



Michael Snow (50-52)

Michael wrote in reply to the Sextant query posed by Barrie Gobey (50-52) in the last Cadet. See the update on Page 60. Michael went on to say:

I still have my sextant - an old 19th century Bell mark 8 which belonged to my father. It did 10 days in a lifeboat in May 1941 when he was 3rd mate on the *City of Winchester*, torpedoed off the Gold Coast on the way to Capetown. They were in the NE trades and decided to make for the island off the coast of Brazil and were eventually picked up by a Norwegian steamer and taken to Freetown.

His next post was Junior 2nd on the *Queen Mary* and then Senior 2nd on the *Samaria*. He taught me how to use the sextant before I went to Conway and allowed me to take it in the final term when Captain Hewitt gave us lessons on the quarter deck. About the only time I impressed Eric, I had my own sextant and knew how to use it and do all the corrections.

It's a lovely old instrument with a marvellous history and a treasured family possession.

Surely There Weren't Captains Like That...?

Picture a typical 1950s general cargo liner, three hatches forward of the accommodation and two aft. The ship is a day out of Aden, or Durban, or Buenos Aires or wherever to somewhere else. The Master is in his office, the door is open so he can survey the entire starboard alleyway, all the way down to the officers' smoke room and bar on the after end of the accommodation. It is almost 'smoko' time on a fine tropical morning.

The master is attending to his paperwork in readiness for the next port. He is muttering to himself in the style we have now come to know as a 'Victor Meldrew'. In order to finish an annoying response to Head Office, he requires some paperwork from the bridge. In his normal manner, when such times arise, he bellows, '**Someone!**' Doors immediately open down the alleyway and several junior officers and cadets vie with one another to do the Master's bidding. This really is 'shock and awe' Merchant Navy style!

The voyage progresses and now the ship is safely moored in some far off port, sweltering in the afternoon sun. The punka louvres dribble out a desultory amount of air, and perspiration is a constant companion. Outside the Master's window, union-purchased slings of cargo briefly cast a shadow over his desk. The accommodation is quiet as deck officers are on deck and engineers are pulling units down below. Alone in the officers' lounge and slouched against the bar, the singular, emaciated and ragged boiler-suited figure of the night watch Third Engineer, a Glaswegian by birth, mutters into his 'nth' whisky since the tropical sun had crossed over the yard arm two hours previously.

Again our fierce Captain requires immediate attention and attendance. '**Someone!**' There is a moment's silence that echoes down the long alleyway for seconds, a tenuous connection between two opposite worlds. A reply rebounds from the open doorway of the bar and builds in sound, amplified by the afternoon's otherwise stillness. '**Sod off, yer silly old fool!**' Our Captain is immediately incensed, becoming puce, his authority has never been so challenged. '**Who said that?**'

And, replying unseen from behind the open bar door.....

'Someone!'