



# The Porthole

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The newsletter of  
 the South Australian Branch of the Company of Master  
 Mariners of Australia,  
 PO Box 1, PORT ADELAIDE, SA 5015  
 Branch Patron: His Excellency the Honorable Hieu Van Le AC



**Branch Master's Comments**

Good day to all our readers

I have very little to report this month as our lock-down, although easing, still exists, and the Federal Court seems to be in hibernation for the duration. While deciding to play it safe for this month and to have no meeting again, it would seem to be that with the restrictions easing, a normal meeting for next month (July) will be in order, depending on what social distancing rules require of us.

It seems that an attempt to publish a trial 'On Line' edition of the 'Master Mariner' magazine has been put in the 'Too Hard' basket for now, but we still have hope for the future. It would seem the underlying cause is the lack of anything to publish. This has been an on-going problem for a long time now and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 problem.

Meanwhile back on the farm (literally!), there has still not been enough rain to fill my dams or get the creek running again, despite the best aspirational forecasts of the BOM. At least the grass looks healthy now, and the sheep are well fed. The three pelicans whom I have hosted for the last couple of months have finally consumed everything edible in my main dam and have moved on to more bountiful climes.

Before I sign off for this month, may I ask all our members to let me know by e-mail if they are happy to resume our normal meetings from next month (July)?

Happy Sailing

Bob W (SABM)

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**Because of the COVID-19 virus restrictions,  
 there will be no Branch or Branch Court meetings  
 until further notice**



The Company of Master Mariners of Australia Ltd. is a Company established to promote and further the efficiency of the Sea Service generally, and uphold the Status, Dignity and Prestige of Master Mariners in particular.

## REMINISCENCES | WHAT'S UP, DOC?

By Michael Grey - May 26, 2020

We are thinking a lot about medical professionals in these virus-infected days, and people have been rightly identified as heroes for their hazardous work in combating the contagion. In our Commonwealth cargo liners, we were fortunate on most of our voyages to have a doctor on board, signed on as a supernumerary, for the month-long voyages between North Europe and Australia or New Zealand.



The regulations required ships carrying more than 100 souls to be provided with a doctor and we thus would not have qualified, except that there was a regular passage of medics between our countries, and it was an excellent way of keeping us healthy for the sum of one shilling per month. The doctors were either going north to qualify as specialists, or having gained their special skills, going south to practise them, although we did find some who were just enjoying a holiday and a cheap

passage, with free food and lodgings.

### **“I remember nearly fainting when the instructor brought out a skeleton”**

By comparison with proper passenger ships and their complements of the elderly and frail, our doctors were not exactly hard pressed; our crews being mostly young and fit, with the exception of the occasional alcoholic and odd malingers. But we liked carrying them for their different approach to life, conversation and the fact that their yarns weren't those of seafarers. It was somebody different with whom to have a drink, and to my recollection most of them spent a fair time in our bar.

Best of all, having a doctor aboard meant that the Second Mate, or some other officer nominated by the Master, didn't have to pretend to medical knowledge and stitch somebody up after they had cut themselves, set a broken bone, or, worse still, inject some shivering matelot suffering from what is called today an “STD”.

We had all undertaken what was laughingly described as a “First Aid Course” for our Second Mate's and were under no illusions about our adequacy as medical practitioners. I remember nearly fainting when the instructor brought out a skeleton, and actually passing out when we were stitching up an artificial wound in a plastic arm. I can recall having to practice injection techniques, using a large rubber ball which allegedly replicated human tissue, and that seemed quite disgusting at the time. I still have the certificate which was dished out for attendance, whether one remained conscious or not.

### **“The Master's ministrations with his scalpel were being guided by radio”**

Those unfortunates who were nominated would have the *Ship Captain's Medical Guide* to aid their diagnosis, although I understand that a good rule of thumb was “aspirin for any ailment above the waist and two spoonfuls of Black Draught for anything south of that line.” The latter medicament was exactly what it said on the bottle – a noxious and evil-smelling liquid that would probably unblock drains, but roughly did the same with intestinal problems. It also dissuaded all but the hardest malingers.

With a proper professional aboard we never had to undertake some of the awful things that were faced by our brother officers in less well provided ships. There were terrible tales around of people stitching up wounds using sailmaker's stitches and spun yarn, or having to extract teeth using pliers obtained from the Second Engineer.

I worked with a chap who swore he had been an apprentice on a ship in the South Atlantic, where the Master had undertaken an appendectomy on one of the crew on the saloon table, with his assistants passing out one by one and being dragged away, revived in the fresh air, and forced back inside to join the bloodstained spectacle.

I seem to recall that the Master's ministrations with his scalpel were being guided by radio, with Sparks rushing in with fresh instructions, such as to “make an incision 120 degrees and three inches from the patient's navel.” Today it is possible to carry out quite involved surgery using Skype and clever cameras, although I think most people would prefer to get airborne on a Coast Guard medivac helicopter.

Some of the doctors we carried worked in somewhat inappropriate specialities, such as a glamorous lady gynaecologist, who seemed to get a far longer than average queue at her morning surgery for our all-male crew. I once had some stitches in a head wound from an ophthalmic surgeon. One doctor who sticks in the mind was a chap who had been a pathologist in Australia for about forty years, who told us we were the first patients he had seen for all that time who weren't actually dead.

He was an exceptionally cheery chap, who was also a bit of an insomniac and who liked to spend an hour or two chatting to the Third Mate (me) on the midnight watch. He was a fund of gruesome stories about corpses he had encountered in his career, which gave me nightmares when I turned in at 0400. Nowadays, alas, all the travelling doctors will go by air, and the poor old Second Mate is left to cure the sick and the lame.

Source: *Baird Maritime 200526*

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### **A useful quote:**

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”  
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

## **Canterbury Star (CS) in Collision with Various Other Vessels, Wonsan, DPRK**

The incident took place on 16 June 2002 in Wonsan harbour, North Korea.

Due to the location of the incident this was an interesting and complex case involving almost all aspects of marine insurance with diplomatic sensitivities thrown in for good measure. Consequently, I was appointed by three parties, ie, owners, P&I and H&M underwriters.

The first challenge was getting to the vessel. This involved travelling to Beijing on 22 June 2002 to obtain a visa at the DPRK embassy. As this was also considered to be a diplomatic incident, the visa was promulgated in a matter of hours.

At the time it was only possible to travel from Beijing into the DPRK on Thursdays and Saturdays, either by train or air, there being only one of each. Coming out of the DPRK was also on Thursdays and Saturdays. I travelled in and out by an old Russian Tupolev which had seen better days. The seating was very basic and narrower than the standard economy class in most Western aircraft. There was no business class so it was interesting to see UN and IAEA diplomats having to experience the conditions.

I arrived on a Saturday afternoon and was met by two 'minders' each in black suits wearing their small metal lapel badge of Kim-Il Sung. I was then taken to a hotel in Pyongyang which was used for foreigners where we checked in, each of my two minders checking into the rooms on either side of mine. I suspected that they were listening to me through the walls and this was later confirmed by British and German diplomats.

Later that afternoon I was collected by the British Embassy Range Rover and taken to the embassy which was shared with the German Ambassador. As the cargo of 1500 MT of meat was a gift from the German people to the people of the DPRK, the embassies of UK, Germany, Norway and the Philippines were all involved in trying to get the vessel released.

It was suggested that I should not try to communicate by phone or fax at any time from the hotel and only when necessary from the British embassy.

I was not allowed to move anywhere without my two minders. This included visiting the local 'pitch and putt' opposite the hotel entrance. Early on 26 June we travelled to Wonsan to carry out the investigation. We set out at 0830 hrs in a Korean saloon car with a driver and my two minders.

Pyongyang has a very distinctive tall pyramid shaped building, the Tower of the Juche Idea, at its centre. As we drove, I noticed that this building was always on my left. It didn't take long to work out that we were going around in circles. I challenged my minders and they stated that we had to wait until the expressway to Wonsan was less congested. We then set off for the expressway. This expressway was a very rough concrete two lane dual carriageway with plants in the central reservation. During the 2.5 hour trip we saw only one other vehicle on the road. It was noticeable that the farmers working in the fields were in tatters and rags with soldiers standing over them with fixed bayonets.

On arrival at Wonsan, my minders checked me into a local hotel and took me up to my room. The place stank, carpets in reception and on the stairs were caked with dirt and grease and the elevator was out of order.

My room looked like something from Edwardian times in that it was a stone floor, with flaking and fading unrecognisable wallpaper. The bathroom was white tiled with one 5 Watt bulb. The bath was full of cold water, my minders informing me that we only had water for one hour a day. The bed mattress and pillow were straw filled and filthy. Suffice to say that I managed to get the investigation done by later the same day and insisted that we return to Pyongyang.

My minders left me for an hour to arrange my visit to the wharf. They returned an hour later and off we went.

I had also been asked by the owners to visit the vessel at anchor to reassure the crew that they had not been forgotten and that all was being done to get them released. This involved taking a tug out to the vessel with, you guessed it, my minders. It was pure luck that the master of CS and I spoke French so that we could communicate without the minders knowing what we were saying.

*Canterbury Star* was a 16 year old reefer vessel owned by a Norwegian company, flagged in Nassau, Bahamas, and manned by Norwegian officers and Filipino crew. She had previously discharged her cargoes at various SE Asian ports.

Remaining on board was a cargo of 1500 MT of boneless beef for North Korean ports.

CS was approaching the No 2 Wharf, Wonsan, on the afternoon of 16 June 2002, when the incident occurred. She had boarded a local pilot who was reported to have been almost incapable of climbing the pilot ladder due to his age and physical condition.

CS was approaching the wharf when the pilot failed to apply astern power in time to prevent a collision with *Dansim 1*, a DPRK flagged 227 GRT refrigerated cargo vessel, and then *Chol Ryong*, a 292 GRT refrigerated cargo vessel, both being moored alongside No 2 Wharf, Wonsan. This resulted in the sinking of CHOL RYONG and damage to the stern of *Dansim 1*.

The bulbous bow of *Canterbury Star* (draft approximately 3.6 m so that the bulbous bow was only semi-submerged) first collided with the stern of *Dansim 1* causing the vessel to move forward and parting the vessel's mooring lines to collide with *Chol Ryong*. CS then hit the after starboard side of *Chol Ryong* holing the engine room and fuel tanks, resulting in flooding of the engine room. The collision resulted in injuries to crew members on the two DPRK reefer vessels:

- Three crew members from the *Dansim 1* found seriously injured at the time of the incident who were removed to hospital. One suffered a fractured skull with the other two having badly bruised arms and legs. All were later discharged from hospital.
- Two crew members from the *Chol Ryong* were found to be seriously injured at the time of the incident and taken to hospital. The Cook is reported to have suffered a fractured skull, with broken ribs and the Chief Engineer a punctured lung. Both crew members are reported to have died later in hospital.

- After the incident a further 7 crew members complained of injuries and were taken to hospital. All but two were discharged from hospital. The two remaining in hospital were reported to be in satisfactory condition and discharged after several days.

Immediately after the incident, *CS* headed out of the harbour to make a second attempt at berthing. The pilot was clearly unfamiliar with piloting a vessel of such power, *CS* being capable of 20 knots. On the second approach to the harbour the bulbous bow contacted the wharf with the bow flare contacting a harbour crane resulting in damage to both.

It is alleged that more than 120 MT of Marine Gas Oil was on board *Chol Ryong* at the time of the collision which leaked into the harbour. The wind was reported to be in a North Easterly direction blowing the oil towards the wharf. However, the wind allegedly changed later, blowing the oil out into the harbour allegedly polluting local beaches.

Three of the fuel tanks aboard *Dansim 1* were ruptured with a total of approximately 40 tonnes being spilled. It was reported that local people were employed to manually clean up the oil remnants from local beaches.

Local authorities requested that the wreck of *Chol Ryong* be removed. This was later removed using a floating crane and disposed of in deeper water outside the harbour.

For two days I was working on my own but on the Thursday afternoon a lawyer from Hong Kong arrived to assist with the negotiations. Together we explored the hotel's facilities. I was already aware of the poor-quality restaurant, but we found a rotating restaurant and bar on top of the building which had not rotated for many years. After a few beers it appeared to be working again! We also found that Stanley Ho, the Hong Kong gambling mogul, had a top-notch casino in the basement floors (to which he flew big punters in his private plane) with a first-class restaurant serving Cantonese food. Most of the lounges were fitted with large screen TVs. There being no English TV channels in the rooms, we were pleased to be able to watch the first few rounds of the soccer world cup.

The claim made by local authorities on behalf of the various parties was for USD 7.13 million. Calculations showed this figure to be extortionate.

This included claims relating to:

- Hull damage to *CS*.
- Hull damage to *Dansim 1* and *Chol Ryong*.
- Oil pollution.
- Crew injury and death.
- Wharf damage.
- Infrastructure damage.
- Crane damage.
- Wreck removal.

Most of the claim could not be substantiated so that we managed to negotiate the settlement to less than USD1 million.

On return to Hong Kong I met with the Norwegian owner in lawyers' offices. He suggested that he should travel to Wonsan to compensate those affected. We advised him that this was not a good idea as it was likely that he would be held to ransom. We also pointed out to him that any financial compensation would likely be seized DPRK authorities.

Once the compensation had been paid to the DPRK authorities the cargo was discharged and the vessel released.

I should add that this was the only time in my life that I was happy to be going into China!

Source: *Flashlight 210*

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## Fire Fighters Injured Battling Blaze on Car Carrier in Jacksonville

June 5, 2020 by Mike Schuler

Coast Guard Station Mayport and partner agencies respond to fire at Blount Island in Jacksonville, Florida, on board the *M/V Höegh Xiamen*, a 600-foot vehicle carrier, loaded with used automobiles.



Several fire fighters have been injured while responding to a fire on board a vehicle carrier off Blount Island in Jacksonville, Florida.

Coast Guard Sector Jacksonville watchstanders were notified at 3:53 p.m. of a fire on board the *MV Höegh Xiamen*, a 600-foot vehicle carrier. The watchstanders immediately notified Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, issued an urgent marine information broadcast and directed the launch of a Coast Guard Station Mayport 45-foot Response Boat—Medium crew.

An update from the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue on Twitter said that eight fire fighters were injured as the result of an explosion while fighting the fire. Four are in stable but serious condition.

All 21 crew members have been safely accounted for.

The fire was extinguished about one week later.

Source: *gCaptain 200605*

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## San Francisco Firefighters Save Liberty Ship SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* From Massive Wharf Fire

Posted: 24 May 2020 06:16 AM PDT

A major fire broke out on Saturday morning in a warehouse on Pier 45 on San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, which came very close to engulfing the historic World War II Liberty ship, SS *Jeremiah O'Brien*. The fire was reported at around 4:15 AM and quickly rose to four-alarms. At the height of the fire there were 130 firefighters and 50 apparatus on the scene.



Shortly after the first firetrucks arrived, the San Francisco Fire Boat #3, *St. Francis*, also came on the scene. CBS San Francisco quotes fire department spokesman, Lt. Jonathan Baxter, who said that the fireboat crew saved the historic Liberty ship.

"When firefighters arrived, the flames were literally lapping over the *Jeremiah O'Brien*," he said. "They literally saved the O'Brien."

"The *Jeremiah O'Brien* has been known as the lucky ship," said ship captain Cevan Lesieur. "She survived the North Atlantic and D-Day and that's the first

reaction — it's a miracle!"

Fire crews also prevented the blaze from spreading to the submarine *USS Pampanito*, which is also docked at the pier. San Francisco Fireboat #1, *Phoenix*, was also called into service to help prevent the fire from spreading to other structures.

By 2 p.m., the fire was under control, fire officials said. Streets around the Fisherman's Wharf neighbourhood were closed off. Initial reports suggest that the damage to the *O'Brien* was limited to scorched paint.

The SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* is one of only two remaining fully functional Liberty ships of the 2,710 built and launched during World War II.

The SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* was built in just 56 days at the New England Shipbuilding Corporation in South Portland, Maine, and launched on 19 June 1943. She made four round-trip convoy crossings of the Atlantic and was part of the Operation Neptune invasion fleet armada on D-Day. She was then sent to the Pacific and saw 16 months of service in both the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean, calling at ports in Chile, Peru, New Guinea, the Philippines, India, China, and Australia.

*St. Francis* to the rescue! No way we could have been as successful as we were this morning without our fireboat the *St. Francis*. A dedicated marine response is essential to a City surrounded on 3 sides by water. @AaronPeskin @LondonBreed @sfbos #yoursffd pic.twitter.com/LG9xwdTfuZ — San Francisco Firefighters 798 (@SFFFLocal798) May 24, 2020

Thanks to Bob McKane for contributing to this post. The post San Francisco Firefighters Save Liberty Ship SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* From Massive Wharf Fire appeared on Old Salt Blog.

Source: MNA Circular 2020 #11

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## All aboard the Sea Train!

DARPA's Sea Train concept hopes to enable a convoy of medium-sized unmanned vessels to travel across the ocean without re-fuelling, before splitting up to conduct independent operations.



Imagine the following scenario: Four medium-sized U.S. Navy vessels depart from a port along the United States' coast. There's no crew aboard any of them. About 15 nautical miles off the coast, the four vessels rendezvous, autonomously arranging themselves in a line. Using custom mechanisms, they attach to each other to form a train, except they're in the water and there's no railroad to guide them. In this configuration the vessels travel 6,500 nautical miles across the open ocean to Southeast Asia. But as they approach their destination, they disconnect, splitting up as each unmanned ship goes its own way to conduct independent operations, such as

collecting data with a variety of onboard sensors. Once those operations are complete, the four reunite, form a train and make the return journey home. This is the Sea Train, and it may not be as far-fetched as it sounds. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is investing in several technologies to make it a reality. "The goal of the Sea Train program is to be able to develop and demonstrate long-range deployment capabilities for a distributed fleet of medium-sized tactical unmanned vessels," said Andrew Nuss, DARPA's program manager for Sea Train. "So we're really focusing on ways to enable extended transoceanic transit and long-range naval operations, and the way that we're looking to do that is by taking advantage of some of the efficiencies that we can gain in a system of connected vessels — that's where the name 'Sea Train' comes from." According to DARPA, the current security environment has incentivized the Navy and the Marine Corps to move from a small number of exquisite, large manned platforms to a more distributed fleet structure comprised of smaller vessels, including unmanned platforms

that can conduct surveillance and engage in electronic warfare and offensive operations. While these unmanned vessels are smaller and more agile than their large, manned companions, they are limited by the increased wave-making resistance that plagues smaller vessels. And due to their size, they simply can't carry enough fuel to make the long-range journeys envisioned by DARPA without refuelling.

By connecting the vessels — physically or in a formation — the agency hopes the Sea Train can reduce that wave resistance and enable long-range missions. In February, the agency released a broad agency announcement to find possible vendors. Citing agency practice, Nuss declined to share how many proposals were submitted, although he did say there was significant interest in the announcement. The agency completed its review of any submissions and expects to issue contracts by the end of the fiscal year. Sea Train is expected to consist of two 18-month periods, where contractors will work to develop and test technologies that could enable the Sea Train concept. The program will culminate with model testing in scaled ocean conditions. If successful, DARPA hopes to see the technologies adopted by the Navy for its unmanned platforms. "What we're looking to do is be able to reduce the risk in this unique deployment approach," Nuss said. "And then be able to just deliver that set of solutions to the Navy in the future, to be able to demonstrate to them that there is, potentially, a new way to deploy these vessels, to be able to provide far more operational range without the risk of relying on actual refuelling or in-port refuelling." And while DARPA's effort is focused on medium-sized unmanned vessels — anywhere from 12 to 50 meters in length — the lessons learned could be applied to larger or smaller vessels, manned or unmanned.

Source: *Shipping News 200608*

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## **TAI YUAN Fire**

At around 13:20 on April 24, 2017, as the cargo ship *TaiYuan*, with a master and ten other crew members aboard, was waiting to begin loading of waste metal and other miscellaneous scrap at the No. 16 Berth of Hakozaki Wharf, Hakata Port, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture, a fire broke out in the aft cargo hold.

At around 04:54 on the following day, April 25, *Tai Yuan* foundered during firefighting and became a total loss. An oil spill occurred, but there were no fatalities or injuries.

It is probable that the accident occurred when, as the Vessel was moored for the purpose of cargo-handling at Hakata Port, a fire that broke out within the scrap loaded into the aft cargo hold spread because firefighting by water-spraying was ineffective, and appropriate firefighting methods using the Vessel's carbon dioxide gas firefighting equipment were not employed.

It is probable that effective firefighting methods using the carbon dioxide gas firefighting equipment were not employed because the Master did not think of using the carbon dioxide gas firefighting equipment.

It is probable that the Master did not think of using the carbon dioxide gas firefighting equipment because he did not have experience with fire drills for a fire in the Vessel's cargo holds, and because the Vessel and Company A did not share information on effective firefighting methods.

It is somewhat likely that firefighting by water-spraying was not effective because the sprayed water was blocked by the scrap's surface layer and did not reach the fire's origin.

Regarding the fire that broke out inside the scrap, it is somewhat likely that a spark created by contact between metal objects, a battery, etc., was the source of the fire, and that the source ignited combustible material. However, it was not possible to determine the circumstances leading up to the fire.

The above is taken from the Japan Transport Safety Board report.

For more information go to:

[https://www.mlit.go.jp/jtsb/eng-mar\\_report/2018/2017tk0007e.pdf](https://www.mlit.go.jp/jtsb/eng-mar_report/2018/2017tk0007e.pdf)

Source: *Flashlight 210*

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## **MV BOLDWIND DELIVERED TO UNITED WIND LOGISTICS**

By [editor@breakbulk.news](mailto:editor@breakbulk.news) 12 May 2020

MV *BoldWind* will soon start her maiden voyage towards Europe carrying windmill blades from China to Norway.



With a deadweight of 10.000 mt, a deck length of 128 m and width of 28 m, the modern Deck Carrier offers great flexibility and attractive intake for any huge or heavy cargo.

The modern vessel combines an optimized hull design and diesel electric propulsion to suit its dedicated service field. The electric package is supplied by ABB and powered by four MAN diesel generators driven by high quality MDO. Additionally, the MAN engines meet IMO Tier III emission regulations being equipped with a Selective Catalytic

Reduction system.

"We are proud to affirm our company's aspirations to take over as front-runners for an eco-friendly shipping industry. We are already looking forward to receiving the sister newbuilding MV *BraveWind* in 4 months from now." says Mr. Puschmann, managing director of UWL.

Source: *Breakbulk News*

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## EU court rules against Italian class society over 2006 ferry disaster

By David Osler

VICTIMS of a ferry disaster in which more than 1,000 people were killed are entitled to bring an action for damages against the Italian classification society which certified the vessel, a court has ruled.

Al Salam Boccaccio'98, carrying 1,400 passengers and crew and sailing under the flag of the Republic of Panama, sank in the Red Sea in February 2006. Now the Court of Justice of the European Union has ruled that survivors and the relatives of the dead can make a claim against Registro Italiano Navale (RINA) before the Italian courts.

The move will come as a blow to RINA, which certified the ro-ro and had earlier contested a claim filed in Genoa, arguing that it should have immunity from jurisdiction as it was acting on behalf of the flag state, and manifesting the sovereign powers of the delegating state. The question was referred up to the Court of Justice of the European Union, which found in favour of the claimants. RINA said in a statement: "The court has expressed its position exclusively on the procedural matter of identifying the competent jurisdiction. Moreover, the court has also ruled that the required verification for the application of the principles of its ruling will have to be carried out by the national judge, who will have to rule on his own jurisdiction.

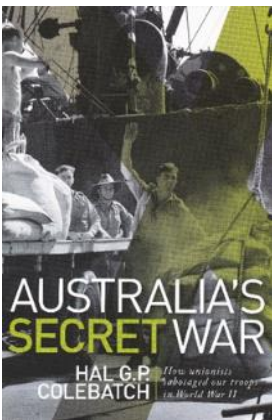
"Today's judgement and any assessment in the merit of the case is completely outside the jurisdiction of the Court of Luxembourg. In this regard, RINA confirms and reiterates the correctness of its work."

Source : Lloydlist

Source: *The Pulse* #10

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## The Traitors Within



A timely new book reveals the union movements role in one of the most shameful periods of Australian history. What the Wharfies did to Australian troops - and their nations war effort - between 1939 and 1945 is nothing short of an abomination. Perth lawyer, Hal Colebatch, has done the nation a service with his ground-breaking book, *Australia's Secret War*, telling the untold story of union bastardry during World War 2. Using diary entries, letters and interviews with key witnesses, he has pieced together with forensic precision the tale of how Australia's unions sabotaged the war effort; how Wharfies vandalised, harassed, and robbed Australian troop ships, and probably cost lives. One of the most obscene acts occurred in October, 1945, at the end of the war, after Australian soldiers were released from Japanese prison camps. They were half dead, starving and desperate for home. But when the British aircraft-carrier HMS Speaker brought them into Sydney Harbour, the Wharfies went on strike. For 36 hours, the soldiers were forced to remain on-board, tantalisingly close to home. This final act of cruelty from their countrymen was their thanks for all the sacrifice.

Source: *The Pulse* #10

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## From Submerged Reefs To Underwater Canyons: China's New Claims In The South China Sea

By admin May 25, 2020



Image Copyright: RFA

With tensions mounting in the South China Sea, China has named and claimed 80 obscure geographical features in those contested waters as it steps up its aggressive campaign to mark out territory and push out other claimants.

Using satellite imagery and mapping software, Radio Free Asia has examined those claims – announced by China last month – and found that they **include rocks, sandbars, and small reefs dotted off the coast of Vietnam** and around **the disputed Parcel and Spratly island chains** where, in all, six governments have claims. **Most of these 80 features are completely underwater.** None of them qualify as islands, despite what China may insist.

With this latest list, China now claims more than 300 land features above and below the water in the South China Sea. Experts warn that the new rash of claims add an irritant to negotiations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on a Code of Conduct, at a time when Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines are pushing back on Beijing's

stance toward the resource-rich region.

### **The Backstory**

On April 19, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Natural Resources announced that China's Geographical Names Commission had located 80 "islands" as part of its mission to standardize all of China's claims in the South China Sea.

The list of names and coordinates came on the same weekend China announced two new administrative districts to be created under Sansha City, a settlement built atop Woody Island in the Paracel Island chain – Beijing's latest gambit to assert that it alone had the right to administer the entire South China Sea.

Collectively, the two districts encompass more than one million square miles of water and rocks.

The move was given a big thumbs-down by rival claimants Vietnam and the Philippines. Experts say there's no basis in international law for China's sweeping assertion of sovereignty over land and waters hundreds of miles from its own mainland. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 ruled China's argument of "historic rights" invalid.

So why is China now adding these new claims, covering even obscure parts of the seafloor? Greg Poling, director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, says there's a simple explanation: nationalism.

"As China faces criticism to its COVID-19 response, including outcries over continued South China Sea activities and aggression amid the pandemic, Beijing is doubling down on chest-thumping nationalism," Poling said.

"That might work domestically. But internationally, this move in particular just shines more light on the very modern and *ad hoc* nature of China's supposedly ancient South China Sea claims," he said.

### **The Land is Not Enough: Claiming Underwater Features**

China last updated its list of names for features in the South China Sea in 1983, but a big difference this time is the inclusion of many features on the seabed – 55, to be exact – that include canyons, slopes, and mountain ranges or hills on the ocean floor, known as seamounts.

Under international law, underwater features can only be claimed by a country if within 12 nautical miles of land. Most of the features China claims are not.

Part of the motivation for China making these claims could be for exploitation of undersea resources. China has invested heavily in deep sea research and mapping. The *Hai Yang Di Zhi 8*, a survey vessel, was recently charting the seabed in waters disputed with Malaysia and Vietnam. China has more research vessels for this purpose than any other country, and it recently announced it had broken world records for extracting natural gas from the bottom of the ocean.

So who has the right to exploit undersea resources? Julian Ku, professor at Hofstra School of Law in Hempstead, New York, said that under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), "states don't have 'sovereignty' over the seabed, but they do have exclusive economic rights to their own continental and extended continental shelf." That means a state has exclusive control over exploitation of seabed resources such as oil, natural gas and minerals.

But some of the new features claimed by China, like Wan'an Haidixiaguqun (Wan'an Undersea Canyon Group), are clearly within 200 nautical miles of Vietnam's coast, which puts them on Vietnam's continental shelf. While China asserts that it too has a continental shelf spreading outward from the disputed Spratly and Paracel Islands that would extend to this area, it's a legal position that has never been recognized under UNCLOS.

The location of the "Wan'an Undersea Canyon Group" named by China off the coast of Vietnam.

"China keeps on changing the facts on the ground while insisting on maintaining the status quo. That status quo is changing in Chinese favor every day," Suorsa said. "China's actions in the South China Sea are making any constructive Code of Conduct agreement next to impossible now, if it wasn't already."

### **Above the Water: Claims in The Paracels**

Of the 25 above-sea features in China's new list, 12 are in the Paracels, an island chain in the northern part of the South China Sea. The Paracels are also claimed by Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. China seized control of the rocks and reefs comprising the Paracels in 1974, in a naval skirmish with what was then the government of South Vietnam.



Experts emphasize that technically, none of these 12 features are new claims – because China already claimed them on the basis of its "historic rights" and the nine-dash line which roughly demarcates the vast area of the South China Sea it says it has sovereignty over. But what it's doing now is effectively mapping the area for itself in more detail.

China claims the Paracels are an "offshore archipelago," and in 1996 drew base-lines around them, which are connections between their outermost points that are normally used by island states to group their islands together for the sake of establishing borders across an expanse of ocean. By doing so, China hoped to

legally extend its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf over the entire northern half of the South China Sea. This was ruled invalid in the 2016 arbitral ruling between China and the Philippines.

“Sanzhizai,” China’s lone new feature in the northeast Paracels between Middle and South Island. North Island hosts a Chinese outpost.

One of the new features, Sanzhizai, is a sandbar that satellite imagery shows to be uninhabited and barely above water at all hours. It is wedged between Middle Island and South Island, which are also unoccupied and claimed by China. China occupies all the inhabited features nearby, including North Island, which houses a small military outpost, and Tree Island, home to a larger port and military base.



No islands named by China in the Paracels qualify, legally, as islands. Two are submerged at all hours. Others are shallow reefs or sandbars. Kuangzai Beidao – or Basket North Island – for instance, is a scrap of land less than a tenth of a mile from end to end. It is adjacent to a tiny Chinese-occupied island called Antelope Reef, which has a handful of buildings on it.

Under the landmark 2016 arbitral ruling on the South China Sea, to meet the definition of an island, a feature has to be able to “naturally sustain” human settlement and economic activity without outside help. Kuangzai Beidao clearly could not qualify – and nor could the other features on this list.

Kuangzai Beidao, or “Basket North Island,” as of April 23, 2020. This scrap of land is on Antelope Reef, just north of a key Chinese settlement in the Paracels.

Other new features are clearly meant to plug the gaps between and around China’s military outposts and artificial islands. Guangjin Beiyidao and Guangjin Bei’erdao (Guangjin North First Island and Guangjin North Second Island) are indistinguishable from each other, and China lists the same coordinates for both of them, but together with Guangjin Xidao (Guangjin West Island) they make up the small sand barrier on the western side of Duncan Island, which houses a Chinese-built harbor and outpost.



A satellite image of Duncan Island from April 28, 2020. Guangjin Beiyidao, Bei’erdao, and Guangjin Xidao are to its west. Guangjin Beiyidao and Bei’erdao share the same coordinates according to China’s list but, based on their names, can be assumed to refer to the two sandy banks right next to each other in the upper left. Duncan Island hosts a harbor for Chinese fishermen and coast guard.

These features seem to be part of China’s ongoing campaign to define clearer baselines around the Paracel Islands, which would allow China to more easily group all features into an offshore island chain. China already demands passing ships request permission before moving through the Paracel Islands. This is a prime reason the U.S. continues to conduct freedom of navigation operations in the Paracels, calling China’s baselines around the Paracel Islands unlawful.

#### ***Above The Water: Claims in The Spratlys***

The other 13 above-sea features China names are in the Spratlys, a chain of rocks and islands where Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei also have claims. It lies in the southern half of the South China Sea.

The Spratlys includes Vanguard Bank, where China and Vietnam engaged in a tense standoff involving multiple coastguard and paramilitary fishing boats in the second half of 2019, and Fiery Cross Reef, a major military base frequented by the Chinese navy, coastguard, and air force.

The new features in the Spratlys are truly tiny, but after plotting the coordinates, it’s easy to see why China is staking a claim to them. They are scattered around West Reef – where rival Vietnam built up an outpost for its own military between 2013 and 2016 and added two lookouts nearby during that same period.

The entire reef itself is barely worth a name, but China has seen fit to label every bit of it – as part of the Xijiao (West Reef) and Longbi (Dragon’s Nose) chain of “islands.” For reasons that are unclear, some of the miniscule features are even labeled twice with different names. For example, Xijiao Dongdao (West Reef East Island) is also known as Longbi Dongdao (Dragon’s Nose East Island), and Xijiao Xidao (West Reef West Island) is also known as Longbi Xidao (Dragon’s Nose West Island).

“It seems like this was some government cartographer’s fancy that got pulled out of a filing cabinet to pad the new list of names, which Beijing presumably pushed out to signal its displeasure over Southeast Asian, and particularly Vietnamese, criticism over recent South China Sea tensions,” said Poling.

One of the Vietnamese outposts on West Reef, that China says was illegally invaded and occupied, China now calls this outpost ‘Longbi Xidao’ or ‘Xijiao Xidao.’

China and Vietnam have been at loggerheads in recent months, over the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat by a China Coast Guard (CCG) ship on April 3, and, in a series of submissions disputing each other’s claims to the South China Sea, sent to the



Source: *The Maritime Post* 200525

United Nations. The last note China sent was more targeted in tone, calling on Vietnam to “withdraw all the crews and facilities from the islands and reefs it has invaded and illegally occupied.”

Malaysia and the Philippines submitted protests against China’s new claims, too, in a rare show of unity – right before China announced its new administrative districts and published its new list of 80 features.

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## In search of a better life (November 13, 2019) by Nick Elliott, author of the trilogy of Angus McKinnon thrillers and Editor of *Maritime Advocate*.

Of all the dreadful stories that fill the news daily, the death of those thirty-nine young Vietnamese folk found in a trailer in the south of England recently, has stuck in my mind. Call them refugees, illegal immigrants, whatever, they were just seeking a better life.

It calls to mind an incident forty years ago in which I became involved and many years later inspired me to create a significant character for my second novel, *Dark Ocean*.



On 22 May 1979 the British ship *Riverbank* (renamed the *Sibonga* by her Danish charterers), rescued two boatloads of Vietnamese in the South China Sea, and, under the command of Captain Healey Martin, headed for an uncertain reception in Hong Kong where I was working as a ships agent.

1,002 were counted as safely rescued by the time the ship arrived off the then British territory. Others, including babies, children and the elderly, had died during the perilous transfer from their leaking craft to the ship, which took place in heavy swells way out in the South China Sea.

The Hong Kong authorities ordered the ship to wait in international waters some miles from the harbour while it was decided what to do. Hong Kong was already hosting some 800,000 Vietnamese “boat people” and was not keen to take more.

As agents, that first day we organised a water barge, provisions, medical supplies and Red Cross doctors and nurses to attend along with two of our boarding clerks and myself.



The scene that greeted us on boarding was one I won’t forget. Later, Captain Martin’s wife Mildred, fortuitously a qualified nurse who, along with the Second Officer’s wife, also a nurse, did so much to care for their unexpected passengers during the voyage, gave this graphic account to the *Portadown News*:

When they spotted the first boat with 600 people on board, Mrs Martin said that hundreds were packed in the bottom of the boat, “so tight that they hadn’t been able to move to relieve themselves – their limbs were intertwined and there was a terrible stench”.

There was panic, mayhem, while the refugees fought their way up the pilot ladders to climb onto the ship, children and old men couldn’t stand on weak legs but somehow the Captain, his wife, the Second Officer’s wife and the crew got them sorted out in a makeshift hospital and fed them.

“The deck outside our small ship’s hospital was crowded,” she said. “Children were vomiting, crying, doubled up with tummy pain; nursing mothers were indicating that they had no breast milk as they were dehydrated; old people were slumped, too weak to sit up.”

She also gave harrowing accounts of a woman who’d had a Caesarean section within the past few days and was in terrible agony, and of a baby who had fallen overboard into the sea and died.

The whole scenario was repeated when they spotted the second boat with 400 on board, and after more trauma, order was restored and they headed for Hong Kong.

By the time we boarded, it was clear they’d done a heroic job in handling this humanitarian crisis. But with the sun beating down on the steel deck, temperatures in the thirties, virtually no sanitary facilities for such numbers and very limited food and water, the situation was dire.

Over the coming days we established a system with regular convoys of supplies and medical staff in attendance. Some cases were hospitalised, others treated on board.

Back in London, Bank Line’s chairman, Lord Inverforth, used his influence to persuade Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to accept some 800 of the refugees into Britain. The rest were accepted by America.

Over the years Mildred Martin received greetings cards from many of the grateful Vietnamese. Children were named *Sibonga*, *Healey* or *Mildred* after the ship and the captain and his wife. But *Healey* was still receiving hate mail for rescuing the boat people long after the event. Trolls were among us even then.

At the time many shipowners ordered their captains to steer a course well to the east of the Vietnam coast to avoid encountering these desperate people. This was not the policy of Bank Line or the Danish charterers.

