 1882. Remarkably, the company continued trading, always with the involvement of a Turnbull family member, as an active shipping company through two world wars, and for decades beyond, long after larger more famous companies had ceased to exist. Trading finally ceased in 1992, when their last ship was sold.

It is fair to say that apprentices in T&S received a very thorough no frills practical training. We were a cheap addition to the rest of the crew. Whilst nominally under the authority of the Chief Mate, we actually worked under the instructions of the Bosun, and there were no tasks on board that we were not required to perform, and that included sometimes working for the Chief Engineer. We had a uniform, but it was rarely worn. Our usual rig of the day was a shirt and pair of dungarees, accompanied by a lump of kerosene soaked waste to wipe the grease off our hands.

As we progressed, we occasionally received some instruction from the other Mates on navigation and other subjects, but in the main we were left to our own devices as to what and when we studied. In spite of, or maybe because of it, I think we all managed to acquire a pretty sound knowledge of our intended calling.

I joined my first ship, the Empire Summer, in Middlesborough, in April 1943 aged sixteen and a half. According to my Indentures, I was "Voluntarily bound unto the said Master and his Assigns, for the term of four years from the date hereof." However, due to the exigencies of wartime, the normal qualifying period of four years sea time to sit for Second Mate was reduced to three years, although it was classed as a Temporary Certificate until the additional year was served, which meant that by June 1946 I was able to sit for the exam. After attending Sir John Cass Nautical School in London for several weeks, I sat for and passed the written exam. Then came the dreaded oral exam, and I remember the examiner was a short tempered, red headed gentleman who had a reputation for failing candidates and sending them back to sea for months before they could sit again. On the morning of the exam, we were all seated outside his office awaiting our turn to be called in. After a while, a fellow emerged looking very crestfallen, obviously having failed and walking out the door without a word. This was not looking good, and I was next in turn.

The first question I was asked was "Where did you serve your time son?"

"Turnbull and Scott, Sir" I replied.

"Hmm, make you work in that company, don't they?"

"Yes, they certainly do sir" I said, wondering where this was all going.

"Not like that young man before you. Out of Union Castle. Ponsing around in a white uniform all day and never getting his hands dirty. I've just sent him back to sea for three months."

Fortunately for me, I managed to survive the next hour or so and came away with my brand new Temporary Second Mate's Certificate. I certainly had no idea at that time that in a few short weeks I would be joining the white uniform brigade myself. My main concern was to find a job reasonably quickly, as I had already been ashore for a couple of months and funds were getting dangerously low. It was then that I remembered that a friend of mine a few weeks ahead of me at school had got himself a job on a cargo ship managed by Orient Line for the Ministry of War Transport. The conditions were excellent, and it paid passenger ship rates of pay whilst enjoying the informality of a cargo ship. This sounded just the sort of berth I was looking for, so after a couple more weeks at home pondering my future I decided to approach Orient Line.

Walking up Leadenhall St. that July day in 1946, on my way to Orient Line Head Office in Bishopsgate, I had little idea how my life was about to change, Than in less than three years I would be married to an Australian girl and living in Melbourne, and not return to the UK for another twenty three years after that.

However, that was all in the future and today was all that mattered. I entered the office and approaching the gentleman behind the counter asked if I could see the Marine Superintendent. Fortunately for me he was actually in his office at the time, and furthermore agreed to see me. I explained that I had recently received my Second Mate's (Temporary) Certificate and that I was hopeful of getting a job similar to my friend a few weeks previously. The Superintendent said to me that there was no berth available in a cargo ship, but instead he offered me a position as Third Officer in the Ormonde currently laying at Tilbury Dock. When I pointed out that this was a passenger vessel, he replied that this was the only position available and did I want to accept it? Of course, I did, but not without some misgivings on my part. After a short talking to on what would be expected of me as an Orient Line Officer, I was given a list of uniform requirements that I would need before joining the ship and reporting on board to Captain Hawker. Off I went to the naval outfitters to purchase two sets of white No. 10s, white shirts, shorts, socks and shoes, and Orient Line buttons, epaulettes, and cap badge. Fortunately for me, my father was a tailor, so at least I had any alterations to my blue uniform free of cost.

To this day, I have no idea why or how I came to be offered this position, particularly as all regular Orient Line officers possessed Masters Certificates and there must surely have been many more highly qualified people than me looking for just such a job.

Ormonde was built in 1917, a comfortable old ship whose turbines could still deliver a steady 15 knots, quite a bit faster than I had been used to. Less than a year after the end of WW2 she was still employed in her wartime role as a troopship under the direction of the Ministry of War Transport, albeit having shed her wartime grey paint and now sporting her peacetime Orient colours. I duly reported on board to Capt. A.C.G. Hawker, and after being introduced to the Staff Commander and First Officer I was given a rundown of my duties. Finally, the Captain gave me the Orient Line bible, a purple bound book embossed with gold lettering which contained all the company regulations and instructions to officers. I was told to go and "Read, learn, and inwardly digest" the contents and return it the following day. Unlike a number of passenger ship companies, who frowned on officers socializing with passengers, Orient Line encouraged officers to extend the hospitality of the Company to them (in fact expected it). The only proviso being that "Thou shall not entertain lady passengers in your/their cabins"

Helped by a maximum bar bill allowance of Two Pounds per month, fairly generous considering the price of gin was Three Shillings and whiskey Five Shillings a bottle, there was plenty of hospitality to go round. It was also customary for each officer to host his own table in the main dining saloon, usually with 8 to 10 passengers, which was great up to a point, as I would find out later.

The ship was scheduled to dry dock before sailing, and the day previous the First Officer was showing me his calculations for the ship's GM before entering dock. There were two items that I had not heard about in any studies on ship stability, namely Personnel and Accumulation, and he explained that the first related to the weight of passengers and crew, (Calculated at 14 persons to the ton), and the second to the weight of paint built up over nearly thirty years, now almost half an inch thick in some places. I didn't know it then, but I would get a more practical lesson in ship stability before the voyage was finished.

Finally we left the dock in Tilbury and proceeded down river to the Tilbury Passenger Landing Stage to embark the troops for our next voyage. Coming alongside, the landing stage was full of khaki uniforms, all of them female. It appeared we were to take on board some 480 ATS girls and Army nurses, the ATS girls to Port Said and the nurses to Colombo. Embarkation completed, we duly sailed on what would for me be a totally new and different experience from my previous three years spent in tramp shipping.

In some ways, Orient ships were run along Navy lines. Uniforms were worn at all time, according to the rig of the day, which was decreed by the Captain. In the tropics when whites were worn, it was shorts during the day and No.10's for dinner and night time. It was customary to salute the Captain when he first appeared on the bridge in the morning, but not at other times. Flag etiquette was strictly observed, with house and courtesy flags broken out at the yardarm at the moment the ensign reached the peak, which was raised to the accompaniment of the ship's bugler, Ormonde flew the Blue Ensign instead of the traditional Red Ensign worn by most merchant vessels, in recognition of the fact that the required percentage of her officers were Naval Reservists. The ensign was always dipped in salute to passing Naval vessels of any nationality.

At sea, I kept the 4 to 8 watch with the chief Officer, so that I had someone to mentor me on my first voyage as a watchkeeper. I was also in charge of the port side accident boat, two of which were permanently swung outboard, one on either side of the bridge, The Second officer was in charge of the starboard boat. These boats were small whale boats, crewed if I remember by eight oarsmen and a coxswain. The signal for accident boat to be launched was given by six short blasts on the ship's whistle, and drill was always carried out every voyage. Our first drill was in the Mediterranean , a buoy being dropped over the side , the ship hove to, and both boats launched in a race to be first to pick up the buoy, accompanied by cheers from the watching girls. Quite an exciting day.

At my table in the main dining saloon, I was host to no less than eight Army Nurses. Whilst this may sound like every sailor's dream come true, for me it was at first somewhat of an ordeal. These ladies had spent years during the war working in all sorts of situations. They had been around and seen it all, and they really called a spade a shovel. They also took great delight in embarrassing me

as much as possible, However, one day, the First Officer, who I got on with very well, said to me "By Jove , three-O, you've got some fine looking women on your table, why don't we ask them up to the cabin for a drink". When I suggested that it was against regulations he said "Oh, don't worry about that. Anyway, it's your birthday this week". So it was that I was able to celebrate my twentieth birthday with a good party after all. Not surprisingly, party invitations were not infrequent during this voyage, and refusal could be a little awkward at times. One of the duties of the officer coming off watch was to do the rounds of the ship, mainly as safety precaution, and to return to the bridge to sign "Rounds Correct" in the log book. During the course of these rounds, heads would often emerge through portholes and doors with invitations to join a party going on inside, and a tactful refusal was sometimes called for.

The night before our arrival at Port Said, the ATS Sergeant Major appeared on the bridge to announce that six of her girls were missing. Order was duly restored when they were found again after a quick search of the crew's quarters revealed them taking a last farewell of their newfound boyfriends. When they disembarked at Port Said the next day, they were sent by train to Suez where they were to be posted. It must have been quite a cultural shock to those girls, I felt quite sorry for them. After the girls left the voyage continued uneventfully to Colombo with only our Army nurses on board, and whilst they were great company the ship seemed much quieter than before.

Leaving Colombo, we were bound for Rangoon to embark some 2500 RAF personnel returning to the UK from Burma. Leaving Rangoon, our next port of call was Bombay to take on a further 300 military personnel before we commenced our final voyage home to the UK. Unlike the outward trip the ship was full to capacity, and our social life was consequently very different too. Many of the men had not been home for years, and while most were looking forward to returning home, some were a bit apprehensive about what awaited them there now that the war was over.

Amongst all the officers on Ormonde, with the obvious exception of myself, a common topic of conversation was that of seniority. Many Orient officers served in the Navy during the war, and now that it was over many were returning to their peacetime role in the Company, which meant that some of those currently employed stood to lose their present positions, depending on their seniority. One name that was frequently mentioned, and spoken about with some awe, was that of Commander Richard Stannard VC. DSO. Coincidentally, this was the same Lt. Commander Stannard who, as Captain of the destroyer HMS Ramsey, rescued our fellow "Curry Club " member Captain Martin Spencer Hogbin after his ship "Stentor" was torpedoed in the South Atlantic in late 1942. Commander Stannard did return to Orient Line after the war, and after serving at sea for some time he was appointed as the Australian Marine Superintendent for the company, based in Sydney. He remained in Sydney where he died in 1977, and is buried in a cemetery at Rookwood, NSW.

Arriving at Suez after leaving Bombay, we prepared to enter the canal on the final leg of our voyage home. The weather was extremely hot, and with no air conditioning most of the troops were on the upper decks trying to catch some breeze. Late in the afternoon an announcement was made over the PA system that the ship was approaching the ANZAC War Memorial on the western bank of the canal. With that, 200 tons of RAF personnel (2800 at 14 to the ton) moved over to the port side to have a look. Being homeward bound, and light on bunkers and water, plus a full complement of passengers, the ship was very tender. The vessel listed heavily to port, at the same time the bow sheered to starboard. The quartermaster reported that the helm was not responding, and despite all the efforts of the pilot to correct the situation with the engines, within minutes the bow was firmly buried in the sand on the eastern bank of the canal.

All our efforts to free the ship using engines and mooring ropes run across to the other side of the canal were unsuccessful, so we were forced to await the arrival of a tug to help out. Eventually the ship was freed from the bank and we made ready to continue on our way, or so we thought. Unfortunately, in the course of letting go the tug, the towline became fouled round one of the propellers, which meant that we were still stuck there while we awaited the arrival of a diver from Port Said to clear the rope. To avoid any further stability problems in the canal, the troops were instructed to remain on the side of the ship corresponding to their boat stations. Many hours later we resumed our transit and arrived at Port Said to take on bunkers and water.

Back in the Mediterranean, and I was reading in my cabin one morning when I heard the ship's whistle giving six short blasts for the accident boat to be launched, followed by the ominous words over the PA, "This is not a drill". I grabbed my life jacket and dashed on to the bridge to find that one of the RAF men had apparently jumped over the side. The ship was turned around, and both boats launched immediately, but despite an extensive search we couldn't find any trace of the man. We will never know what was going through the poor fellow's mind when he decided to jump, but I suspect that he really would not have wanted to be found. Of course, the incident cast a pall over the other troops for the next few days.

Finally we arrived back home without further dramas, disembarking our troops at the Tilbury Landing Stage where we had commenced the voyage three months earlier. The ship then moved into Tilbury Dock to the Orient Line berth to prepare for the next voyage.

As I lived only a short distance from Tilbury, and could go home every night if I wished, I stayed aboard whilst some of the other officers went on leave. One day I received a message that the Marine Superintendent wanted to see me in his Dock office ASAP. Wondering if my career in Orient Line was about to end after only three months, I presented myself as requested. He informed me that I was

being transferred to the "Sameveron", a Liberty ship managed by Orient for the Ministry of War Transport and currently also laying in Tilbury Dock, I was to report to Capt. S.S. Burnand the following day. Naturally, I was delighted, as this was exactly the sort of job I was looking for in the first place. As an added bonus, I was to be promoted to Second Mate, which meant a nice boost to my finances at the time.

So ended my very brief but interesting and instructive sojourn in passenger ships. I was back in cargo ships where I felt more at home. I remained in "Sameveron" for the next nine months, during which time I made my first voyage to Australia, which is how I come to be writing this in Melbourne today, nearly seventy years later. Had I not walked up Leadenhall St. that day it may never have happened.