

24) D.C. Coleman (ZCAZ) 123,000 DWT 21,120 SHP  
Rotterdam 16/3/77 - 18/6/77 Rotterdam.



Another big bulker, with the usual long boring trips. It seemed as if I was destined to spend the major part of my life on this type of ship. We loaded coal at Richards Bay in South Africa, just northeast of Durban. The cargo was bound for Europe, but the trip turned out to be longer than expected. On the way down to Richards Bay, we experienced an interesting natural electrical phenomenon. One afternoon, it was a clear blue sky, a light wind, but again with a light haze from the Saharan dust being blown out into the Atlantic. Over a period of half an hour or so, the receiver noise level rose, until it was impossible to hear any stations whatsoever. Totally fed up with only hearing noise on the radio, I went out on the bridge wing for a breath of air, where to my surprise a high pitched whistling buzz could be heard. Intrigued, I tried to trace it, and found it came from the bridge wing lights (which had some pointed wing-nut securing screws). The noise came from them! The lights were turned off so there was nothing to cause it. I slowly came to the conclusion that it was caused by a brush discharge from the sharp edges initiated by a very high electrostatic field - but where from? The sky was clear, no clouds, and the amount of dust was really quite small. All there was, was a fairly stiff breeze, say force 5 or 6.

As an experiment I got an ordinary lead pencil from the chart room, and stood on the bridge wing with it. As I raised it above my head, the sharp point began to buzz and whistle like the lamps. The higher I raised it, the louder it became. A cheap plastic biro had no effect, probably because the point is insulated. At this point I got a little nervous and after showing the effect to the astonished deck officers, decided I would stay inside. I had no wish to be struck by lightning or something similar. The effect was duly reported in the meteorological log. It continued for several hours, and after nightfall, I could see a faint light (St Elmo's fire) on the top of our vertical radio antennas. The effect slowly died down, and after a while stopped entirely, but it is something I shall never forget. It was also something I never experienced again in all my subsequent years at sea.

Richards Bay itself is just a harbour inside a sheltered deep water bay, but it is miles from anywhere. There is nothing more than huge heaps of iron ore and multiple conveyor belts and loaders. There is nowhere to go, and nothing to do ashore. This is typical of bulk carrier ports, and was another reason I was not too happy to keep being put on these ships. One could save a considerable amount of money, but the runs were boring.

We were delayed for over a month at anchor in the English Channel waiting to get into Dunkirk to discharge. There was a strike at the port, and a large backlog of ships was waiting to get in. Whilst waiting, I contacted my friend Mike who used to be the second officer on another CP ship, but was now working for Sea-Speed. We used to be "buzzed" by the Dover-Calais hovercraft twice a day when my friend Mike was navigating it. He was friends with one of the senior Sea-Speed Captains, and when they were on the same hovercraft together, he used to call us up on the intership VHF radio and ask if it was ok to make a close pass.

"Hello D.C. Colemean, this is Hovercraft Princess Margaret. We would like permission to do a close pass down your Starboard side. Over."

"Hello Princess Margaret, yes ok, please don't scrape the paint off."

"Roger, thank you. Princess Margaret out."

We always agreed, as it gave us something else to look at, and used to wake up the Captain in the mornings. Those hovercraft are really LOUD! At least then he had something to grumble about at breakfast, which kept him happy all day! The hovercraft passengers got the thrill of seeing our huge wall of steel looming up above them as they passed close along our starboard side. We were there so long that we were being used as a navigation marker by the hovercraft



and cross channel ferries. We could hear them giving their position with reference to us. They got quite upset when we moved! Mike had planned to send us up some English newspapers by stopping and throwing them on deck for us. He had even bought the papers, but that morning we were no longer there! We had been told to discharge at Rotterdam instead, so as to cut short our waiting time. Time is money, and with a ship of our size, that could be (and was!) a lot.