From 'Goorkha' I was transferred to the 'Bampton Castle', a war-time built cargo steamer of about 5,000 tons. She carried about 9,000 tons of cargo. In this ship there were eight cadets, all with a fair amount of sea time and the number of able seamen in the crew was reduced accordingly. This meant we did tricks at the wheel, look-outs and, indeed, any of the work an able seaman was expected to do. A cadet would be in the chains heaving the lead when we came to an anchor and the cadets did all the boat work. All this was excellent experience and as we also rigged and un-rigged derricks in addition to our normal hatch duties when working cargo there were few seamanlike activities which we were unable to perform.

The voyage started with a continental trip - Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg and I seem to remember we also made calls at Middlesborough and Immingham on this side. The officers were all young, the Chief Mate being a passenger ship 3rd Mate and the 'Bampton's' 3rd Mate was probably no older than the oldest cadet. The captain was an extraordinary individual, obviously an alchoholic and how he managed to retain his command was a complete mystery. No doubt his officers were loyal and did their best to keep him out of trouble but it must have taxed their ability at times.

On the outward passage - the voyage was round Africa, out east coast and home west about - as the ship approached the

harbour at Genoa, the captain called away the port accident boat to go ashore and obtain pratique (Health Authority permission to enter the port). The cadet crew manned the boat and seamen stood by to lower away. Much to our astonishment and, no doubt, dismay, the captain gave the order to lower away with the ship making good five or six knots. As with all ships life-boats there was a long painter led right forward in the ship but the boat took a sheer on hitting the water and it was impossible to unhook the heavy blocks of the falls. The seamen let the falls go with a run but a six-fold purchase does not overhaul easily and the life-boat was heeling dangerously. Fortunately the pilot realised what was happening and got the way off the ship just in time or there would certainly have been a serious accident.

Going through the Suez canal all the officers seemed to take it as a holiday. With an experienced pilot in charge there was not much for anyone else on the bridge to do - except the helmsman, of course. On arrival at Suez we anchored in Suez bay early in the evening and the captain left orders for us to heave short at midnight. There must have been a bit of a party in the officers' saloon for when I went round to call them at a quarter to twelve they refused to move. According to routine I rang down 'Stand by below' on the engine room telegraph and at midnight the bo's'un at his usual station on the fo'c'se

head started to heave short. More frantic efforts were made to get the captain, Chief Mate or one of the officers on the bridge without result. I sang out to the bo's'un who had also been imbibing, to vast heaving - an order which got a very rude reply from the bo's'un and soon afterwards came the cry 'Anchors aweigh'. There was an A.B. at the wheel but otherwise I was alone on the bridge. The ship was technically under way in Suez bay with other ships at anchor in close proximity and the narrow channel marked by a lighthouse the only way out. I was eighteen years of age. There was only one thing to do - take the ship out and put her on the course for the straits of Jubal for it was obvious the bo's'un had no intention of anchoring again. So I rang down 'slow ahead', walked to the compass and took a snap bearing of the light and steadied the ship on a course for the channel. The man at the wheel showed no signs of surprise and merely repeated my orders in normal fashion.

"Starboard a bit"

"Starboard a bit, sir"

"Steady"

"Steady, sir"

Then as she came up towards the narrows,

"Port"

"Port it is, sir"

"Ease your helm"

"Ease the helm, sir"

"Steady as she goes"

"Steady as she goes, sir"

And so, very slowly and carefully, we passed out of Suez Bay into the comparative safety of the wider waters beyond. At this moment the Chief Mate arrived on the bridge.

"What the bloody hell are you doing Middleton?" he enquired angrily. "The old man will shoot us all".

I explained exactly what had happened and said there were plenty of witnesses ready and willing to shop the old man and him too if that was the proposal. He climbed down at once and said "All right, you've done well. Go and get some coffee for both of us". This I did and was still on the bridge when the old man staggered up at daylight. His first remarks were,

"Here you, boy. What are these dirty cups doing up here? Get rid of them at once. You boys are all bloody well useless". I did as I was told without comment: He was Master under God. (The usual description of the master of a ship in maritime documents.)

Later on, in the Red Sea, the captain had us all out at about 2.0 a.m. with orders to swing out and lower one of the boats. On this occasion we jibbed and having swung the boat out we refused to go aboard. We had no wish to become shark food and even if we survived that ordeal the chances of being picked up at night were small. The old man was furious and

muttered something about 'mutinous dogs' (it was long before Laughton's Captain Bligh) and we all spent a very unpleasant following day holystoning the wooden decks round the captain's cabin in the burning heat of a September Red Sea sun.

"Bampton Castle" was a strictly utilitarian vessel built, no doubt, with a short life in U-boat infested waters in view. She had no refrigerated store space, only a large ice box. Once away from England ice was always too dear so our meat had to be carried live or tinned. We usually had a few sheep which looked remarkably like goats, a few chickens and a pig. Butter came in large tins and most of the time poured easily and was usually applied with a spoon. Drinking water in the tropics and Red Sea was more than luke warm and we made canvas bags which we hung up filled with water to cool. Unfortunately there was always a distinct taste of tar or something like it, no doubt from the dressing used on the canvas.

The cooks were Chinese and the food was ghastly. The bread was usually so doughy you could not cut it or so hard you could not cut it either. But we survived, although I do not think anyone put on any weight.

At Port Sudan we managed to get leave to have a swim, which as usual was closely attended by hammer-head sharks. Although I went ashore in Port Sudan on many occasions I never managed to get as far as the town.

The ship's stay here was invariably a short one, usually a matter of hours.

The Red Sea always had an eerie unreal atmosphere to me and the bare, uninviting coastline - when you could see it - and the barren, desolate islands gave the impression of a doomed or dead land, suffering for some ghastly misdeeds.

Life in "Bampton Castle" was rough and tough and there were no concessions to civilised niceties. The Chief Steward acted as ship's doctor and his medicine consisted mostly of 'starters' and 'stoppers'. Minor injuries, boils and burns were usually left to the patient to treat. There were often a number of cases of V.D. on board, which got the standard Board of Trade treatment until they could be landed into hospital.

Going down the east coast there was a lot of malaria about and by the time we got to Beira at least a third of the ship's company were down with it. The port health authorities came off each day and insisted on every man taking a massive dose of quinine, which ruined one's palate and made ones hair fall out without apparently affecting the progress of the disease.

On arrival in Durban I went down my hatch when cargo work commenced but soon had a raging headache. I only just managed to get up the long iron ladder from the lower hold and

collapsed at the top. After that everything was a vague blur for a couple of days. I remember someone examining me at night by the light of a torch (we had no electric light in port) and vaguely understood he was the doctor from the Union Castle mail boat. Twice I was found wandering on deck in delirium and put back in my bunk but as far as I can remember I had no nursing whatever. Nevertheless I was back on duty in less than a week but felt somewhat debilitated for a considerable time. Indeed, it was many weeks before I had anything like a reasonable sense of taste.

During one of the longer sea passages on the east coast between Mombasa and Durban our bo'sun was taken ill and soon in a high fever. The Chief Steward diagnosed his complaint as typhoid (in spite of the prevalence of malaria) and eventually it was decided to move him from his cabin to the little isolation 'hospital'. He was a tall, powerful man in his early thirties and was thrashing about in delirium. The job of moving him devolved upon the cadets as the rest of the crew would have nothing to do with it. The Bo'sun's cabin was tiny and it was crowded when the four cadets chosen for the job were inside. However, we were not inside for long as our patient's flailing arms soon had us all out on deck in some disorder. We tried again. For some moments there was an interesting bit of all-in wrestling with four very hot and sweaty cadets trying to get a

firm grip of an even hotter and sweatier bo's'un, who also smelled pretty foul. It was quite one of the nastiest jobs I have ever had to tackle. Eventually we got him out on deck, by which time he was aware of what was going on and swearing horribly. He then got really cross, sent us flying in all directions and retired once more to the bunk in his cabin. The Chief Steward, who had watched the final round from a safe distance, agreed to call it a day and leave him where he was. As far as we could see there was no point in moving him, anyway. We were very relieved when it later turned out not to be typhoid and we had no ill after effects.

The eight cadets in 'Bampton Castle' were all between 17 and 19 years of age and amongst them were some interesting personalities. On my first voyage in her there were three cadets from Pangbourne, C.A. Milward, who later became Port Captain at Port Sudan, M.J. Castle and myself. Both Milward and Castle had been in the college sail-training ship "St. George" and in the process had lost a certain amount of sea time as they were a year senior to me at Pangbourne. Milward had been my cadet-captain at Pangbourne and was, without exception, one of the nicest personalities it has ever been my fortune to meet. I do not remember him ever saying an unkind or even a cross word and yet he was a good disciplinarian and full of fun. He added tone to our half

deck by playing the flute!

Castle was also a pleasant person but as wild as they come. I remember one occasion when he drank half a bottle of brandy and then put his face in an electric fan. His nose suffered considerably but as he promptly collapsed and was unconscious for some hours it probably did not hurt much.

There was a certain amount of fairly rough horseplay but I do not remember any really bad quarrels or fights. I think our daily life was tough enough without additional discomfort.

Rigging the derricks was a task of some magnitude as there were twenty-two of them - four at each of the five main holds and two at the deep tank. The wire topping lifts were not easy to handle and certainly none of the cadets ever wore gloves. Lowering the derricks could also be tricky as the wires did not render easily round the crucifix on which they were belayed and if you took off one turn too many the derrick came down with a run. So one way and another we learned a good deal about ships and men and were nothing if not self-reliant. We were usually pretty cheerful and made light of heavy dirty work and long hours, bad weather and bad food. I daresay today our lives would be considered impossibly degrading but I am sure most of us were secretly rather proud

of our 'hard case' existence and I have no reason to complain of its effect in after life - on the contrary. Once again, it is a case of 'what can they know of freedom who only freedom know!'

'Bampton Castle' loaded large quantities of lead and copper in Beira and it was the custom for the ship to keep her own tally of the number of copper ingots as these were valuable and any discrepancy could be costly to the Union-Castle company. The job of tallying normally fell to the cadets and we were paid something like 15/-d a day for the work which provided us with a welcome increase in spending money.

On one voyage so much cargo was offering that a cross bunker was used - for groundnuts I seem to remember - and the result of this was that we left Capetown homeward bound with 250 tons of coal on deck to get us through to Tenerife, about 14 days steaming, as the rest of our bunker space did not provide a reasonable margin.

As soon as coal was burnt and there was space in the bunkers, the cadets were turned to to shovel and wheelbarrow the coal on deck down the bunker hatches. This was very hard work owing to the many obstructions on deck and it took us about 2½ days. I do not remember getting any extra money for that particular job.

It was quite usual to carry deck cargo, particularly from the Canaries, where in season most ships would lift large quantities of tomatoes and potatoes. There were lots of bananas, of course, but our ships were not fitted to carry them and those on board consisted of purchases for private consumption. These were usually bought almost green and ripened very rapidly so one was inclined to try and eat them equally rapidly, often with unpleasant internal results. Fruit in quantity was available at many of our ports of call. Durban in particular producing delicious little pineapples (in those days at 4d each) bananas, pawpaw and other more ordinary fruits. I do not remember ever suffering any ill effects from fruit bought in Durban, which is really rather remarkable.

Our call at Tenerife produced two memorable incidents. In one case a vessel of the Port line was unloading explosives and, apparently because of some port regulation, had a donkey boiler rigged on deck to work a winch instead of using steam from the main boilers. Just as we arrived a man was lighting up the donkey boiler and we could clearly see the whole operation. Having built up wood and coal to start the fire he dosed it liberally from a two gallon petrol can, which he then carefully removed some yards away. As soon as he applied a light to the fire there was a flash back along the deck to the petrol can, which promptly exploded, in a mass of

flame. As one man, all the stevedores waiting to unload the explosives dived straight over the side of the ship. The ship's crew soon had the fire out and there was no further sign of trouble. Perhaps it was just as well for us, as we were very close.

On a previous occasion in another ship we had brought ten tons of explosives back from Capetown to England for testing. These had been made in an explosives factory in South Africa and had been given the somewhat fancy name of 'Shatterdike'. It was packed in wooden boxes weighing about 40 lbs each and a special magazine had been constructed in No. 2 hatch. On arrival in the Thames we anchored in the special anchorage for ships carrying explosives, off the Higham bight below Gravesend. Here a team of men from the explosives works nearby came off to unload and we were more than a little apprehensive when they began throwing the cases about in the most casual fashion. We had been told in Capetown that as a new explosive it should be handled with great care and we duly obeyed when loading and behaved as if they were boxes of eggshell china. Eventually the Chief Officer could stand it no longer and said to the foreman "I suppose you do know the stuff in those cases is a new explosive called "Shatterdike" and very sensitive?"

"Good Lord, gu'v'nor, no! We thought it was only dynamite", after which they were slightly more careful but not much.

The second event was a more personal one for the ship. Somehow or other the firemen and trimmers got hold of some local hooch and when the time came to raise steam for sailing the Chief Engineer found he had only one man who was still conscious. The rest of the 'black gang' were obviously out for a long count.

The Captain was also taking his usual somewhat detached view of things but the Chief Engineer told the Chief Mate that the one remaining fireman could probably keep steam for six or seven knots for some considerable time but of course he would not be able to dump ashes. Again the cadets were called in as assistants and Bampton Castle got under way with one rather undersized little man keeping all the fires going. This he did for best part of 36 hours, cat-napping in the boiler-room and drinking gallons of oatmeal water. At the end of that time his mates were beginning to filter back looking and feeling ghastly but to find the ship still making about five knots!

From Tenerife we were bound for Pauillac, on the Gironde river below Bordeaux, to discharge our copper. In bad weather the approach to the Gironde could be very difficult but on this occasion we entered the river in bright sunlight. Away on our port hand was the town of Royan, tucked into a bay formed by the northern arm of the estuary. It looked a

delightful spot with white houses gleaming in the sunshine, brilliant green trees and a sandy beach. I promptly decided that I must visit this charming place as soon as possible. I regret to say I have not yet done so, nearly fifty years later.

At Pauillac, some 15 or 20 miles from Bordeaux, we made fast to a large wooden jetty on the south bank of the river. We could see the refinery which was going to deal with our copper ingots and we were soon discharging on to the jetty and also into barges alongside.

The rise and fall of tide in the Gironde is very considerable, probably as much as 30 ft. at springs and the mooring ropes needed constant tending. This was easy enough in daytime when there were plenty of hands available but at night it was not so easy. Every man who could raise a few francs to spend went ashore in the evening to taste the local wine, for which the region is famous. Possibly in the hope of a measure of women and song as well. The cadets were no laggards at invoking a festive evening and we had lots of fun and instruction for a shilling or two. The wine was ridiculously cheap, less than a shilling a bottle and very good indeed. We ended up with brandy and returned to the ship, our way lit by innumerable fireflies, our own rather ribald songs almost drowned by an impressive croaking

chorus from what must have been an army of gigantic frogs. It would be fun to be able to recapture that night again. At least that part of it; the rest was not so amusing. As we approached the jetty we heard horrid metallic noises as if a gigantic tin-opener was at work. And so it was. One of the big steel bollards projecting from the jetty had managed to force its way in between two of the hull steel plates at the top of the tide and was now tearing its way upwards as the ship went down with the ebb. The night watchman, a very elderly A.B., who had obviously been ashore earlier, was flat out on a hatchway oblivious to the excruciating noises of the ship being rent apart. It was a difficult and somewhat dangerous job releasing the ship from the bollard but it was done pretty quickly leaving a most unpleasant looking hole in the cabin occupied by two of the Chinese cooks.

Sometime after leaving Pangbourne I had applied for an appointment as midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve. This had been automatic for the top ten cadets of each term on leaving but as I did not go on to the sail training ship 'St. George' I found I had not been nominated by the college. When I sent in my application to the Admiralty I received a reply asking why I had not been nominated in view of the fact that I had passed out second in my term. To me this obviously

hinted at some misdemeanour as the reason. So I pointed out that the probable reason was the fact that I had not continued my training in the 'St. George'. The Pangbourne authorities confirmed this and were, I heard, rebuked by the Admiralty in consequence.

The next voyage in 'Bampton Castle' was my last as a cadet and another "round Africa, out east coast, home, west, trip". This time I was senior cadet and more or less in charge of cargo work under the Chief Officer. The ship was loaded in London and on the continent for some 22 ports of discharge, at most of which we also loaded cargo for home so it was a fairly complicated business. It was, of course, essential to ensure that nothing was overstowed so that it could not be discharged without shifting other cargo. The consequences of such a mistake were usually disastrous. I kept the cargo plans going and in general the Chief Officer would approve my stowage arrangements. This responsibility stood me in good stead at my examination for 2nd Mate when one of the examiners had an obsession with cargo work and as soon as he discovered I really took an interest in it became very helpful and friendly.

There were one or two particular incidents in my second voyage in Bampton Castle which remained firmly in my memory. The first was bathing in the docks in Marseilles, which still

makes me shudder when I think of it. Anything more like a cess pit than a Marseilles dock in those days would be hard to imagine and why we did not all contract some foul disease or other is a mystery. Of course, it was not until we were actually in the water that we realised just how filthy it was.

The second episode was at my favourite harbour, Dar-es-Salaam. We were there on a Sunday and with no cargo work got permission to take away one of the ship's life-boats on a picnic and bathing expedition. We set off on a fine morning with a nice breeze and sailed comfortably away across the harbour towards the uninhabited beaches away to the southward. Here we found an excellent spot and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in the water and exploring on shore. Alas, we were not very seamanlike and sometime in the afternoon found that the tide had ebbed and our large ungainly craft had dried out. There were only about six of us so, of course, we could not move her, however hard we tried. Just as we were resigned to a first class row when we returned to the ship about midnight, two natives arrived in a dugout canoe. By means of sign language we suggested to these men that they should return to their village and get more help to put the boat in the water, for which we would give them a quantity of ship's biscuit and a case of condensed milk. In fact, the emergency stores from our

life-boat, which was all we had to offer. They quickly got the message and disappeared into the bush. For best part of an hour nothing happened and our spirits were getting low. Then suddenly we heard loud and, we were inclined to think, warlike cries as through the bush and scrub came leaping a horde of fierce looking black men brandishing all sorts of primitive but effective weapons. We quickly decided that we had been hasty if not unwise in our choice of rescuers and that it would undoubtedly have been preferable to face the wrath of our Chief Officer or Captain. We huddled together in a protective group as the rescue party surrounded us with wild cries and obvious enjoyment. Their leader, a really villainous looking rogue, stepped forward and made signs that he wished to be paid in advance. Against our better judgement but pleading 'force majeur' we produced all the emergency rations from the boat. After inspecting them the headman shook his head and indicated that he wanted the oars, mast and sails as well It is amazing what you can do with sign language and I think he realised we were saying that without them we could not get back to the ship anyway. Accepting this defeat philosophically he then indicated that he would settle for either money or all our clothes. No one would admit to having any money so retaining our bathing trunks we reluctantly handed over our shirts and shorts. Then and only then did we persuade our

salvors to go to work and it must be said they were very efficient when they got going. They first picked up the boat, which must have weighed over a ton, and walked it into the water. We tumbled aboard, shoved off with an oar and prepared to make a quick get away. But an anguished cry from the shore told us that one of our number had been detained as a hostage and he informed us that his ransom had to be money - amount unspecified. Very reluctantly one of our party produced about 5/-d worth of local currency which was exchanged for the captive.

We returned on board tired but generally pleased with our day out and eager to tell all and sundry of our adventures. But I cannot recall how we explained the missing provisions No doubt we had ways and means of overcoming this sort of problem!

On the east coast of Africa many of the crew bought African finches as I had done previously. On this voyage the firemen had really gone to town and on the after deck there were some twenty or more cages containing these delightful little yellow songsters. One day I was on watch with the Chief Mate when we saw a large bird like a hawk swoop down towards the cages. "He's after those finches", said the mate and dashing below returned quickly with a revolver. A few shots obviously missed but appeared to

discourage the hovering bird as it flew away. But next morning nearly all the finches had gone, the hawk apparently dragging them out through the flimsy bamboo strips which formed the bars of the cages. The firemen and trimmers, as tough a lot as you were likely to meet, were horrified at the fate of their pets and almost in tears.

Much to our delight we again loaded copper for Pauillac and spent a rousing evening ashore in the little village. I remember walking for miles along dusty roads bordered with pine trees and with vineyards stretching away in the distance. It always impressed us, too, to see the men in the barges alongside the shore, washing up their plates and cups with white wine.

So 'Bampton Castle' returned once more to the East India Dock and paid off. I left her with no particular feelings and made my way home to prepare for a completely different life as a midshipman R.N.R. in the Royal Navy.