

28) M.V. W.A. Mather
Trieste Italy 16/8/78 - 20/11/78 Long Beach USA.

When flying out to join from Heathrow airport, the plane was delayed around 3 hours when a bus with passengers (i.e. me – amongst others), manoeuvring alongside the aircraft, hit and cracked one of the navigation lights on the end of the wing. This had to be replaced, whilst in the meantime we had to sit inside the aircraft waiting. It was not really unpleasant, just somewhat boring! Luckily I had no connecting flights to catch, so could just sit back and read my book. The agent meeting me would have to wait until I finally arrived.

When I joined, the ship, it was at anchor off Trieste, Italy, waiting for a berth. We had several days waiting there, and as not much was going on, I and a couple of the deck cadets organised a trip ashore. Trieste is near the Yugoslavian border, and the countryside there is limestone, with interesting rock formations called Karst.

We decided to visit some very impressive caves near a village not too far away. Inside one of the caves was a long wire suspended from the vast domed ceiling. On the end of was a vibration sensor for sensing earthquakes. This huge cave was so big, it was almost like an underground cathedral. The caves were very impressive, but unfortunately, the internal lighting had been left on too long for the tourists, and many rock formations were marred by the green or brown alge which grows as soon as light is present.

We had walked there as it was not all that far, and wanted to walk back for some exercise. The weather was excellent to start with, but on the way back, it clouded over and there was a heavy thunderstorm and accompanying rain. We took shelter in a small cafe/bar in the village, where I had my first taste of home made Sangria. It tasted great, but I don't remember too much about the rest of the return journey!. I am not sure if any of us did. It turned out to be a nice little party with the very friendly locals.

The captain's wife and small son visited whilst we were anchored too. It was quite an unusual experience to hear the patter of tiny feet along the corridor, and to be visited in the radio room by a tiny inquisitive figure. Wives were quite common aboard, but it was the first time I had experience of children aboard ship.

The ship had previously experienced some trouble with salt water contamination of the stern bearing. Even on this quite modern ship, it was made from a very hard dense tropical wood called Lignum Vitae and is lubricated and cooled with fresh water kept in a small tank just behind the screw. Salt water ingress causes corrosion within the tank, and also to the shaft and must be stopped.

We travelled down to Barcelona, where the ship had a 2 day dry dock. A small split in a weld was soon found and patched, after which we could continue. Most of the time was taken up by pumping the dock dry, then re-filling it again. This may sound like a lot of effort for a small leak, but if the propeller shaft becomes damaged due to corrosion, the repair costs would have been huge – probably requiring the propeller and shaft to be removed.

We visited Southern Turkey with a cargo of fuel oil. Making the most of the short stay, a group of us rented a taxi for the day (I was surprised at just how cheap it was), and travelled up to Istanbul. This required about a 3 hour journey each way, and thus needed a very early start. We had to drive over the newly built bridge over the Bosphorous to reach Istanbul, which was an interesting experience. Then we had a lightning tour of the tourist sights and bought a few souvenirs.

It was a very long day, and by the time we returned back to the ship it was almost dark. We were a tired but happy group who poured into the ships bar afterwards for a refreshing beer, and to tell the others of our exploits. The ship then made a quick visit to Constanta in Rumania. I was Retracing some of my old tracks!