

Capt Eric Valentine Whittleton

November 28, 1921 – March 21, 2017

Capt Whittleton was born in Hull, UK and at the time of his death, was living at Bilgola on Sydney's northern beaches.

From Capt John C H Foley's book, *Reef Pilots, the History of the Queensland Coast and Torres Strait Pilot Service ...*

Captain Eric V. Whittleton. Another pilot with an interesting life during the War. While apprenticed to Ellerman Wilson Line of Hull, Eric spent three years in the Eastern Mediterranean running troops and supplies from Egyptian ports to Tobruk, Benghazi, Crete and Greece as the North African campaign raged. From 1942 to 1945, he served in ships sailing across the North Atlantic.

After the War, Capt Whittleton came to Australia. He settled down with ANL and rose to Master from which position he was accepted into the Queensland Coast and Torres Strait Pilot Service (1967). Among the more noteworthy jobs he had, Eric considers the pilotage of two US submarines the most memorable. He also piloted a floating university, *Universe Campus*, which he says, was 'interesting by gum'! His most professionally demanding task so far has been a southbound tanker, *Tankrex*, from Booby Island loaded to maximum draught. It was a bit out of the ordinary because Eric was not on board *Tankrex* – he was on a tug, *William Golding* which had the job of towing the fully loaded by mechanically handicapped tanker to Gladstone.

From the files ...

THE INAUGURAL TRANSIT of HYDROGRAPHERS PASSAGE

At dawn on 21st of December 1984, the 61,000 deadweight tonne bulk carrier *World Jade*, bound from Japan to Hay Point, arrived at the seaward entrance to Hydrographers Passage.

Just after 5.30 a.m. on that day, a hundred miles off the coast of Queensland, the *World Jade* rendezvoused with a tiny pilot launch, the *Hamilton II*. The launch swung alongside *World Jade's* great steel hull, next to a dangling pilot ladder. Marine pilot captain Donald Grant, allocated this first job, clambered up the wooden ladder. He was followed by two colleagues; Captains Eric Whittleton and John Foley.

When the three men reached the navigating bridge they were warmly welcomed by the *World Jade's* master. Captain Bob McKechnie obviously delighted to have the unique privilege of inaugurating a new passage.

At 6 a.m. precisely, the event recorded on film by observers on board a hovering Hamilton Island helicopter and a circling seaplane. *World Jade* passed midway between Blossom Bank and Marilyn Shoal and sliced neatly through a symbolically hypothetical ribbon stretched across the entrance to Hydrographers Passage.

This historic transit went off without a hitch. As if by divine arrangement the weather was superb; light winds, clear skies and exceptional visibility. Under Captain Grant's guidance *World Jade* followed the planned route between White Tip and Bond Reefs, past Little Bugatti, Bugatti and Creal Reefs, and steamed on in triumph to Hay Point. By 3 p.m. that same day she was safely anchored off her berth and the first transit of Hydrographers Passage had come to a successful end.

This ten hour journey was a milestone in Australian shipping history and signalled the end of a three-year-long development stage as well as the start of an operational era that will stretch many years into the future.

CONCLUSION

After the fanfare of the *World Jade's* pioneering inaugural transit, Hydrographers Passage settled down to a steady pattern of work and growth.