

Capt Paul Cooney

October 14, 1944 – May 24, 2022 (Sydney, Australia)
Roll No. 63

Fishing trawlers in the North Sea from age 13
King Edward the 7th Nautical College, London, “King Teds” (Cadet Captain)
Elder Dempster Lines
Trident Tankers (owned by Pacific and Orient lines)
“Tramp freighters”
Transpacific – Worldwide Shipping – taking *World Oak* on its maiden voyage.
Assistant Harbour Master, Nauru
Patricks Stevedoring



With thanks to Capt Cooney’s wife, Anne and family and Capt Cooney’s close friend Peter Claydon for the following information.

I met Paul when I joined the cadet ship *MV Fourah Bay* in March 1964. I was 18 and he was a year older. He was also a big lad - over six feet tall which I was not! The *Fourah Bay* cadets were deck officers (AKA navigation officers in training) who required four years of service before being eligible to take their Second Mate’s certificate and be promoted to a watchkeeping officer. But on the *Fourah Bay* we were all able seaman and acted as the ship’s deck crew- meaning that we mostly maintain the ship’s superstructure and deck equipment by cleaning, chipping rust off, and painting as well as oiling and mending the machinery. It was often hard work, hard manual labor, carried out in all kinds of weather and all kinds of seas.

There were, I think, 18 of us and each voyage out and back from the UK was approximately three months in duration and each time three cadets were appointed to lead the crew (these were Head Man, Second Head Man, and Third Head Man). They organized and supervised the work under the watchful eyes of the First Mates. I’m not sure if Paul was Head Man on my first trip, but he certainly was on subsequent voyages and as he had a hand in selecting the Second and Third Head Man. I eventually ended up as Third Head Man on my third and final trip. For reasons I couldn’t explain then or now we

just hit it off - though I suspect from my perspective it made good sense to have a very big and strong friend who was also a born leader.

Paul was already an experienced deck hand before he joined Elder Dempster Lines (EDL) at the age of 16 or 17. He had been working on fishing trawlers in the North Sea from age 13! I also found out only recently that he and I attended King Edward the 7th Nautical College in London prior to joining EDL. He had been made cadet captain there and apparently attended the year before I, myself, joined at that college in 1962. "King Teds" as it was called provided basic training in seamanship and navigation and then arranged interviews with various Merchant Navy shipping companies for the graduating class. Many of us who failed to be recruited by our first-choice shipping lines (mine was New Zealand Shipping Company) were "fed" to EDL whose regular routes were from UK ports to Europe and then onto West Africa and back. These voyages typically lasted about three months. At the end of each voyage, we were usually "signed off" for a week or so before rejoining that or another ship of the line. Once on board all personnel worked seven days a week sometimes with extended hours especially in heavy weather and or when loading or discharging cargo. For example, I served on a ship where the First Mate, Mr. Beasley ("Beastly Beasley") had both cadets working up to 18 hours a day supervising cargo loading and discharge in the heat and humidity of West Africa. I was only 16 at the time and the senior cadet was only 18. I expect Paul had similar experiences. When I first signed on my pay was 180 pounds per year or 15 pounds per month, so it was a form of indentured servitude. Still, it used to be that cadets had to actually pay the shipping company for the privilege of being "trained" (i.e. forced labor!).

Anyway, about halfway through our four-year cadetship we were sailing on the *Fourah Bay* and also attending Riversdale Technical College in Liverpool when in port and living at Riverhouse just across from the college. Elder Dempster ships typically had a complement of two cadets, so the *Fourah Bay* was a very different sea going experience for all of us. As a bunch of young lads, we had many adventures both onboard and ashore. Paul was very popular with the other cadets and also with the officers in charge (we had two first mates serving together). I was definitely not the best choice for third headman - the job was certainly the easiest of all and my responsibilities mostly consisted of getting paint and supplies ready each day from my "office" in the Forecastle Head for the other cadets to work with. I recall mostly "skiving off" for hours at a time down below - typically sleeping on a coiled-up hawser (heavy duty rope). I think that one of the first mates got wind of this because halfway through the voyage the third head man position was given to someone else, and I reluctantly returned to the regular work crew routine.

This was the only ship that Paul and I served on together, but we stayed in touch from then to now, (1964 to 2022) 58 years! He ended up leaving EDL and joining Trident Tankers (owned by Pacific and Orient lines), and because Paul recommended this, I eventually joined with the same company in 1967 having completed and passed my Second Mate's ticket. Paul in the meantime had left Trident Tankers and was wandering around the world on what are called "tramp freighters" - ships that have no regular trading itinerary and basically go wherever there's a cargo they can pick up and offload. These ships hire pretty much anyone so Paul must have sailed with some rather motley crews! He was doing this to stay employed whilst he tried to get his various seagoing tickets. Paul was an excellent seafarer but struggled with the academic side of this profession and the examinations required, though he eventually did get all his tickets and ended up as captain of his own ship.

Over the years we kept in irregular contact but on a few occasions when he was in the UK, he came to visit me at my parents' London home in Fulham. I had left the sea and joined the field of personnel management after about a year with Trident Tankers and following the explosion on board my last ship

while in dry dock in Yokohama, Japan. This experience reminded me that the Merchant Navy is a dangerous occupation and I felt I could have more fun ashore as well!

On one occasion Paul took me on the back of his motorbike from London to his parents' fish and chip shop and home in Alderborough, Suffolk (I remember the address, 226 High Street). I was terrified the entire time on the bike as he was weaving in and out of the traffic. This made him very happy! On another occasion we went by car to Alderborough and ended up inviting two nurses from the local nurses' residence, who were available, to join us on a blind date. He was always far more confident and competent than me in these matters and clearly the women or "birds" as they were referred to back then liked his looks and his style. I therefore benefited by association! I also recall that on one earlier occasion in Liverpool we double dated the Bosun's daughter and her friend, when Paul knew that the Bosun was away at sea. He had somehow got the daughter's contact information from the Bosun before he left.

In sum, Paul was a wonderful friend to me, and we always had great times together. He had a wicked sense of humor and could insult me in every way possible and still make me laugh. He was always looking to make the most of life and it was my privilege to share some wonderful experiences in my own youth because of his friendship. One other thing about Paul is that he was universally liked and respected by pretty much anyone he met. The world has been a better place for me because of my friendship with Paul.

Peter Claydon

With thanks for the following to Tim Lowry of Transpacific Bulk Carriers –

Paul was indeed quite a character and I have many fond memories of working with him over three years. Maybe I could relate some of the stories.

Coal cargo - in 1984 *MV World Oak* came into Sydney with a port record lumber cargo (on deck was also full) and after discharge at Woolloomooloo shifted in ballast to the coal loader at Balls Head.

I was on board for the shift and remember a young cargo agent being asked (just after berthing) by Paul with a poker face, "when are the mattresses coming?". The young agent looked suitably puzzled and Paul explained that he would not allow 32,000 tonnes of coal to be loaded by conveyor into the holds of such a pristine ship without something to break the fall of the coal and to protect the tank tops. The young agent looked flabbergasted but soon Peter put him out of his misery and everyone had a good laugh. The cargo loaded without incident and the ship sailed for Japan.

Hair cut - when one was due Paul would ask for the *World Oak* to be scheduled into Sydney so he could visit his favourite barbers. Apparently the girls wore very short mini-skirts and forgot to do up some blouse buttons. They also gave customers a glass of port. He thought it was terrific and would then pop into the office to tell us.

Tim Lowry