

**49) Dart Atlantica 15584 GRT 15660 BHP
Felixstowe 17/6/86 - 15/7/86 Felixstowe.
50) Dart Atlantica Re-signed on articles.
Felixstowe 15/7/86 - 20/7/86 Felixstowe.**



The Dart Atlantica was also a "Box Boat", but faster and larger than the Mississippi and probably one of the largest on the regular Europe - USA East Coast – Europe run at that time. This ship and her sister ship Dart Americana, used to plough across the North Atlantic at high speed, through the worst weather and on a tight schedule. One ship going East, the other West. The ships were eminently seaworthy, but it was sometimes a bit wearing for the crew. The constant time zone changes, the constant pounding and vibration took their toll. We never slowed down even during the heaviest weather, and the ship was often very lively to say the least. At times containers (or boxes as we called them) would be washed overboard, with some very interesting consequences when we found out what was in them! But this was seldom. Its surprising what is sometimes carried in containers. (Cars, antiques, books etc). Sometimes what is carried is not what is on the manifest, then things can turn a bit hairy when a container starts to drip some corrosive liquid on the deck, or starts to smoke! We actually had one case where a container of such an innocuous sounding cargo as concentrated orange juice caused a problem as it was corroding the deck underneath!

Turn around times were short, and free time in port very limited. Most container ports are quite a way from any civilisation, and transport was a major problem if we wanted to go anywhere. The schedule left little time for a run ashore anyway. We had around 8 ports in as many days, only staying an average of a few hours in each. We were all kept busy with our various duties, and very often, I was called upon to help "drive" the boat, together with the Captain. The regular deck officers were busy with cargo matters, or just trying to get a bit of sleep. Money was tight, and we were often sailing short-handed. I used to be the bridge general purpose help. Steer the ship, answer the pilots telegraph commands, keep the bridge movement book, make the coffee and the odd sandwich for the Captain and pilot, keep the VHF watch and look after our normal communications as well. I was not bored! Just in case I was, I could always check the radar and tinker with the secondary auto pilot.

The ship had been fitted with an experimental system to optimise its steering characteristics (and it was hoped, save money). It had developed a fault long ago and no one had been able

to fix it. It had not been used in years and the company which had made it had no further interest. After spending a lot of time on it, I managed to get it working, for which the captain was very grateful. It worked beautifully. It was an interesting time, and I was always up to date on the latest news and gossip from the captain and the pilot. The problem was, that I (and virtually everyone else on board) suffered from a chronic lack of sleep.

On this ship, we were fitted with an automatic satellite weather reporting system. A small omni-directional antenna was fitted above the bridge and the transmitter was fitted inside, with a small computer into which was typed the coded weather information taken every 4 hours. This was a job all deck officers had to do, measure sea and air temperatures, barometric pressures, wind speeds and observe and report all weather parameters. These were coded and typed into the computer. On other ships, the coded message would be given to me to send. On here, at exactly defined times, the satellite unit automatically sent the data via a scientific research satellite back to Bracknell. The weather service had negotiated a free time slot of a minute or so for each ships data. All I had to do was ensure the clock was accurate by checking its time against a standard time broadcast. On other ships I had to transmit these weather messages by hand sent Morse or telex to special stations several times a day. As we were also dependant on weather forecasts generated from these observations, the extra work was gladly done by myself and the other officers concerned. The weather service provided all the measuring instruments free of charge, and re-calibrated the satellite transmitter clock and measuring instruments each time we were in the UK.

C.P. Ship Management Hong Kong formed. CP Ships London disbanded and all ships were re-registered under the Hong Kong flag.

Whilst not unexpected – we had been informed this would happen, it had far reaching effects. We were effectively made redundant from the London company, and re-hired by the Honkong company, with a completely different contract. Pay rates and conditions were not so good as before, and we were paid in US dollars instead of Pounds Stirling. We had to pay all our own social insurance and pension, and had to sort out our own tax. This last in itself was quite complex, as we were effectively working abroad.

Unfortunately, shortly after, the dollar exchange value crashed against all major currencies, and we ended up by being paid only about 75 percent or less of what we had previously earned. A lot of British companies were “flagging out” at this time, so leaving was not a good option at that time. We were better off than many. It was hoped that this move would save the company money, and enable it to continue. We all guessed it was a way to phase out British Officers, and employ foreign nationals at a fraction of our pay, with longer trips. Basically we were all hanging on for redundancy money if (or when) the company got rid of us.

It was not a happy time.