

- 11) Northern Star (Shaw-Saville) 23982 GRT. 22000 HP. 2nd R/O + E/O
Southampton 2/10/72 - 1/12/72 Southampton.**
**12) Northern Star (Shaw-Saville) 2nd R/O + E/O
Southampton 19/12/72 - 19/5/73 Southampton.**



This was a 1400 passenger and 500 crew Cruise Liner, on the run between Southampton - Grand Canary - Dakar - Capetown - Perth - Melbourne - Sydney - Brisbane - Pacific Islands cruises (Noumea, Fiji, Lautoka, Western Samoa, Auckland, Wellington, Sydney) – Then Wellington - Auckland - Fiji - Acapulco - Panama - Barbados - Grand Canary - Southampton. It was fitted with the New Marconi Predictor Radar for a test).

I suppose being posted to a passenger liner was some peoples dream. I was however not quite so sure. I had to negotiate quite hard with Marconi to get them to pay for at least some of the extra uniform and equipment I required. Whites, Number 10's, white uniform shoes, bow tie etc. It came to quite a sum. After all, it was they who wanted me to sail on the ship to look after their new all singing, all dancing Predictor radar. Marconi had put the Predictor Radar on as experiment to find out how well it ran, as well as a sort of public relations campaign, so they could maybe sell it to some other passenger ship companies.



The radio room was rather small, but quite well fitted out with basically two separate installations. One was a Crusader transmitter and Redifon R408 main receiver. Both excellent for all types of communications. The second was an Oceanspan transmitter and Atalanta receiver set up for reserve or emergency use. This second installation could be powered from batteries or mains. There was quite a lot of radio traffic. Our record was over 400 telegrams in a day, plus around 100 telephone calls via Sydney radio, when we had to bypass Melbourne due to being late on schedule. Melbourne passengers were flown home from Sydney. For this marathon we ran our Oceanspan reserve TX on HF CW, The Globespan on HF R/T both at the same time with two operators. Sydney Radio of course had

no problems except we occupied his entire 12 Mhz section for the complete afternoon and evening. We had closed circuit TV, Telecine, talkback, intercom, and PA equipment to look after, plus normal radio duties as well as sorting out and radar /gyro /autopilot problems. The Chief radio Officer was a bit upset at first at my being put on board. He thought I was there to try and push him out. Up until then, he had been doing the servicing of all equipment. We talked it through however, and on it being made clear I was there only because of the new radar, he became quite friendly and eventually we got on quite well.

One of our jobs was to show the films on the telecine equipment. There were TV monitors dotted around the public rooms so passengers could watch. We had a number of films for children which we put on in the afternoon and films for adults were shown in the evenings. Various notices concerning shipboard routine or special attractions were also displayed. We had no live cameras however, and no studio, so we were unfortunately never able to try out our production skills.

Another, very time consuming job, was to receive press reports (in Morse code) broadcast especially for ships, and then to send them to the print shop for the ships newspaper. We also recorded the BBC news twice a day on tape, playing it back to the passengers at suitable times. The ship was generally rather run down, but very popular with immigrants (many who had assisted passages out to Australia). A lot of the passengers were thus young, and used the voyage out to enjoy themselves and have a holiday. It was a lively and fun place to work.

As a radio Officer, I had to sometimes use the public address system to call passengers who had telephone calls. The microphone and switches were in the chart room, just aft of the bridge. My announcements were sometimes done to the great enjoyment of the bridge crew, who used to have a lot of fun tickling me or making faces or comments during my announcement. It was not unknown for me to have to



break off a call in the middle as the other distractions around me were too great to be able to continue. This caused even greater hilarity and often a round of beers which had to be paid in the bar. It was not only I who had these problems however. Even the second and third officers were not exempt from this hazard when using the passenger PA system.

We had two policemen called masters-at-arms. One, named George, was a huge guy, and very definitely someone to whom I would say "Sir" on a dark night. He used to visit me in the radio room during his night rounds. We always had a pot of coffee on the go, and it made a nice break for him and us. We used to ask him the news, and he could always come up with some juicy gossip or interesting happening of the evening.

We had all sorts of things going on. Attempted murder, wives being attacked by their husbands (or husbands by their wives!) due to drink, jealousy or rage, petty theft, fights and

the odd death by natural causes. On being called to quieten down a raucous party on one occasion, he related on how at least 30 people were crammed into a small 4 berth cabin. He wasn't sure if it was an orgy, but a number of people were semi undressed. On asking them to come out, he was astounded on how they just kept on coming! He never realised the cabin could hold so many. The ship was a floating town, and all the things that happen in a town ashore, happened on board. Sometimes perhaps even more so, due to the relaxed atmosphere, close confines, mixture of races and cheap booze.

I nearly blotted my copy-book on the trip back from Australia to the UK. I had a passenger as a girl friend (as did virtually all the officers), but as I found out later, she was the Captains niece!. We had to be very careful and circumspect in our meetings, especially when she visited my cabin as it was on the same deck as the Captain. I don't think we were discovered – at least the Captain never said anything to me, but we had a number of close shaves!

On the Pacific cruises the Maori passengers were great. They sometimes travelled as huge families, and all sitting around the aft open lounge/bar, would sometimes spontaneously burst into Maori song. It sounded really super.

The swimming pool area was the only public area officers could visit without being in uniform, and even that only during the day. Midnight pool parties were out!. After 6PM we were obliged to dress in our finery. Blue uniform during the cold weather, but special evening dress (number 10's) was prescribed for dinner. During the tropical phases of the voyage, white tropical uniform was prescribed during the day, and again number 10's for the evening. I felt like a penguin, and we often used to call the evening dress our penguin suit.



There were several bars, but the favourite for the younger set was the after lounge/bar called "The Tavern bar". Here we had a live music group, which on the run back to England from Australia were very good indeed. Dancing continued into the small hours, but I had to reluctantly leave at about 23:45 to go on watch. This hampered my contacts with the young ladies considerably, but was probably a blessing in disguise. At least my bar bills were kept within reasonable proportions.

We met up with the radio operator of the American Samoa coastal radio station. A great big guy. We met his family and visited the radio station (all rather primitive). We then invited him aboard in return, and he promptly drank so much that he was violently sick when we took him back home. His family were so upset at his bad example, that they made him cut a huge branch of bananas from their plantation which he carried on board for us (much to the amusement of some passengers). We stored it in one of the fan rooms near the bridge,(about the only place big enough to take it) and enjoyed fresh bananas all the way back to Europe. As the bananas got less, so the number of ants seemed to multiply. Thank goodness they were only small ones, and we never saw a large spider. (Maybe they were all eaten by the ants!)

The Samoans go in for tattoos in a big way. It's a form of manhood rite. The bigger the tattoo, the tougher you are. This radio operator showed us his. It was a snake, with its head on his upper chest, just below the neck, with several beautifully decorated coils, around his body, with its tail on his penis. It must have taken years to do, with much pain and money!

At Suva, a small group of us got some time off, and when the passengers were ashore, we hired a car and drove to the other side of the island. The car was a small Japanese saloon, but had seen better days. After experiencing the state of the (non-existent) roads, I could understand why. We drove like maniacs, ignoring deep water filled pot holes and ruts in the dirt tracks. It was huge fun! We ended up at a nice almost deserted beach where we could swim and relax. On route, whilst stopped at a small local shop to get some drinks, we were almost hit by a couple of falling coconuts which landed only inches away from the car. I picked one up and took it with us.

At the beach I asked a Suvan guy sitting on the beach husking coconuts if he could open it for me. He shook his head, and I was a bit disappointed. It turned out however that the coconut I had was bad. He then took one of his, and with deft movements of his razor sharp knife, removed the husk, and opened the top with one swipe. He passed it to me grinning hugely. It tasted lovely! On the way back, we stopped at a hotel known to one of our party, and drank until late. This ended up by turning into a pool party where we were all thrown in completely clothed. A magnificent outing for all concerned.

In Fiji, we once launched one of our motor lifeboats when alongside. Most of the passengers were ashore, so a few of us officers, some of the entertainments group and a few passengers with whom we were on "special terms" decided to have a boat trip. We stocked up on beer and food, got the boat lowered and set off. We found a spot a mile or so off the island in really deep water, and just drifted there diving over the side for a swim, drinking beer, eating and generally relaxing.

We thought it would be nice to find a beach, but the one we looked at had some very expensive power boats tied up alongside a pier, and was obviously private. We were wondering what to do, when we saw a figure running along the pier and waving to us from the end. We waved back all friendly like. He beckoned to us and pointed to the pier. We gathered he wanted to tie us up. Oh well, in for a penny.. We motored alongside and gave him our mooring line which he made fast to the pier in a very professional manner. Then an elderly but very well dressed lady came up the pier, and in excellent English made us very welcome. Somewhat puzzled, we trooped ashore.

Questions and explanation followed. It turned out she was the owner of the brewery on Fiji, and was always pleased to have guests from English ships. She had a wonderful place, bungalow style open, spacious and airy. The beach, boats and house all belonged to her, but we were told to use them as if they were our own. She produced lots of beers, small eats and some freshly pressed lemonade. We built a camp fire, and a couple of the entertainers had guitars with them so we had a great session sitting around it, singing English, French and Polynesian songs.

Just off the beach was a coral reef. We loaned some snorkels, fins and masks from our generous host to explore it. The water was so clear that when hanging in the water, I had a feeling of vertigo looking down at the reef and the gaily coloured fish swimming around completely unconcerned, about 10 metres below me.

It was completely dark when we reluctantly left, but the ship was so brilliantly lit, it was impossible to miss! It was a great day out, and a wonderful introduction to Polynesian friendship and hospitality.

Maybe one is curious as to how all the rubbish and sewage is handled on such a floating city. A strict waste separation system was in force. We had our own incinerator for all paper and other combustible waste. Metal objects like tins were put in a crusher and flattened into small disks which could be stored easily. These were put ashore at regular intervals. Food waste and other bio-degradable wet rubbish was put into sealed, weighted sacks and thrown overboard.

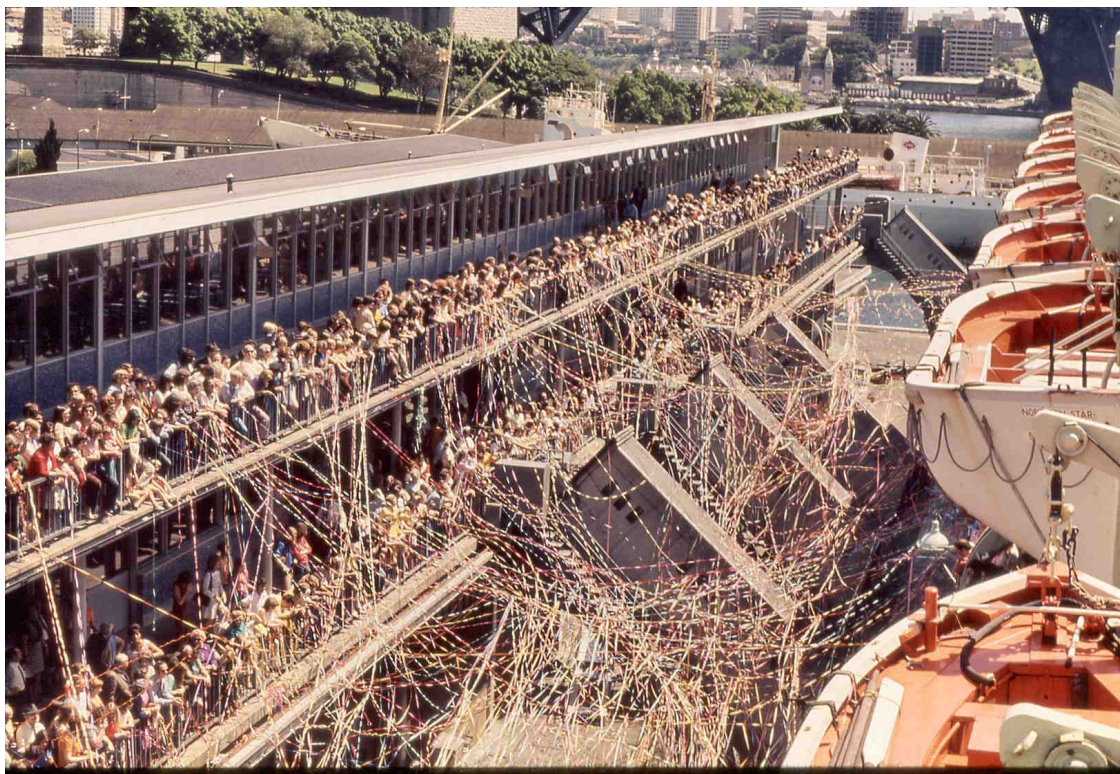
We had a biological sewage system even then, where the end result was clear water which was pumped into the sea, and a solid sludge which could be burnt in the incinerator. It would not do to dirty the pristine beaches of the Pacific and Caribbean islands with raw sewage (and 2000 people produce a lot!). Bottles were mostly returned with the empty crates, but quite a few did find themselves at the bottom of the sea when broken or thrown overboard during various revelries. We did what we could, but our floating city did leave some traces behind. Even the most modern cruise liners are still not totally free of this problem.

Older small merchant ships did just dump everything overboard, including the contents of the various toilets. This sometimes made coming aboard from a trip in the lifeboat somewhat adventurous. One must always pay attention exactly where one came alongside, and NEVER under one of THOSE outlets!

These days, most ships have closed sewage systems and practice a form of recycling. The international regulations have become very exacting on these points. Not only cruise liners, but all ships are expected to comply or risk severe fines or being banned.

I was asked to do a second stint on this ship as acting chief radio officer, but although it was a great life, all the money I earned disappeared into the bar, entertaining and trips ashore. As 2nd R/O (we had 5) I was expected to entertain at dinner (with my own table of 8 passengers). Unfortunately I got no allowance for this, and sometimes had to dig into my own pocket when I couldn't wangle something from the chief steward. Working for Marconi was not that well paid, so I decided I would try something different to earn some badly needed cash. I asked to become a tanker man again.

The Northern Star leaving Sydney



Northern Star at anchor off Acapulco

