

**43) M.V. Fort Victoria 17281 GRT 13,100 BHP
Fukuyama Japan 9/4/84 - 16/8/84 Vancouver BC.**

I flew from Strasbourg to London where I should have met up with some other officers, and then all travelled out to Japan together. This never worked out, as I was never given any names or means of identifying them. As it was, I boarded the plane for Osaka without knowing if I was alone or not. I thought I would recognise some, but it was not to be. We should all have been met on arrival at Osaka, Japan, but due to some misunderstanding by the agent, it was not known I was coming. The other officers on the aircraft, (unknown to me), got off first and they were met and escorted to Kobe. (They were at the front of the aircraft and got off fast, I was at the back, and by the time I was off and retrieved my baggage, they had gone. Apparently they didn't know I was there either. There I stood, no one to meet me, no Japanese money, no Japanese language, no transport and the airport was closing for the night. It was, (as is always the case,) a weekend, and even after I managed to make a collect call to England, no one was at the office in London.

Plastic money was a Godsend. I waved my American Express card at a taxi driver, and said about the only word of English he knew, - "Hotel". He took me to the biggest, most expensive hotel in Osaka, The Royal. They paid him (and put it on my bill of course) and gave me a room. Now with an international phone connection, a roof over my head, and the hotel able and willing to help, I was all set up. I just hoped the bill would be picked up by the company as it was costing around 150 Dollars a day plus meals! After several days I managed to sort things out. I was told that I would have a long wait for the ship, as it was still delayed in Russia. Nobody knew why, or for how long. I played tourist, and visited the various tourist attractions in and around Osaka. Every few days I kept phoning the agent, and he kept giving me the same answer, no news. I met some young friendly Japanese "Salarymen" who could speak English, and we used to meet evenings at the English pub near the hotel. It gave me an insight into the Japanese way of life, and gave these young Japanese considerable English practice. We all benefited enormously.

After 2 weeks in Osaka, the agents suddenly informed me there were some other officers staying at a hotel in Kobe, and would I prefer to go and stay with them. At first I got a bit upset that it had taken all this time to tell me I was not alone, but as I had done virtually everything I wanted (or could afford) in Osaka, I agreed, and a taxi was chartered to take me to Kobe, about an hour's drive away. I and the other three officers then had a further 2 weeks at a hotel in Kobe. I and the others played tourist again, seeing as we could be waiting an indefinite time, we thought we should use what time we had. It must have cost a fortune in hotel bills! I visited a model European style farm which was unusual. These have been set up outside some big cities so as to let people see where their food comes from. The majority of Japanese children have never seen a live cow or a pig, and probably think that milk is produced in a milk factory! It made a good day out for city dwellers and school classes.



Again, I met some very friendly Japanese Radio Amateurs in Kobe. I had previously contacted a Japanese amateur from home, and he mentioned someone in Kobe I should contact. As is usual, I had forgotten all about it. I was walking around an Amateur Radio Emporium on the Motomachi (a huge shopping arcade) in Kobe, when I got speaking to a very well dressed elderly Japanese gentleman. He spoke excellent English, and after a while, it turned out he was the one I had been told to contact! It's a small world. I was invited to his home, met his wife and generally had a great time. He was a business man, with his own company making sportswear, and had travelled to Europe quite a bit. He then introduced me to quite a number of other local amateurs. Amateur Radio has opened many doors for me, and enabled me to make many friends all over the world whom I would otherwise never get to meet.

The ship did finally arrive after over 4 weeks delay in Russia. Apparently there was no working telex connection from the Russian port, and they were not allowed to use the ship's radio to give information. So, after a paid Japanese holiday of around 4 weeks, we all waved goodbye to Japan.

The ship loaded timber at New Westminster (Vancouver) where I met up with some Canadian friends who used to be stationed at the big NATO base at Lahr in Germany, then across to Tacoma, Washington and down to Newport, Oregon. This was a very small quiet town, but once a year it came alive when it had its "Navy Days". The Coast Guard were invited, and all ships in their small port were dressed with flags. Everyone had a jolly good time. As we were there at just that time, we were also heartily invited. Our Captain, Chief engineer and Chief Officer were invited to all the official celebrations, together with the senior American Coast Guard officers.

We were very welcome, as the mainstay of the local economy was logging and exporting timber and timber products. As not many large ships called, it was a major event us being there at all. The US Coast Guard asked if they could take our berth, and move us to a less favourable one. The one we were using was right in the centre of town and a prime site for the celebrations. The local authorities refused with the excuse that our deeper draft would not allow it. Actually we think it was because they did not want to disrupt the cargo operations too much. If no ships called, and the shore storage facilities were full, then the local workers were out of work until a ship called. This sometimes caused considerable hardship, and every timber ship was made very welcome by the townspeople.

Sometimes we used to flash messages to a Coast Guard ship moored at the next berth using our Aldis signalling lamp. This generally took place later in the evening after a good session in our bar. It started as a test to see if they were still keeping a watch in port, - they were! We then had great fun sending coded messages from the international code book, and seeing if they could read them. Some of the messages were somewhat "blue tinged"! It was extremely interesting to see what could be sent using the stilted phrases supplied and a bit of imagination. Unfortunately, we never got to meet them, as they sailed shortly after, but we all had great fun.

I managed to hire a car (It was not that easy being as there was no car rental agency around, so it was done via a friendly garage), and drove around the area. It is a beautiful part of America. The main highway runs north/south, parallel to the coast. On one side is continuous forest, and on the other there are beaches and rocky headlands. It is virtually deserted, with no sound apart from the wind in the trees, and the Pacific rollers breaking on the beaches. I would pass the occasional car, and through the occasional small coastal settlement. It was however, profoundly peaceful. I would stop at a small pull-in, and go for a walk along the Pacific shore taking in the peace and solitude.

Another unforgettable experience was phoning home from a call box on the beach, next to the rolling Pacific Ocean. First having to feed the phone with about 4 dollars worth of quarters, (25 cent pieces), during which time my wife Christine could hear me counting out the coins, muttering to myself, and making comments to the operator. I had made a special trip to several shops and a bank in order to collect a whole pile of these coins, enough for the initial 3 minute call. When the time was up, she said she would ring me back. I stood there, facing the wide Pacific Ocean, waiting for the phone behind me to ring. A few minutes later it did. It was a strange feeling to just pick up the phone and speak to Germany, half a world away, watching the sun set from a call box on the rim of the Pacific.

As the coastguard ships left, they played patriotic music from their PA system whilst passing under the bridge and until clear of the harbour. It sounded very rousing. Not to be outdone, as we left, we played "Rule Britannia" through our loudhailer system with around 100 watts of noise. It sounded great too!