



Experiences of the Western Pacific *by David Smiley (56-59)*

In the early 1970s, I was Mate, then Master, of a small former German Horn ship, owned by the Gilbert and Ellice Island government Wholesale Cooperative Society. The ship was called the *Moanaroi* which means something like 'smooth sea'. She was a very pretty ship of about 1,000grt, having two holds, served by two sets of 15 ton swl derricks, the reason for which will become apparent.



Accommodation was all aft, and included a dormitory area within a converted part of the No 2 hold - we had an all up crew of 28, and frequently carried as many as 64 deck passengers. The all white hull was set off with a beautiful painted figurehead of a native mermaid on each bow. These had been hand-painted by our 3rd Mate, a Gilbertese with the unlikely name of Joe Kum Kee. Joe was of mixed parentage and may have been the by-product of the Japanese WWII invasion of Tarawa. Other notable characters included our Ellice Island bosun, a chap called Bopoti (pronounced *Bobose*) who stopped the Aussie stevedores in their tracks when he demonstrated how to carry two by one hundredweight bags of copra, one under each arm, instead of ripping the sacks open with hooks. We also had a real character in the form of a self-styled carpenter called Tokatati (pronounced *Tokatass*), but more of him later.

The voyages of the *Moanaroi* regularly took us throughout the 27 islands in the former colony, collecting copra (and enormous cockroaches) as we journeyed south for discharge in either Suva or Sydney, where we would backload with general cargo for Tarawa and the outlying islands. Tarawa was the distribution point so a fair bit of double-handling took place. We also had side trips to places such as Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, where we would drop off a 'deck cargo' of male plantation workers. Sometimes I could fill up one of our two cargo reefer lockers with a private consignment of avocados, (only fed to pigs in Santo) but which our ship chandler in Sydney sold to fine restaurants - with a percentage for me, of course.

Another side trip would take us north of the colony to Majuro in the Marshall Islands where our Aussie beef was gratefully received by an island group that was very American in its culture, being one of the Trust Territories. Majuro was different in a number of ways from the colony to the south, one being the fact that we entered a fairly large lagoon and actually berthed alongside a wharf. Most other island destinations could only offer an anchorage. I should just mention that none of the islands offered even rudimentary pilotage, and hence the Master was responsible for some fairly hairy pilotage and ship-handling of his own. Reef and atoll islands differ quite a bit in the manner that you approach them - coral heads, steep outcrops, to name but two of many hazards. Back to Majuro. How many reading this will have had the job of collecting freight on cargo, I wonder? One or two ex-Bank Line perhaps but that is about all. In Majuro, I often had as much as \$100,000 (1970 values) being the freight on several tons of beef. Most of this came from small traders so there was always quite a bit of coming and going to the Master's cabin when we were in Majuro, one of the reasons why the ship quite legitimately had an issue to the Master of a .45 Colt revolver!