45) M.V. Mississippi 15680 GRT 15000 BHP
Antwerp Belgium 2/5/85 - 26/6/85 Felixstowe.

This was quite a small container ship as ships go, and relatively old and well used. It used to make regular runs out to the Middle East via Suez. This is not as prone to storms as the North Atlantic run, but even here, the weather could be quite bumpy. The container ships had a tight schedule, so we very rarely slowed down no matter what the weather did. This occasionally meant that we "lost" the occasional box over the side. This problem is known on all container ships, and actually can cause a considerable hazard at sea. These containers normally quickly sink, but it is not unknown for some of them to float just underneath the surface for weeks, causing a serious hazard to shipping. Small ships and yachts can easily sink after hitting such an obstruction.

The radio room was a pokey little hole behind the bridge. Small but cosy I suppose you could say, but it was not well laid out. The previous R/O's had kept all the old paperwork, dating virtually back to the time the ship was built, inside a large filing cabinet. There was hardly any room for it all, so I packed it all up in a big parcel and "posted" it at the back of some locker on the bridge. A heavy clearing up session followed, and the place was almost tidy. At some time the gyro had been replaced. It now had the smallest gyro compass I had ever seen. It was an Arma Brown unit, which resided in a small box around 18 inches square screwed onto a bench. It used to run very hot, around 60 or 70 degrees centigrade, but this was normal, and was indeed required, to keep the stuff in which the sensitive element floated, in a fluid state. On switching off and cooling down, it became solid and served to protect the element from shock damage. It thankfully never gave any problem, and I never had much to do with it.

I had duties all over the ship, wherever any electronics were. This included the autopilot and steering. The steering flat is a room located behind the engine, and just above the screw. Here is where the high power hydraulics for moving the rudder are to be found. On inspection, I was amazed to see some flexible high pressure hydraulic hoses connecting some essential parts of the steering system. These used to jump around and move like snakes as the internal pressure changed with the steering movements of the rudder. These hoses are normally made of rigid piping, and thus cannot move. All that happens is that they knock loudly due to the pressure pulses. I was expecting all sorts of problems here, but they never occurred. This was surprising as vibration on the steering flat was fierce, situated as it is, right close to the propeller. The engineers assured me there had never been any burst pipes, so I guess the dramatic sight was harmless, but it didn't do my nerves any good.
Our eldest daughter Julie was born on the day I left the ship. Unfortunately, she arrived two days early, but some things really cannot be delayed. It had been arranged that I would be with Christine when Julie was born, but seeing as she couldn't wait, I was at London Heathrow airport instead, waiting for my plane. I phoned home. No Christine!! Rather concerned, I then phoned friends and they said "Congratulations, you are a father. You have a lovely daughter".
I was picked up at Strasbourg airport by a friend and taken straight to the hospital where I saw our daughter for the first time. She was only a few hours old, sleeping peacefully and very lovely.