

22) M.V. W.M. Neal (ZBML) 69903 GRT (123,000 DWT)
Fukuyama Japan 17/8/76 - 21/8/76 Kawasaki Japan.
23) M.V. W.M. Neal Re-signed on articles.
Kawasaki Japan 21/8/76 - 20/12/76 Port Talbot Wales.



This was another sister ship to the D.C. Coleman. With almost exactly the same equipment, and similar runs. Port time on these ships was usually limited as they could be loaded and discharged in an amazingly short time. Huge 50 ton grabs would descend into the hold, hoist out a load of cargo, dump it into a hopper leading to a conveyor belt, then return - over and over again. Total discharge time for the 123,000 tons of cargo was between 1 and 2 days. Loading was just as fast, but here the conveyor belt was used to funnel cargo continuously into the holds, being steered using remote control by stevedores on deck or directly from a cabin high above.

The chief officer had the job of planning the loading or discharging, and then to monitor it to see everything was going according to the plan. Failure to do so could put tremendous shear and bending stresses on the hull, and lead to the ship cracking or breaking up. It could have poor stability, or the cargo could shift whilst in a seaway, with consequent danger of capsizing and sinking. He had very little sleep during the port periods, checking drafts, cargo figures and liaising with the head stevedores. Effectively, all our lives were in his hands at that point.

The other deck officers would be on deck during their watches too, checking and supervising, but the C/O had overall command. The Captain never usually interfered with general cargo work unless a problem arose. He was mostly busy dealing with the mounds of various official paperwork, talking to owners' representatives, shippers and port officials. The Chief Engineer would be busy supervising engine maintenance, stores and fuel, so he was also quite busy during the short spells in port. The other engineers would be carrying out the work, as well as keeping normal watches. Depending on how my Radio Room and bridge equipment was working, I would often also be involved in this maintenance work. As Electronics Officer, my duties often involved a range of engine room equipment. I did generally however have more free time than most other officers.

We were delayed a week or more at Dampier in Australia. It should only have been a short stay, as loading iron ore for Europe, even on such a big ship is remarkably quick, but there was a strike in Dampier, and we were anchored off the port until it was resolved. It was a very peaceful time, with excellent weather and virtually nothing to do. With the strike over, we loaded our cargo of iron ore in 48 hours and made our slow ponderous way via Cape Town to Port Talbot in Wales. I was greeted by Christine at the quayside and I had the somewhat unusual experience of going home by train!