

**37) Fort Fraser 42445 GRT (VRCW)
Long Beach 26/5/82 - 12/7/82 Lulea Sweden.
38) Fort Fraser Re-signed on articles.
Lulea Sweden 12/7/82 - 21/10/82 Kobe Japan.**

A week or so before joining the ship, I had an Amateur Radio contact from home with a radio amateur living in Los Angeles. When he heard I would be in LA shortly, I was invited to stay with him for a few days and see some of the sights. I arranged to fly out a few days earlier than initially planned so I would have the time to do so. I was picked up at the airport by this tall lanky guy over 6ft tall, in cowboy boots and a big hat. He had told me I couldn't miss him. He was right!

He was an officer in the Los Angeles police force, and took me into the depths of the LA police headquarters as a guest, as well as an LA Courtroom where he had to appear as a witness. He had previously been on a drugs raid and had secured heroin which he had to produce as evidence. He lived just outside LA in a large single story house together with his wife and two huge black poodles. Don't let anyone tell you they are lap dogs. These two were almost the size of Great Danes, and guarded the property possessively. They were very friendly when they had got to know me, but I would not like to meet them without an introduction!

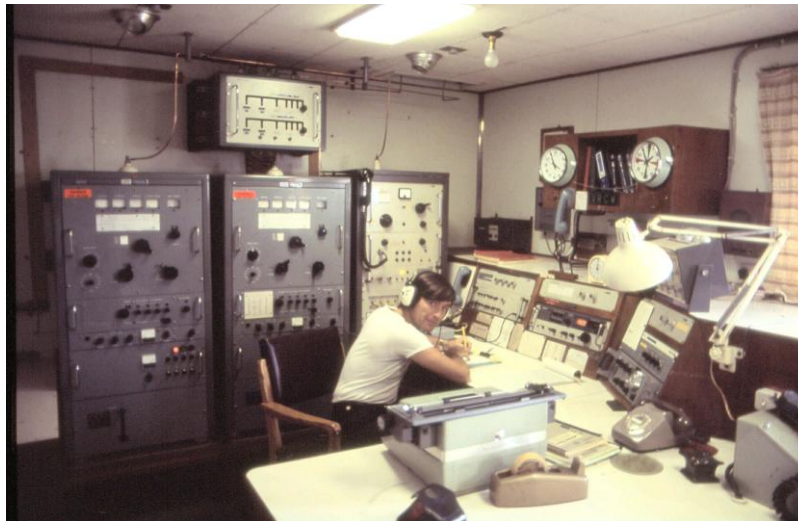
His beat was the Long Beach port area, which was a very rough place. This was before it had been cleaned up, and had a lot of red light areas, strip clubs and dubious hangouts. He also trained newly appointed police officers and instructed police car drivers. He was an interesting guy to know, and I got an insight into the seedier side of American life which would not have been possible without knowing him.

I rented a car and drove up into the mountains east of LA, intending to have a look at the famous Mt Wilson optical telescope. Unfortunately, it was too early in the season, and the road to the site was not open to the public. Snow was still to be seen in sheltered areas, and some roads were closed. The scenery though was superb, as was the view from the mountains, looking down over LA. The car I had rented for this excursion was from a company called "Rent a Wreck" which rented out large second hand cars cheaply. This was still a period of fuel shortages and even Americans were looking towards smaller more economical cars. Large ones tended to get sold off quite cheaply. The one I rented was a Ford-LTD, a massive machine, with a 5 litre V8 engine, an air conditioner which would not have been out of place in a deep freeze, and a thirst which made petrol pumps shrink back in horror! I was not sure how far I would be driving, so decided to fill up the tank. I inserted the nozzle into what I considered to



be the right hole, started the pump as normal, then waited. The gallons started to mount up, and after about 25 I began to wonder if I had used the right hole after all, and started worrying about the cost. Even at American prices, it was getting expensive. I stopped at around 35 gallons, looking around for any spilled petrol. The tank was still not full! It was worth it though as it drove well, and I ended up taking a group of our officers to Disneyland for a day out.

The radio equipment on this ship comprised the original complement of ITT equipment, including a large 1 KW HF/MF AM transmitter with two separate synthesized RF sections (HF and MF) served by a common modulator and power supply. CP had added a synthesized RMT1500 from Redifon with SSB, as the AM transmitter no longer fulfilled the international regulations for HF R/T. They also added an R551 receiver with high stability unit for SSB



reception. It made quite an impressive show on entering the radio shack. The ITT receivers had a nice bright digital display from a dot-matrix LED display. The only problem was they became very hot in operation due to the considerable amount of TTL logic inside. Also the dot matrix display IC's proved to be somewhat unreliable, some of the dots going out or flickering which became very annoying. I had to change display IC's several times during my time on this ship. This was not a particularly easy operation on a vibrating ship.

We loaded a bulk cargo of crushed coal, then made a direct passage, slow steaming to Sweden via Panama, a voyage of around 38 days. The time passes slowly on these long slow voyages. One day seeming to merge into the next. We all were looking forward to arriving in Europe with its promise of mail, visits by family and friends, and a relief from the routine.

My wife Christine joined via a pilot cutter at Brixham when we were passing through the English Channel on route to Lulea. She was going to do a voyage with me, and it was a joyful reunion. It was compulsory for us to take a pilot as the Captain did not have sufficient local knowledge to be exempt from the requirement. It is naturally a cost factor. Their services were not free.

We had a lovely stay in Lulea, a very pleasant town situated north of the Arctic Circle, where again through my Amateur Radio contacts we met a friendly young couple. With them as guides, we were taken to a sheltered bay where Christine actually had a swim in the sea north of the Arctic Circle, a somewhat unusual claim to fame! It was apparently not that cold, but I kept my feet dry! We both enjoyed the break, and had many lovely walks into town from the ship's berth, enjoying the quiet solitude of the area. Walking around the area, with lots of wild

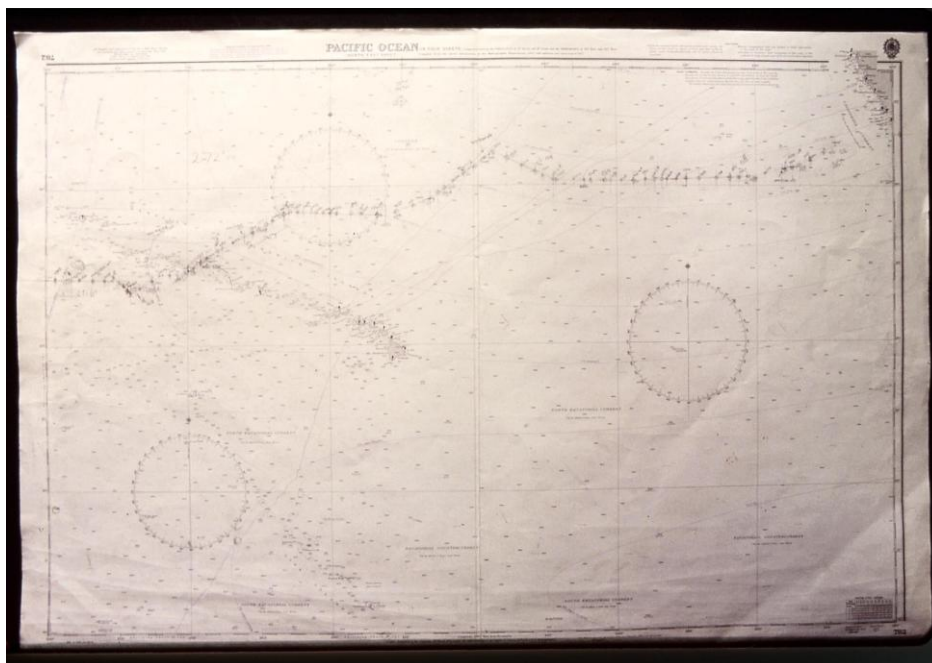


flowers, we were struck by the lack of bees. We could see absolutely none at all. On asking a local, we were told it was too cold during the winter, and there were none. Pollination being carried out by other hardier insects.

The quiet pause ended and then it was across to Baltimore, where Christine unfortunately left to go back to work. Passing then through the Panama Canal, we again loaded a crushed coal cargo in LA. This cargo was very wet, having been stored outside, and LA having also experienced recent heavy rains. Continual measurements of water content were made during the voyage, as there was a distinct danger of the cargo becoming fluid and dangerous. Water slopping around in a cargo hold can upset the stability of a ship drastically. The so-called "free surface effect" raises the centre of floatation of the ship until it becomes unstable and flops over. It does not require all that much water to do it, as the ferry disaster with the Herald of Free Enterprise dramatically illustrated.

Our water content measurements were done by putting a measured amount of cargo into a heavy pressure container which looked a little like a small bomb. A carefully measured amount of calcium carbide was put in, then it was sealed. The water reacted with the carbide forming acetylene gas. The gas pressure inside the sealed container was measured by an instrument fixed to it, the pressure being dependent on how much water was in the cargo; we had a book of tables for finding the exact percentage.

A severe storm on the way across the Pacific forced us right down South of the Hawaiian Islands instead of (as we were weather routed) the Northern Great Circle route. Weather routing was a service offered by a number of companies (and meteorological services). It was supposed to pick the most economical route from A to B bearing in mind the ship's performance and the weather forecast. The Captain however had the last say, and was not absolutely bound to the route



given if he had grounds to doubt the ship's safety. Our Captain refused the routing given, on grounds of safety of the ship, bearing in mind the potentially dangerous state of the cargo. The charterers were not amused, as the Southern route is further, requiring a greater amount of time and fuel. As it turned out, the cargo HAD started to separate, there being several feet of water on top when we opened the hatches at the end of the voyage. It was not, however, too dangerous at that point, but a sign of perhaps what MIGHT have been.

The bad weather forced some work to be done forward to ensure the anchor was stowed correctly. The Captain was worried it might shift and puncture the hull. We hove to, but a huge wave buried the main deck in water and nearly washed the Chief Officer and 3 of our crew overboard. One man broke a leg when he was washed against the deck railings. I was on the bridge at the time and remember seeing only white water on deck, then his head poked above and I could see him frantically hanging on for his life. The Chief Officer had badly bruised arms where he hung on to some hatch cover chains to prevent himself being washed over the side. One of the inflatable life rafts stowed near the bow was under so much water that it thought the ship had sunk. The hydrostatic release operated and the lifeboat inflated itself. It remained tethered to the ship,

but being washed up and down the deck by waves breaking on deck didn't do it any good at all, and it was punctured several times. It was impossible to go on deck and lash it down. After this treatment it was irreparable and was later scrapped.

It was just as well we didn't have to use it in earnest though, as it didn't seem to inflate properly. It was outdated anyway (all inflatable boats have to be regularly inspected or replaced), and was only being kept until we could dispose of it correctly, and obtain a new one. The company making these inflatable rafts would take them back to be renewed and re-stocked. We took the rations and seawater lights out to try them ourselves and use them for training during our lifeboat drills. Seawater lights are small self-contained units containing a waterproof lamp housing and a special battery which is completely inert when dry, and can be stored for years when kept sealed. As soon as it is immersed in sea water however, it supplies enough power to light the lamp brightly for quite a considerable time. They were fitted to liferafts, life jackets and lifebuoys. Normal batteries lose energy and corrode in a very short time, even when in sealed containers. I still have some of the dry rations here at home. The lights however got used up during barbeques, parties and even once for an illuminated toilet bowl! It was the first time I had tried lifeboat food. I am glad I never had to live on it! The food was dry and tasteless, and the water tasted "tinny" through being in cans for too long. It would however, keep one alive for quite a while.

In Kobe, Japan, I met some more radio amateurs after having talked to them using the local repeater and my 2 meter portable. They sounded a lively group, and we had many laughs as they practiced their English, and I used my few words of Japanese. We decided it would be fun to meet, and a time and date was arranged. This is one of the interesting aspects of Amateur Radio. One likes the voice and the personality it projects. Seeing what the person at the other end looks like is then a very interesting experience.

Most, as I found out later, were part of a local motorcycle gang. Unsuspecting, I agreed to meet them outside the port gates, as they could not enter the steelworks where we were discharging without a pass. It was quite a surprise to see who was waiting for me at the gate. The security guard looked decidedly unhappy at being faced by such a group! One of the gang members was driving a car, in which I was invited to travel. It felt rather strange to be given a motor cycle escort by around 25 young Japanese mounted on large powerful machines.

They were however all very friendly, and I was escorted to one of their favourite coffee bars, where we met up with some other club members. It was indeed a merry meeting with much laughter at our mutual misunderstandings and mistakes in language. Later, together with a few latecomers alerted by phone or radio, we all travelled to a restaurant in town where members of another radio club were meeting. I was again made very welcome and a great time was had by all.

I have only very rarely indeed been disappointed with the people I have met via Amateur Radio. Almost everyone I have personally met up with after a chat on the radio, were indeed wonderful people. In the sort of job I was in it opened so many doors, and allowed insights into lives and cultures which would otherwise have remained totally closed. A seaman in a strange country knows no one, and has nowhere to go. An invitation to a private home is a heartwarming experience.

Shortly after this meeting, my relief arrived, and I flew home on leave.