

**18) M.V. Fort Macleod 18743 GRT 12200 BHP
Istanbul 3/12/75 - 23/2/76 New York.**



This was another Oil products carrier. It seemed I was getting into a rut! On joining in Istanbul, I had quite a job getting through customs. I had some amateur radio equipment with me, which was completely prohibited in Turkey at that time. It was really only because I was in transit, joining a ship going through the Bosphorus, that I was allowed to keep the equipment at all. It was also pointed out by the agent, that I as a radio officer, obviously carried radios! A captain carried a sextant, and an engineer carried his engineering tools. It was all perfectly normal and nothing to get excited about. This seemed to convince the customs officials, and they let me through.

I spent two nights in an excellent hotel overlooking the Bosphorus waiting for the ship. It was really lovely, watching the ships travelling up and down. At night, all the ferries had searchlights which would be waved about wildly, illuminating all and everything. The amount of boat traffic through that narrow waterway was amazing.

I was travelling together with a couple of other officers who were also to join the ship. We were told about a night club in an old fire lookout tower not far from the hotel. These towers were built long ago, when the buildings in Istanbul were constructed mostly of wood, and fire was a very real danger. The view from the top of the tower was fabulous, and the lights of the city and those on the Bosphorus twinkled gaily.

Inside, it was a night club, where we were treated to belly dancing and plenty of food and drink (at a price!). One of the engineers I joined with looked just the part for a Caliph. He was tall, rotund, with a big bushy beard and lightly greying hair. He was invited to act the part in a sort of play. He was dressed in a turban and flowing robes, sat on a divan with many cushions and surrounded by some lovely female dancers who fed him some chocolates and other goodies.

He thoroughly enjoyed it. He was rewarded by the management with a few free drinks, and some kisses from the girls. We all enjoyed the show immensely, particularly the dancing girls!, (who also seemed to have taken quite a shine to their "Caliph" and sat with him for quite a while afterwards, much to our envy).

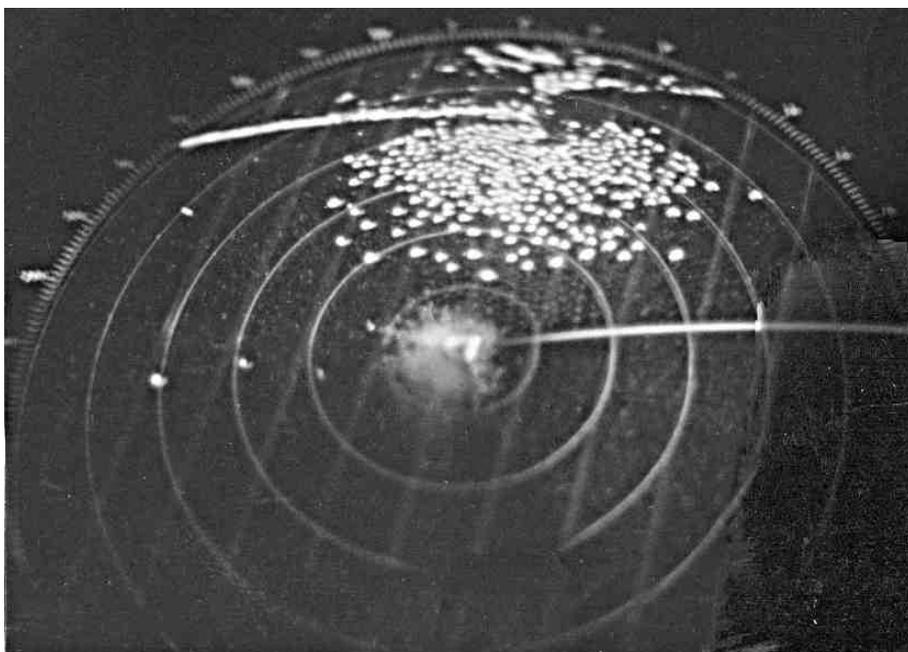
Our ship arrived finally, and we all were taken by the agents bus down to the water and ferried out to the ship. It did not stop, merely slowing down a bit on its way, passing through into the Mediterranean. Climbing up on to the accommodation ladder of a moving ship was also an interesting first experience!

This ship had had an interesting year or so behind it. It had been involved in the Falklands war, being used by the British forces as a floating fresh water store. It was anchored off Port Stanley, and supplied the warships and services as required. It was still manned by C.P. Ships personnel (on a volunteer basis) together with some naval ratings for signals. The ship was very well liked by visitors due to its bar and recreation facilities, which were missing on HM ships and also ashore. It sustained a couple of near misses by Argentinean bombs, but remained unscathed. Another of our companies ships was also used as a fresh water tanker for the duration of the crises, also being moored off Port Stanley.

Whilst I was on board, the 2nd Officer was an ex airline navigator called Mike. He had first qualified with a merchant naval chief officers certificate, then managed to wangle himself a place with the Australian airline Qantas flying in Jumbo jets as navigator. Navigators were being phased out in aircraft at that time (like the prior demise of the airline Radio Operator), so he got a place with CP Ships also as navigator. (The 2nd Officer on a merchant ship is generally responsible for all navigation, charts and the lifeboats). Later he left CP and was employed on the cross channel Hovercraft by Sea-Speed, again as navigator. I met him sometime later in unusual circumstances on another ship as he used to "Buzz" us with the Dover-Calais hovercraft ferry.

We loaded a cargo of fuel oil for Port Sunlight at Lagos Nigeria. The port had been built by the soap company Unilevers as a means of supplying their soap factory in Lagos with raw materials and fuel. It was also used for exporting the finished product. The port had since developed into the main harbour for Nigeria.

Our oil was destined for fuelling the soap factory. The port of Lagos at that time was in chaos. The Nigerian government had taken delivery of over a million tons of cement as aid. The problem was they had absolutely no storage facilities for it, and also no way of using that amount within the foreseeable future. The result was over 300 ships waiting at anchor off Lagos, some of them having been there for a year or more. The radar picture when approaching was a mass of dots clustered within a few miles of the port. It looked like the radar set had come down with a bad case of acne!



Some of the ships had run out of food, (and were then having to shop at the local markets), had no fuel, no water and in a few cases even the cement cargo had solidified. Ships carrying bulk cargoes are not designed for long term storage and the warm humid air of Africa had done its work. The cargo would have to be taken out with pneumatic drills and pick axes. Looking at some of the ships, they were not worth the costs involved, and would probably be scrapped.

We were lucky, our cargo was classed as “priority” so we “only” had to wait 3 weeks! The VHF calling channel was full of activity, especially at night, as the ships watchkeepers tried to relieve the boredom by talking to each other, singing songs, playing music or emulating farmyard animals. It was quite clear that some could not quite be called “sane” any more! Our agents had a private VHF channel otherwise we would probably never have been able to talk to them. The noise on the calling channel 16 was sometimes overpowering. We lowered the lifeboat for a run ashore a couple of times, and passing close to some of the ships we could clearly see the state they were in. Weed growing along the waterline, rust streaked and virtually deserted.

Whilst at anchor, I had spoken to a British air conditioning engineer who was living in Lagos. He was a radio amateur 5N2ESH. He met me when we docked, and took me for a drive around the area. It was amazing. Half completed bridges just abandoned when the aid money, or supplies dried up. The 4 lane motorway out of Lagos suddenly splitting in two, passing around a huge mobile crane, that had broken down and had just been left there rusting away, sitting on a patch of grass. A monument to waste, inept management and false technology. The road had simply been continued around it. This is typical of some aid projects. The high tech machinery is provided, but no training or parts for maintenance and repair.

A huge gambling casino had been built just outside the city, where many hundreds of thousands of dollars changed hands nightly. I am not sure where the money to build it came from, but its customers included wealthy local industrialists, government officials and of course, members of the underworld. The company my amateur radio friend worked for had supplied the air conditioning system, so he was allowed to take me inside for a look. He was apparently well known by the heavily muscled bouncers on the door, and we passed with no more than a friendly greeting. Inside was bright lights, opulence and air conditioned luxury. Outside, it was totally dark, dusty, dirty and squalid.

My friend lived in a nice bungalow style building on the outskirts of Lagos itself. He had a large patio, and a couple of servants. He lived well, and obviously held a well paid position, but was affected, as everyone else by the chaotic state of the port. At times there was no toilet paper to be had anywhere. Various other imported products were also gone from the supermarket shelves until the next container ship arrived.

He told me a story of one ship which arrived with aid goods – mostly foodstuffs – which was delayed months while the corrupt customs officials tried to impose customs duties on its contents. These port delays can cost a shipping company dearly, and are mostly not covered by any insurance or extra payments. In the end, the frustrated captain, no doubt instructed by his company, sailed secretly from the anchorage one night, and apparently dumped the (by now probably spoiled) cargo over the side.

MV Fort Macleod



Hand

illustrated Crossing the line Certificate

