



**25) Fort Coulange (ZCHA) 18782 GRT 11600 BHP
Guayama Puerto Rico 2/7/77 - 10/8/77 Hamburg
26) Fort Coulange. Re-signed on articles.
Hamburg 10/8/77 - 26/10/77 Bombay India.**

I had had my fill of the big bulk carriers, and therefore requested to go on something smaller. These small product tankers were always much more interesting than the big ships. They would often load small parcels of oil at various small ports, and discharge at several others. This was my first visit to Puerto Rico, so I was quite excited about it. I flew in to San Juan and had a long taxi ride along mostly small winding roads, past a very impressive black sand beach to Ponce on the Southern coast. I wondered if I would pass the huge radio telescope at Arecibo, but that was in another part of the island. I stayed overnight in a small but clean hotel near the town square. I brushed up on my Spanish and wandered around, ending up drinking a cold beer or two in a small bar. The next day, I was picked up by the agent, and taken to the ship at Guayama, a few miles away. The cargo to be loaded at Puerto Rico was petrol, which left the tanks reasonably clean. It had all apparently been planned in advance. On the trip back to our next loading port, they were further cleaned with hot water and hand dried for carrying our next cargo, vegetable oil. We loaded this absolutely pure edible vegetable oil, a very valuable commodity in Hamburg for various ports in India. Great care was taken that all tanks, lines, pumps etc were absolutely free of all pollutants. Inspectors went down tanks to see, and required all sorts of documentation to ensure total cleanliness. The oil was discharged at several small ports on the West coast of India, each one providing its own problems.

Problems in India

One of the biggest problems was, that our pumps could not be slowed down enough to discharge the small quantities required at some places. The shore pipelines (when available) were not suited for fast discharge rates, and if our pumps had a hiccup (which often happened as they were not intended to run at such slow speeds) there were shouts and screams from ashore as the locals saw their pipes starting to balloon and stretch as well as various couplings starting to spray vegetable oil in all directions. At times, when we had slowed the pumps right down, the shore guys would get impatient, and come aboard to agitate for a faster flow rate. The watch officer would just nudge the turbine controls, and there would be screams from outside to slow down again. We just could not win! The problem was finally solved by making

a closed loop with our own hoses, discharging back into ourselves at a rate suitable for our pumps. The shoreside hoses being tapped off ours at a manifold, via a pressure reducing valve. The shore guys could adjust their own flow rate, and it prevented them from bothering us.

The other problem however nearly drove the poor chief officer mad. What seemed like hundreds of local road tanker drivers waving their little bits of paper descended on his office demanding they be served their five tons or seven tons first. They refused to take their turns at our makeshift discharging system and became quite noisy and agitated at times. The fact that we could not measure such small amounts also complicated things no end. In the end we turned off all the pumps and stopped discharging completely until they had all left the ship and formed an orderly queue with their trucks.

The next delay came when we lost a complete railway tank train somewhere between Bombay and where we were in Northern India. Well, actually, WE didn't lose it, the Indian railway system did. They knew it had left Bombay, and knew apparently when it SHOULD have arrived with us, but as to where it actually was ... well, India is a big country, and it was sure to turn up somewhere, sometime - probably! It did in fact finally turn up several days late, with no explanation as to where it had been or why. Even after it HAD arrived, there was some problems with the cleanliness of the tank wagons. Some of these had to undergo an additional clean as were told they had previously contained fuel oil!

During all this, we frequently had locals actually living on deck, with the subsequent fire, hygiene and security problems they caused us.

Bombay (Mumbai) India

On arrival in Bombay, I got into contact with some local radio amateurs who were talking on the 20 metre Amateur Radioband. One was in charge of the entire bus system for Bombay. He lived in the centre of the city in a very large, beautifully appointed 3rd story apartment. Well educated, with his sons studying in America, he explained the problems of running the Bombay public transport system. He took me to one of larger bus garages where the damage caused by poor drivers, overloading and just sheer old age was repaired. Some of the buses were ex London Transport, and already old when they arrived in India. The continual overloading by passengers hanging on the platform (and anywhere else they could find a handhold) gradually takes its toll. I saw buses where the rear platform was bent down, almost touching the ground! The other problem was that the drivers habitually drive too fast, so the odd bus used to fall over whilst going round a corner. (This is actually quite difficult to do with a double-decker as they are specially made to be extremely stable)

Another radio amateur was a garage mechanic. He had a collection of lovingly restored vintage cars he kept in the garage. He used to tour around India and sometimes find them being used to plough a field instead of a tractor, or maybe rusting in a shed. He would buy them, bring them back to Bombay and restore them to original condition as a hobby.

He took me for an unforgettable drive through Bombay in a vintage open MG. It was quite an experience for me, dodging cows and ox carts, bikes, scooters and pedestrians, as well as the nearly suicidal car and bus drivers in one of the most densely populated cities on earth.

He lived with his two lady cousins in a second floor flat in an older area of Bombay. His cousins, very courteous and friendly ladies, took me to a shop where they used to buy their Saris. This was highly interesting, and demonstrated the Indian hospitality, business sense and the unimportance of time. We were greeted warmly, and after being introduced, I was offered a tea or a cold Coke. (A runner was sent out to buy it for me). Then the sales pitch began, although I had made it clear I only wanted a little silk for my wife. The shop owner took out roll after roll of beautiful material. Some lavishly embroidered with real gold or silver thread. These were

unrolled with a flourish on the floor beside me. He extolled the virtues of each material, its use, where it was made, and only when directly asked would he give an approximate price (VERY expensive even by European standards). The two women with me were also enjoying this show, and said this was quite normal practice when they came for their Sari material. After an hour or so, I had chosen my small pieces of silk material, and the shop owner with no sign of disappointment or anger at what would in Europe be classed as a waste of time, rolled up his wares again. We continued talking for a while, then after another cold Coke, said our goodbyes and left. The owner knew of course that if in Bombay again, I would unfailingly come to him, so I guess I was classed as a possible good investment of his time.

I left the ship at Bombay and flew back to the UK for a well earned leave.