

19) M.V. Lord Mount Stephen 41520 GRT 20,700 BHP
Southampton 8/4/76 - 15/4/76 Southampton.



The ship had just been taken out of lay-up, and was chartered for the North Sea oil trade. When a ship is laid up, it is either moored or anchored in a safe place, everything is closed down and the ship is usually left totally dead. It is normally done when due to economic conditions, a ship cannot be profitably operated, but the owner hopes for improvement and re-activation in the future. After a long lay-up, it generally requires considerable time, money and effort to return the ship to its previous condition. The Lord Mount Stephen had been found a time-charter to Shell, and was destined to load at a large floating buoy, moored next to an oil platform in the North Sea and take the oil to various points around the UK coast. It was quite a nice run really. The ship however was in a terrible mess, rusty, dirty, flaking paint and virtually no services apart from electric light. Even that was in short supply and somewhat dim. The week I was on board was quite enough. We were living on board, but we had no heating, no sanitation (we had to go on to the side of the drydock for showers and toilets) and it was all very dirty and noisy. I was engaged in so called "making ready" work, getting the radio station into a suitable condition for a Department Of Trade inspection, after which we would (hopefully) be granted a Radio Safety Certificate, and allowed to go to sea. The ship was quite high tech for its time, but the technology was a bit unreliable, and after a few of years of lay up was sometimes almost unusable. The engine room contained an early data logger with all mechanical-relay-scanning of the various points to be logged. It had a teleprinter printout every 4 hours (or on demand) in the engine control room. We had some engineers from Honeywell down to try to get it running. They did get it semi-working again, but it was never really trusted! For me, the work involved getting the radio batteries cleaned up and charged. Testing and where necessary repairing the radio and various other equipment in the radio room and on the bridge, as well as getting it all clean and tidy. Repairing the ships aerials, and rigging new ones where necessary. Making sure all documents were present and corrected up to date. Checking and repairing the radar, navigational systems and ship's intercommunication systems (talkback for docking etc.) Probably the most time consuming was the corrections to the various publications (Volumes 1 to 6 of the Admiralty list of radio signals, the list of ships wireless stations, various notices and marine documents). If the previous radio officer had not kept them up to date, I had a lot more to do. In this case, seeing as the ship had been laid up, nothing had been done for years! It was a busy time. My French girl friend did however visit me on board, which did a lot to raise my spirits, and got me a number of envious glances from other members of the crew!