

52) Fort Macleod
Manzanillo, Mexico 3/4/87 - 9/7/87 Rosarito, Mexico.

This was on a regular run around Mexico with petrol for PEMEX from Salina Cruz to various ports along the Mexican West Coast. The best port was Mazatlan, a holiday resort. It had some beautiful beaches, as well as hotels and beach bars where we could hang out. Unfortunately we didn't call there every trip, so it was sometimes a couple of months between visits. Our stay was also relatively short as the quantity of cargo required was often quite small. It was however an eagerly awaited stop. Some of the ports were nothing more than fishing villages with a few oil tanks. The average person being visibly very poor. One of the ports we visited had just a tank farm, a small motel, a tiny village school and a huge white sand beach, totally undeveloped. It had some wonderful waves, being open to the Pacific Ocean. It also had thousands of large sand crabs. If we sat quietly, they would dig themselves out and start to move around. The slightest movement and they would dig a hole and disappear within seconds. They must have had amazing eyesight or vibration sensors. Apart from the tank farm, there was a sea water salt evaporation business there. Just behind the beach at one end, was a large shallow lake. This was sealed off from the sea, and left to evaporate. Workers then raked the salt into piles which were then collected in sacks and sold. Afterwards, the sea was let in again, and the whole thing repeated.

Some of the working conditions we had to adhere to were rather strange. We were not allowed to discharge "slops" ashore (the remains left after cleaning tanks at sea) as Pemex allegedly had no facilities for processing them. We were also not allowed to pump the "slops" over the side by International and Coast Guard regulations. We were obliged however (by PEMEX) to arrive at the loading port "Clean and Gas Free" and with "No Slops" which meant we were obliged to clean our tanks at sea. What we did with the residues was our concern, just don't bring them to PEMEX, and don't tell PEMEX or the Coast Guard what you did with them - so we didn't - and if anyone asks, I still haven't!!

I left the ship at Rosarito, together with several others. This was an adventure I don't want to repeat too often. There was no harbour at Rosarito, and any reliefs, mail and spares had to be brought out by small motor boat. In a heavy swell, this could be just a little hairy! The ship was moored to some buoys, about a mile offshore, discharging our cargo through an underwater pipeline, to a tank farm ashore. Some time previously, the small motor boat used as a ferry had capsized under similar weather conditions. The passengers were ok (they could swim), but all the luggage was on the bottom of the sea! This did not greatly enhance our confidence!

There had been a storm out to the west a few days previously, and the heavy Pacific swell built up as it approached the shallow water of the coast. Waves were reaching 10 feet or more (over 3 metres). This may not sound like much, but you should try being out in it on a small boat! Our big ship just rocked gently, but climbing down a rope ladder into the violently bobbing boat - well, my mind has blanked that bit out! It was NOT nice. The boat then had to negotiate a very small entrance into the harbour, and it required a great deal of skill and judgement on behalf of the boat's pilot to judge the waves, backwash and current and get it right. A mistake meant we would be splattered on the rocks! We waited fully five minutes outside whilst he gauged the waves and we got nervous. Then, with a sudden burst of full power, we dashed for the entrance. We made it without mishap, much to our relief. We unloaded our gear and drove to Tijuana for the flight home from Tijuana to Mexico City, then Mexico City to Frankfurt.

The end of the saga is that my luggage was stolen at Tijuana airport (all 40 Kilos of it!) while travelling home. Two suitcases with around 40 kilos of gear, stolen from the (supposedly) secure checked-in luggage section, presumably before it even made it to the plane. I remember seeing them lined up with a load of other baggage, then I went to the airport restaurant for breakfast. On returning, all the bags were gone, and I presumed they were on the aircraft. As it turned out, my bags at least, were not.

It is a very sobering experience, waiting at the baggage conveyer as everyone else on the flight finds their luggage, then leave. There you are, still standing there. The conveyor continues to turn, but no more bags follow. Then the empty conveyor stops, and the flight number sign goes out. At that point you realise you have lost all bets! I only had the clothes I stood up in, and my personal papers left. On checking into the flight to Frankfurt, I was treated with some suspicion when I said I had no baggage. Who these days, flies half way around the globe with no luggage!

It caused a big insurance problem on returning home, which spoiled a considerable portion of my next leave. In my report to the company I wrote, - Survived voyage, boat trip, and getting ashore, but luggage lost on plane! The airline, in accordance with the IATA agreements, only paid out a few dollars per pound weight. Luckily I had some private insurance for the computer, and the company also insured seaman's baggage. In the end, I was financially compensated for the loss, and could pay for new clothes and a computer. This did not of course make up for a few things that could not be replaced such as the computer program I had written on board, and a personal diary with pictures given to me by my wife. It angers me to think they were probably tossed into a ditch.