

John Adams

MAN OVERBOARD

During World War II the Blue Funnel Ship GORGON, registered at Liverpool with English officers, Malay deck hands and Chinese stewards, under the control of the Australian Sea Transport Service, plying between the east coast of Australia and the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, was carrying 6000 Australian troops. In the vicinity of Wewak, a loud voice from the bridge "Man Overboard". A Malay quartermaster who had been working in a lifeboat had fallen overboard. Captain Marriot manoeuvred his ship towards the man in the sea. A lifeboat was lowered and headed towards the floating man. During this time an Australian soldier dived from the forecastle-head into the sea and swam towards the man in the water. The lifeboat and swimmer were only about thirty feet from the Malaysian Quartermaster when he disappeared. WHY?

TOILETS OCCUPIED

One voyage when transporting troops, officers used the passenger's accommodation, soldiers were billeted below deck. Ten wooden toilets were constructed on the aft end of the ship from port to the starboard. Each toilet instead of a wooden door was provided with a heavy canvas screen for privacy. When at sea every morning 'Ships Inspection' was at 10am. One morning the Army Officer with the ship's Chief Officer arrived to inspect deck toilets. Private Jones stood by with the mop in his hand ready for comments. "These toilets are a disgrace. Tomorrow morning if no improvement there will be hell on".

Next morning arriving at No. 1 toilet the inspection officer lifted the canvas screen with his cane, it was occupied, "Sorry". This happened to the remaining toilets. Every one was occupied "sorry, sorry, sorry". At the meeting after the inspection the army officer laughed and remarked, "Private Jones beat me this time".

LOST SHIP

This trip the Gorgon was sailing from Hollandia to Tan Bay. This ship's navigating officer was confused, as the charts did not show a Tan Bay in New Guinea. This was a worrying time, heading to an unknown destination with 700 men on board, 600 army and 100 crew. After a discussion with Captain Marriot, he commented, "I wonder if Nick would know?" Off I went to look for Lt. Col. Nick Norris who was in this group of soldiers for Tan Bay. In the meeting in the chart room we decided that Nick knew more than the navigating officer, therefore decided to take his advice. We proceeded and later the ship berthed alongside a small jetty and discharged all troops. Just off the jetty among the trees were two Japanese aircraft.

Nick Norris was familiar with the Gorgon as in civilian life was Shipping Manager for Dalgetty and Company of Fremantle and controlled Gorgon, Charon and Centaur, three Blue Funnel ships from Liverpool.

From John Adams, born 16.3.1916 – County Durham, England – served from 12.8.1932 to 25.9.1949 in the Merchant Service.