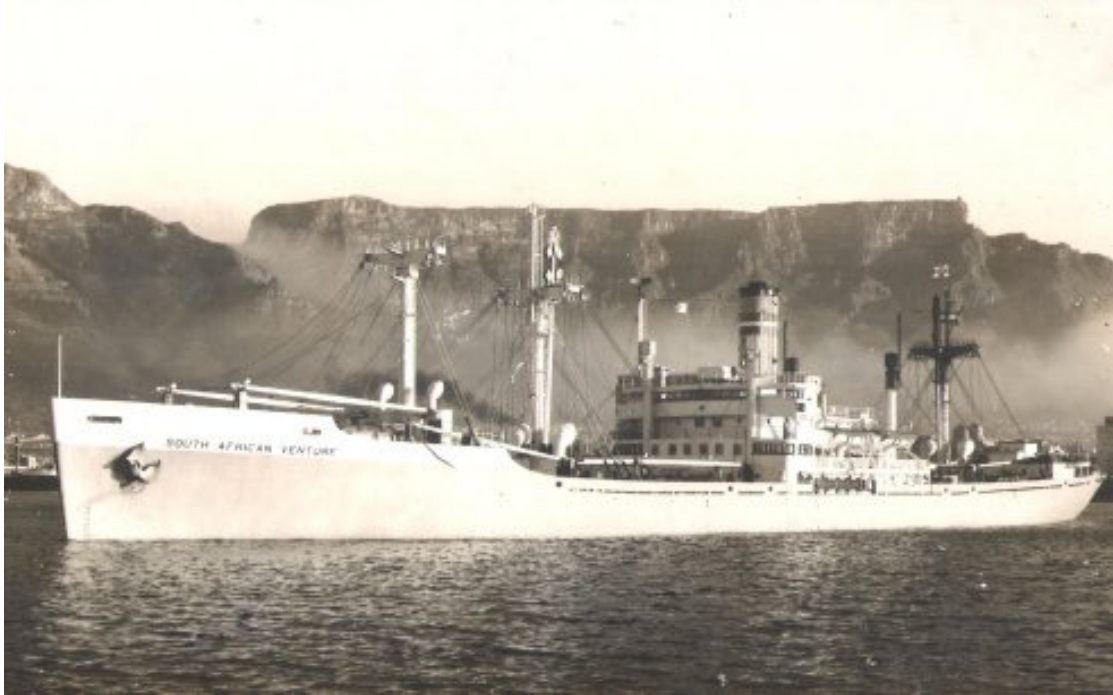


My Memories as a Deck Cadet with Safmarine

Part 1

“SS South African Venture” 3 May 1965 to 15 May 1966



Chapter 1 - The Early weeks

The “South African Venture” was a Victory Class Ship. The Victory class ships were built in 1944 in USA to carry cargo across the Atlantic Ocean to supply UK during World War 2. They were in the convoys of merchant ships protected by the Navy Destroyers and Corvettes from the German U-boats during these crossings. After the war there were many of these Victory Class ships in surplus, The US had them in moth balls after the war, Safmarine bought three of these Victory ships in 1946 but required some alteration to suite peace time use. , *i.e.*. remove guns etc. They were then commissioned in 1947. So you can see that I was same age as the Ship.

I was due to sign on in Durban early in 1965 but the ship was held up in a US port (Boston I think) because of dock worker strikes. Remember in those days there were no containers - so ships needed labour to load and unload the cargo. During my period of waiting for the ship to return to South Africa (about 3 months) my Mom organised for me to work as a male nurse at the Fort Napier Mental Hospital. She was a Psychiatric Nurse there until she retired. That is a story on its own.

So I boarded the Venture in Durban in May 65 and met up with fellow General Botha (GB) 1964 Cadet JD Baxter. He had signed on in East

London. We shared a cabin – very comfortable as it was a stateroom used for passengers. I only recall having a passenger once while sailing to the UK. On my first night aboard I made friends with Alistair O’Henry (known as ‘Irish’), a junior Marine Engineer. Joined him in his cabin for a few beers and we became quite good friends. I often went ashore with him.

Irish was from Bangor Northern Ireland. He was a good story teller, like you would expect from an Irishman. His big story was of how he ended up on the Gold Mines in the Free State and finally at sea on the Venture. He had travelled from Northern Ireland through Africa. When he got there the Belgium Congo was involved in a civil war. This was just after independence and lasted from 1960 to 1965. Irish and his friend somehow got stuck in the Belgium Congo while the war was taking place. He was bailed out by the South African consulate on a two week visa and stayed for two years before joining Safmarine as a junior maritime engineer.

The Ship was now no longer on the USA route but on the UK route. We set sail from Durban for Lourenço Marques (LM) and Beira (the still under Portuguese rule). JD and I were Junior Cadets with Larry Beama (1963 GB class) as our Senior Cadet. Training for cadets was to understand all aspects of life on a cargo ship. So we were started with the task of maintenance and painting of the Life Boats. Working out in the open on the deck allowed us to adjust to the motion of the ship and avoided sea sickness as rookie seaman. I was only sick once – but that comes much later.

In port our job was cargo watch with either the Third Mate or Second Mate. Cargo watch entailed checking that the cargo was stored in the correct place in the hold and also insuring that no pilfering took place. Pilfering was a bigger problem in the UK than on the African coast. We worked eight hours on and four hours off.

These two ports and most of the South African ports worked 24/7. The Cadets task while in port was also to lower the cluster lights into the holds each evening for the night workers and take them out in the morning. Any broken lights or damaged cable were passed on to the second electrician (known as the ‘Leckie’) for repairs. We also had to raise the SAFMarine flag every morning and take it down at sun set. The flag was attached to a wooden handle/pole so it flew above the main mast. If the flag got stuck we had to climb up the mast and sort it out. Not so pleasant in the morning if you had a hang over.

We went ashore in our time off and sampled the Portuguese beer and wine. Had a walk/look around the red light district in Lourenço Marques

(now Maputo) and checked out the night clubs. Though we would rather spend our money on the ship as drinks were much cheaper being in bond and not taxed. For Example we bought Camel or Texan cigarettes at R1 a carton – ashore in SA it was at least double that and in UK much higher.

We then returned to Durban to load cargo – don't recall what we loaded in Durban but in Lourenço Marques and Beira we loaded large ingots of Copper – they were pretty heavy bars about two meters long. The stevedores were pretty tough and efficient at loading them. Time in port was always a big rush to load or unload as it cost money while in port.

We then loaded cargo in East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. I recall running into some heavy seas off PE which broke the small forecastle mast used to fly a South African flag while at sea. The main flag was on the main mast. I don't recall this flag being flown in port. The blue peter flag was always flown on the day of departure.

Chapter 2 - The Deck Officers

- **Captain** (Skipper). Don Tooms (not sure of spelling) was a GB Old Boy. He would be on the Bridge when arriving and leaving port. The harbour pilots would give instructions to the helmsman, Tugboat and workers on the pier while entering or leaving port - but the captain was in charge and could override the pilot if he thought necessary.
- **First Officer** - Mr. Tipping. While at sea he would do the 4 to 8 watch. He was responsible for the general maintenance of the ship (other than the engine room). The Cadets gave him the nick name of Chipping Tipping as a major task given to Cadets was chipping paint before repainting. He would be in charge of the forecandle when arriving or leaving port.
- **Second Officer** – Mr Harry Gillespie. The Second Mate had responsibility for Navigation. While on the high sea he would take the midday sighting using his sextant to measure the angle between the sun and the horizon. When the sun is at its zenith the angle between the sun and the horizon would give him the ships latitude. The method of getting the longitude was called “Longitude by Meridian Altitude”. This calculation and method is no longer in my memory. He would take the 8 to 12 watch and would be on the after deck while docking or leaving harbour - supervising the seaman handling the mooring lines.
- **Third Officer** – Wilson (I think Dave). He did the 12 to 4 watch. He would be on the Bridge during arriving or leaving port.
- **The Cadets** while at sea did mostly manual work allocated to them by the First Officer. During arriving and leaving port they manned the telephones on the forecandle, the bridge and the after deck. The Cadet on the bridge was also responsible for keeping the ships log - recording the instructions issued by the pilot and all actions involving arriving and leaving a harbour.
- Some names changed during the period I was on the Venture but I have only mentioned those that were onboard when I signed on.
- **The Carpenter** (Chippy) not an officer, but important when arriving or leaving port. He would handle the windlass used to haul in or let out the mooring lines used to tie the ship to the pier. The windlass was also used to haul in or drop anchor. The anchor is attached to a heavy chain stored in the chain locker which is in the fore peak. The ship often had to be anchored off shore while waiting for a berth.

Chapter 3 - At Sea

We did three trips to UK while I was on the South African Venture. Deep sea away from shore the Cadets worked an eight to five routine doing maintenance work similar to the ordinary deck crew. We got our instructions each day from the First Mate. Work entailed plenty of scrapping and painting decks, maintaining life boats, sweeping the decks and varnishing the woodwork etc. On the homeward voyage the ship was painted from top to bottom and stem to stern before docking in Cape Town. This painting was done by the Cadets together with the deck crew. The ship had to be spick and span to impress the head office big Shots.

We never went through the longstanding maritime tradition to initiate sailors when crossing the equator for the first time. The Equator-crossing ceremony typically featured being dunked by King Neptune the Roman god of freshwater and the sea. Don't recall why it did not happen.

We always had to wear our uniforms in the dinning room – the grey Safmarine summer uniform or in winter the full navy blue number one outfit. The food on the ship was as good as any five star hotel/restaurant. The captains steward (known as the Captains Tiger – no idea where this name originated) would take pity on the Cadets. At lunch time he would smuggle a meal to us in our cabin so we did not have to change out of our working gear. At Lunchtime anyway.

In the evening we would go to the officer's lounge for a beer before dinner. After dinner we would return there for some rounds of liar dice and a beer or two – relax and chat. Other officers would come and go depending on their watch times.

Once on the coast we would then revert to sharing a watch with the Deck Officers. I recall the first time I came up on to the bridge to join the Third Mate on the eight to twelve watch. We were sailing up the Bristol Channel to my first UK port of Avonmouth. Larry (senior Cadet) who had been on the four to eight handed over the watch to me. This involved pointing out the landmarks such as light houses, channel bouys etc, that were used to navigate up the channel. I was able to do some practice sights under supervision of the Third Mate. (remember no GPS back in those days). All positions were determined by taking sites of known shore landmarks and plotting them on the the navigation chart.

When we got close to port we may have had to anchor off shore until the pilot came out to guide the ship in into the port. The Cadets job was to go down to welcome the pilot aboard and guide him up to the bridge. The pilot would come out to the ship on the pilot boat He would come aboard using a rope ladder put in place over the side when the pilot boat came alongside. The pilot would guide us in and dock the ship with the aid of

the tug boats. Though the Captain was still in charge, the pilot, because of his local knowledge of the port and conditions, would give the commands to the helmsman, communicate with the workers ashore and the Tug boat captain..

Chapter 4 Ports of Call

Avonmouth:

My first view of UK. JD Baxter and I could not wait to get ashore to have a look around and try out some UK pubs and the beer. We were not impressed with the local draft British Bitter Beer. Flat and warm – not our style. We soon gravitated to lagers from Sweden (Skol) and others from Belgium or the Netherlands. It was summer and we visited Bristol which was close by. A group of us were walking down a suburban street in Bristol. The third engineer was wearing shorts – some local children could not believe anyone would walk about in shorts and started chanting “He wears short shorts”. It was if they had never seen a person in town wearing shorts. For some reason this stuck in my memory. We only docked here on the first trip.

Swansea:

We visited some time in winter – my only memory is having a drink in a pub sitting near the a warm fire. We only spent one day there.

Liverpool:

This was the main port for unloading and we spent up to week at a time there. Sailing up the Mersey River and docking near the Liver Buildings was always a wonderful experience. Once tired up in the harbour the Cadets first job was to get the TV aerial set up on the mail mast. We watched TV in the evening in the officer’s lounge. “Top of the Pops” with Jimmy Saville was the main attraction. Remember TV only came to SA in 1975. I only found out a few years later – after he passed on – what a pervert Saville was. With “Top of the Pops” one of the attractions was to see all the dancing and check out the female talent.

We also were able to contact a local hospital and invite some nurses to parties on the ship. The Third Engineer – forget his name – had the contacts. Our objective was to persuade a girl to come view our pennants in the cabin. At every port we collected these pennants with the name of the port and had them on the bulkheads (wall) in our cabin.

When we had time off going ashore to visit the local clubs was the main attraction. Remember this was at the height of the Mersey Beat phenomena. I recall I had a date with one of the nurses I met and she took me to the “Blue Angel” club. She pointed out the original drummer (Pete Best) for the beetles who was at the club. His audition to join the Beatles took place in the Blue Angel on 12 August 1960. Liverpool was a very

exciting g place to visit in 1965/66. WE docked here on all three visits to UK

Birkenhead:

We visited this port on the way back where most of our loading took place. We started loading in Glasgow. The other ports were mostly for unloading. Birkenhead is on the western side of the Mersey River and Liverpool on the East. Therefore most of what we did was similar to Liverpool. Though I did recall a stop over on an Easter weekend when no loading took place and we had plenty of time off. You could get to Liverpool via the Queensway Mersey Tunnel. We used taxis to get around – sharing a taxi made it not too expensive.

Dublin:

We docked at least twice in Dublin. I recall going to local pubs and really enjoying the Guinness draft beer. My friend Irish was our guide as he knew his way around - though he was from Northman Ireland. The one pub we were in had live music and often members of the public were invited to sing solos with them. They obviously knew these customers and they were pretty competent performers. They mostly sang Irish folk songs from what I recall. Chatting to the some girls in the pub they mentioned that an open concert was going to be held in a hall near by. They invited us to join them and we had a good evening listening to good Irish music.

The big attraction in Dublin was the Metropole Hotel which comprised a number of levels with bars, a restaurant and a large dance hall. The dance hall had females out numbering males by maybe two to one. That suited us. I recall the Irish economy was not so good in those days. Many of the young men had gone to the UK (mostly London) seeking employment. I was not much into dancing but Irish chatted up and persuaded a few girls to join us for drinks. I recall Babycham and “Pale Ale and Lime” were their preferred beverages. This was mostly true in most places in the UK that we went to.

Belfast:

I recall being on the bridge with the Third Officer going down the buoyed channel towards the entrance to the harbour. We had to keep an eye out as we navigated the channel. I think we only docked once in Belfast but recall the stevedores were much harder workers than the other ports. I was told they worked on piecework basis, hence the good productivity. They also used the ships derricks rather than shore cranes. Probably allowed them to unload at a faster rate – not sure.

This was before the Irish troubles so it was pretty safe then. No IRA bombs going off. We did go ashore but don't recall any particular things. Maybe that was because Irish visited his home in Bangor which was pretty close?

Glasgow:

This was a port we visited every time. I recall going up the river Clyde in mid summer when it was still light at quarter to midnight. Glasgow is only 10 degrees of latitude from the arctic circle but remember they have daylight saving in summer – so true time is around 22h45. Betty's Bar was our main pub of call - not sure why but it was within walking distance of the docks.

JD and I took a special trip by train from Glasgow to Loch Lomond and then the ferry up the loch and back one evening after work. Mid summer it was and still light. We sat having a beer while touring up the loch and back. That is still why the song "the Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond" is one of my favourite songs. It always brings back memories of my trip on the Loch

We unloaded fortified wine in barrels from Cape Town in this port. The dock workers would make a hole in the side of the barrel and tapped wine into a tin mug. They would plug it up and have a drink every now and again while working. While on cargo watch it was our job to keep the cargo safe. At this stage we had a new Chief Officer, Dave Thomson, and he advised us to allow them access to one barrel. If we did not, many barrels would accidentally fall and break open while unloading. Hence loss would be much greater. My friend Otto Peetoom (a Cadet from my year) told me later that when he was in Glasgow he had tried to stop the pilfering and nearly got attacked. I don't recall how he managed to solve the problem and remain safe. We also loaded Scotch whiskey in a special locker in one of the holds. Same problem with pilfering we had with the wine. The Dockers would manage to drop a case from the wooden pallet while loading. They could then have access to the broken bottles.

The venue in Glasgow that remains in my memory is the Locarno Ballroom in Sauchiehall Street. There was a massive dance floor with balconies on the floor above that you could look down from. The night we went there the US Navy boys were in town and the place was crowded. We had a good night just soaking in the atmosphere. We did not meet any young ladies – competition must have been the problem with US navy boys in town.

While in Glasgow a World Cup qualifying match between Scotland and Italy was due to be played. The Captain, being a football fan, organised

tickets and travel for us to go to Hamden Park to watch the match. Really a great experience as 50 000 Scotsman stamp their feet on the wooden flooring in the old stadium. Scotland won One Nil. The goal was scored by full back John Grieg.



Cape Town:

Our head office. Spent time ashore at various night clubs like “Navigators Arms”, Daryl’s and Clubs. JD and I had purchased bowler hats while in UK. We went to the Mount Nelson Hotel wearing our bowler hats. Had a bit too much to drink but got safely back to the ship. I met up with Glynis Smith (PTI Smith’s daughter) for a date while in Cape Town and had good night at one of the clubs – don’t recall which. She was now living in Mowbray with her Mother.

Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban:

Much the same as Cape Town visiting Local Pubs and Clubs, though in Durban I was able to get home for a day or two. My parents visited me on the Ship once and I invited my cousins Fred Amos & Warner Bird for a meal on the Ship one evening.


Chapter 5 Some Photos

SEAMAN'S
CERTIFICATES
VERSLAG-
ONTSLAGSERTIFIKATE

DECLARATION

I declare (1) that the person to whom this record book refers has satisfied me that he is fit in a seaman's way and that the photographs and stamps may without cause be a true likeness of the person, and the signature written in his hand is his own, and that he does not know of any other person who has used his name and photo in any other way than as stated above.

Signature of Proper Officer: *Jacobson*
Date: *2* *1957*
Place: *CAPE TOWN*



All holders of this book must comply with strictly anti-fraudulent regulations for, and strictly for the use of, the book and the form and stamps attached to it, and provide any reasonable amount of proof in a court of law that the book is not used for any other purpose than that for which it was issued. The holder of the book is responsible for its use for all the purposes for which it was issued. The holder of the book is also responsible for its use for all the purposes for which it was issued. The holder of the book is also responsible for its use for all the purposes for which it was issued.

Signature of Seaman: *Gordon Dalgaard*

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RECORD BOOK AND
OF DISCHARGE
BOEK EN
VAN SEEMAN

NAME OF SEAMAN: *DAVID VAN SEEMAN*

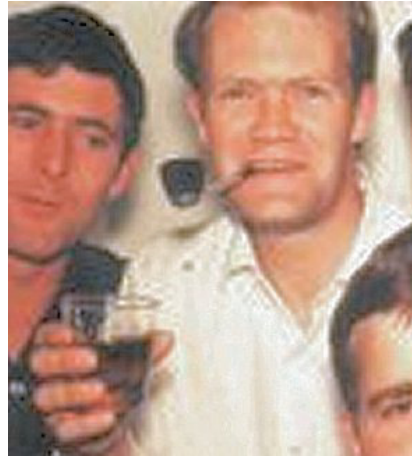
Signature of Seaman: *Gordon Dalgaard*
Signature of Seaman (in Dutch): *GORDON DALGAARD*

RACE - RAS		MARRIAGE STATUS		RESIDENCE	
W					
Height in Feet	Weight in Lbs.	Complexion & Hair		Complexion & Eyes	
5	9	Brownish Fair			
Date and place of birth: <i>16.6.49</i> <i>Durban</i>					
Name of other ships: <i>None</i>					
Name of other ships: <i>None</i>					
Union or State of Issuance					
Signature of Seaman <i>Gordon Dalgaard</i>					

Gordon's Seaman's Record Book



Gordon with Irish on the Venture



JD Baxter – Cadet with me on the Venture

So ends my time on the good ship SS South African Venture.