

USAT NEBRASKAN

By William Elmgreen

This story is by William (Bill) Elmgreen (1902-1990) who was Chief Engineer on US Army Transport ships the Greylag (or Grey Lag) and then the Nebraskan, between 1944 and 1946.

William was born in Denmark on 1 March 1902. He studied diesel engineering there, and from 1923 worked as a Junior Engineer for the Scandinavian / American Line, crossing the Atlantic to New York more than 30 times in the 1920s as the ships (including Frederick VIII) took emigrants to North America.

In 1927 he took a job as a ship's engineer with the Great Northern Telegraph Company. He was posted to Shanghai where he was until 1940.

In 1940 luck brought him to Australia, where he eventually started work for the US Army, involved in the supervising of the building of small ships in Newcastle, New South Wales. Following that, in 1944 he made a decision to go back to sea for a time, to earn enough money with which to get married to the young nurse he had met in Newcastle. He was appointed Chief Engineer and ranked as a Colonel. He did indeed marry the young nurse and lived the rest of his life in Sydney.

Extracts from his unpublished autobiography, written in the 1970s; supplied by his son, John Elmgreen, Sydney Australia, May 2024.



August 1944: joining the US Army

I made my final decision in August 1944 and called in at the U.S. Army Services of Supply Office at Grace Building in Sydney on a Saturday morning.

[William was appointed Chief Engineer on the Greylag and on returning with her to Sydney was appointed to the Nebraskan. - Editor]

USAT Nebraskan – 1945-1946

I was transferred to The Flagship – Commander Carl called her – the 16,000 ton *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan*. I could refuse to change ship, but Carl advised me against it. He said: "This is promotion, Bill, don't ruin your chances with the U.S. Army!" My letter from the Main Office, Grace Building, read: "You have been appointed Chief Engineer on the *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan* in Brisbane, kindly leave at your earliest possible convenience." I had to land in Australia again and according to somebody at the Tax Department, I had to pay tax for the last six months. After arguing for hours, I finally paid £440 – under protest – and got my clearance. We raced to Mascot, arrived in time, but it took too long to clear my 200lbs luggage, so we had to return in the evening and we left about 8pm. My luggage was registered as U.S. Army instruments! I got my £440 back in three years – no, not with interest! At Brisbane, I was picked up by an Army Officer and I slept in a Grace Course Shed. Taken to the river by the Army Officer and ferried out to the mighty *Nebraskan*, in peace time, belonging to American Hawaiian Steamship Company, hence the name *Nebraskan* after the State of Nebraska.

How I persuaded the *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan* to give up smoking

Onboard the *Nebraskan*, I was introduced to the American Chief Engineer I was to replace. He said he was not well acquainted with the giant engine, but Nick, the First Assistant Engineer, would show me around, he knew all about it. I went down with Nick. He was tall and slim. He introduced me to 2nd, 3rd and Junior 3rd Assistant Engineers – plus the electrician, Abdul; later, the water tenders, firemen and wipers – the entire engine room staff, 18 men. Four large oil-fired boilers, an enormous engine, with a largest piston over 7ft. diameter, crankshaft 18", propeller shaft 21", diameter of propeller, 19ft.

Nick said the men were experienced and reliable and everything was in good order. We were to leave early in the evening. While we walked round down below, we came to the giant blower, supplying air to the four boilers. I couldn't believe what I saw! It was completely encased in an enormous box, made of heavy sheet iron, with only a tiny opening at the top. I went up to the old Chief and asked him how on earth they could keep four large boilers going without air. "It was like that when we received her from Russia, where she had been on loan a year, and I was not going to stick my neck out and alter anything!" I sent a man up to get Nick. "How many men can you get down here, to remove all the plates around the blower?" Nick said, "Six," and he brought them down with spanners etc. immediately. Nick promised to renew the oil in all boxes after they were cleaned out and renew all wicks. Nick was beaming: he thought all along that something was wrong: they could never go full speed – no steam.

About midnight, we were clear of the Brisbane River. The skipper had rung Full Speed for good. I went up on the bridge to meet him. it was pitch-dark – blacked-out – and the weather was calm in the Pacific. The Captain, a Scot, was an old China coast hand, formerly

with the Jardine Matheson Steamship Company. He knew several of our cablemen, so we were soon friends. After another trip down below, I went to bed, with the blower racing at full speed.

About 8am, I was downstairs again, after which I had my breakfast in the messroom. Afterwards, I went for a walk on the upper deck and met our Chief Steward, who pointed to the enormous funnel: "No smoke?" he said. "She used to belch smoke out of the stack for the benefit of submarines 100 miles away, all the way from San Francisco to Brisbane!" I said, "I'll tell you the story of how I persuaded the *Nebraskan* to give up smoking for good!". I told the steward what the Russians had done to the blower downstairs, by enclosing it in a big box, undoubtedly because of the extreme cold up north, cutting the air inlet off almost completely. After my talk with steward, almost all 82 men on board commented on it and thought it was wonderful. One said, "Apparently the new Chief is a non-smoker!" It boosted my popularity onboard no end.

The *Nebraskan* could carry an enormous lot of cargo in her six holds and we always did. The skipper told me the ship and engines were in bad condition and when we returned to Sydney, we were due to have a major general overhaul: kindly prepare for this! I kindly did.

On our voyage up north, we were doing nine knots, a pretty poor performance by our ship. Formerly the German *Elsass Lorraine*, captured by the U.S. Navy, the *Nebraskan* was renamed the *Sukhona* by the Russians when they had her on loan for one year, until she had been returned to San Francisco by the end of 1943. She was later sent to Brisbane as the *Nebraskan*. The Chief Officer on the *Sukhona* was a woman, she had left ladies' things behind in her cabin when leaving.

The Russians had completely covered the blower in order to reduce the icy down-draft from above the engine room in the freezing temperatures experienced north of Russia. The fact that the Americans in San Francisco didn't notice the blower was covered up surprised me and the engineers at the State Dockyards, half a year later when they heard about it.

We arrived at Sydney in May [1945], after an uneventful voyage, and anchored. The Marine Superintendent arrived soon after and climbed the 40ft up the ladder from his motor launch. In my office, he went slowly through 14 pages of Dock Report. "I am quite sure you haven't left anything out!" he said. "I am only sorry you have to dock at Melbourne, the Sydney iron workers are on strike, unfortunately." He looked at me, "I don't like it either", he said. All of a sudden, I had the greatest brainwave of my life: "What about Newcastle?", I said. "Newcastle? Why on earth didn't I think of Newcastle? - no, they are not on strike and their dry dock is 520ft long, just big enough for your battleship! See what I can do. It would suit me perfectly. See you first thing in the morning."

I had been in touch with my fiancée early on the phone and promised her, I would be up on Saturday. Next morning, the Super arrived about 9. "Newcastle!", he said, "Monday morning." Later, I went ashore and rang my fiancée again: "Please book me into 211, at the Northern, from Monday, for 6 months!" I still couldn't believe it and I looked genuinely surprised when our skipper asked me: "Can we be ready to leave 10pm Sunday? We are going to Newcastle for our big overhauls." "So I hear!", I said and assured him we would be ready on time. How lucky can you be?

May 1945: War Over, USAT Nebraskan to Newcastle

We began raising steam early next morning and I spent the day with my Danish friend and family in their home at Kirribilli [A Sydney harbourside suburb - Editor]. He was an electrical engineer, working for the U.S. Army in Sydney. We had an interesting day, listening to Copenhagen and London on his radio receiver. The war was over in Europe on that day in May 1945, and we listened continuously all day, until I went back onboard the *Nebraskan*. We left for Newcastle in the evening. On arrival there, we moored at a wharf not far from the Great Northern Hotel. A few days later, we moved to The Dyke End, where we stayed almost two months at the State Dockyards for our overhaul.

My fiancée and I had both lunch and dinner at my hotel on that unforgettable day and my favourite aunt greeted us both with a big smile, having her favourite nephew back home again! "Did you do it, Bill?", she asked me. "My incredible luck", I said, "but this time, I had to help a bit!" I had a few beers with Bill, my former boss and he handed me my highly complimentary references covering 14 months with the U.S. Army Shipbuilding Project at Newcastle, as Marine Surveyor, Marine Supervisor and Super.

References were not allowed in Denmark after 1920. All you were allowed was 'Mr So-And-So left his position with us as Marine - Engineer from this Company at his own request on this and that day after serving 25 months in the above capacity, onboard passenger liners S/S this and that and S/S something else, sailing between Copenhagen and New York.' Being far removed from Denmark, I realized good references would be essential, both in Australia and the U.S.A.

As soon as the *Nebraskan's* four boilers had cooled down sufficiently for me to enter, I was down, checking the amount of heavy scale deposited on the interior surfaces in the water and steam spaces. They were very much overdue for scaling, cleaning and checking. Conduction of heat through the furnace walls to the boiler water is considerably retarded by a thick layer of scale. No doubt a lot of extra oil had been burned to keep the giant engine maintaining a reasonable speed, with a 19 ft propeller attached, with four blades, 6 ft across. Afterwards, I spent several hours in the sooty interiors of the twelve furnaces, with a suitable gauge measuring any malformation or deviation from the cylindrical shape of each furnace. It was dirty and quite exhausting work, but certainly worthwhile, as I located one badly malformed furnace, which had changed considerably from its original shape. It was carefully marked for the benefit of the Marine Superintendent and the dock's boilermakers, and the extent of malformation indicated by me. The malformed furnace was later repaired, after it had been pressed into true cylindrical shape by an enormous jack, using the Scottish method:

Two heavy rings, with bolts fitted between them around the circumference, all bolts penetrating the furnace wall, tightened and caulked to withstand the boiler pressure, strong enough to resist enormous thermal expansion and contraction forces. An arrangement that has kept hundreds of furnaces in shape all over the world, almost a century. The Superintendent and I noticed a repair carried out in the U.S.A., by welding only one ring round the furnace. No

doubt it was done by a First Class welder, but they were in short supply at Newcastle then.

One day, when the Superintendent was visiting me in Newcastle, we had gone through a list of overhauls in hand and we had a quiet beer in my office. He noticed a picture of my fiancée on my desk. "Who is the pretty lady?", he asked me. "My fiancée," I replied. "Where in the world would she be?", he continued. "Here in Newcastle, she is a nurse at the hospital," I replied. He roared laughing. "You've had the giant Nebraskan redirected to Newcastle – with 82 men onboard – in order to be with your fiancée? You deserve my greatest admiration!"

One important item on my list was: Check and refill twelve large CO₂ bottles. They came in handy a year later at Batangas in the Philippines when we had a large oil fire in the boiler room.

Naturally, I was extremely happy to have my ship overhauled by the State Dockyards at Newcastle. The men there reminded me of the men I worked with at the giant Burmeister & Wain shipbuilding yards in Copenhagen, twenty years previously.

I knew everybody there and it was a pleasure to watch them put my ship in good condition. Nothing was left to chance. There was a War on and the word 'strike' had been left out of the workers' dictionary, I am sure nobody missed it.

On our first trip up North, we had had quite a few breakdowns on the *Nebraskan*. The four boilers were fed with water by Weir's feed pumps – well known by me as well as by any Scot who sails the Seven Seas down below. Our American engineers had never heard of Mr Weir and I had to type a story, called "Mr Weir's Feed Pump", distributing a copy to every one of my engineers and water tenders. The pumps needed complete overhauls badly and this was carried out by Scottish experts at the State Dockyards, greatly appreciated by the Chief Engineer onboard the *Nebraskan*.

Before you can enter a floating dock, you have to make sure water levels in all ballast tanks have been checked and noted, so that you can make sure they all have exactly the same water levels when you are ready to leave the dock again. You also have to make a note of the degrees of list – if any – your indicator shows. I would suggest absolute zero off the vertical, to make sure no damage is done to the long row of large blocks upon which the giant vessel is resting. A couple of degrees making the ship keel over when the water level in the dock has made the ship float would cause enormous damage and would necessitate re-emptying of the entire dock for extensive repairs.

On American ships, the Chief Engineer is responsible for this, whereas on ships of most other nationalities responsibility rests with the ship's carpenter. We went into the State Dock Yard's floating dock, assisted by several big tugs. I had no desire of wrecking this 520ft long floating dock. I had a good look at the *Nebraskan*, high and dry, she looked very grown up. It was a long climb to get onboard her, about 55 ft from the dock floor. Scaffolding was being erected all around, and workers were already scraping and brushing with steel brushes her 1/10 of a mile long hull, which was heavily overgrown with barnacles and marine growth. She was later painted with anti-fouling paint, to keep her smooth and increase her speed. Her 19ft propeller was enormous to look at, far bigger than any of Queen Mary's four props. I measured the wide blades with my arms and hands, 6ft across.

One sunny afternoon in **June 1945**, after the giant propeller shaft – diameter 21" – was passed by the Surveyor and painting of the hull completed, the floating dock was flooded and the *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan* was towed off the 500ft long line of stacked hardwood blocks, each 1ft x 1ft x 6ft, by two large tugs, and moored alongside the State Dockyard wharf at the Dyke End. No damage was done to the blocks at the bottom of the dock, so I slept well that night.

I had quietly fallen in love with the glorious *Elsass Lorraine*, the inglorious *Sukhona* but most of all, my lovely boat, *Nebraskan*. I had once spent a couple of enjoyable days in Omaha, Nebraska, helping the Nebraskans celebrate their fabulous annual cattle show.

Towards the end of all our overhauls and repairs, I began to realize that now was the time to make sure no details were overlooked and stores and spares ordered and received. I went from stem to stern repeatedly, checking and re-checking. One big job, suggested by the dockyard people: a large oil tank (not in use) was converted to a fresh-water tank, supplying showers to our 82 men onboard and boosting my popularity considerably.

The remaining repair jobs throughout the ship were continued and in the meantime, Marjorie and I had plenty opportunities to go on trips by bus to Swansea, 18 miles away, have lunch at the Hotel, often roast leg of port or duckling, scarce during the war. Later, we would walk to Cave's Beach for a swim or go fishing on Lake Macquarie in a hired boat, reading the paper – we never caught anything – didn't try either. The boat belonged to a Captain. We had many trips out there when I was working in Newcastle in 1943-44, building ships for the U.S. Army.

While I was still in Newcastle we were lucky to take part in the greatest event of the year, The Legacy Ball. My fiancée was lucky to get six tickets for two of my colleagues and myself with ladies. We were in uniform and had a fantastic time. Towards the end an auction was held at which we bought all the Scotch available at highly inflated prices. 100% went to Legacy, so we didn't complain about the prices. After the ball, we ended up in the home of some friends of my fiancée, where we danced and had a big feed of scrambled eggs till 4am. I am sure our hangovers the next day were worth it. Before I left on the *Nebraskan*, we joined several dances held at The Great Northern.

Finally the *Nebraskan's* face lift was completed and she was almost as good as when she was the *Elsass Lorraine*. On our way to Sydney, empty, she was rolling like mad. While we were loading in Sydney, my fiancée had lunch onboard one day, which she thought was good. While she was onboard, I managed to get her down three stories to the floor of the engine room, to see the biggest engine she and I have ever seen. She pretended she wasn't impressed!

1945: Nebraskan to Asia, via Tasmania

When we were fully loaded except the very tops of our six holds, we left for Burnie, Tasmania, where we were to top up with potatoes in crates: the famous Tasmanian Brownells. I had told our Canadian Second Assistant Engineer to give her all she's got! But about midnight, the entire ship was vibrating from stem to stern, I nearly fell out of my bunk. I rang him in the engine room and asked

him: "How much is she doing?" "About 92", he said. "Keep her on 88", I told him and we settled down. This was our Full Speed. At Burnie, the population had been making 38,000 crates, holding about 200 lbs each. The main reason for the crates being kept well apart was the high temperatures in the tropics on our way to the Philippines. Another precaution were some giant canvas ventilators, from the rigging to the tops of the holds, supplying air to the potatoes. Later, we found it worked very well, we didn't have ½% spoilage of the Brownells on both trips we made. While we were at Burnie, the staff in the local supermarkets invited us to several dances. One evening our sailors stole a whole barrel of beer from the local pub and rolled it down the street, singing "Roll out the Barrel". After some persuasion, they brought it back to the pub, drank the lot, and paid for it!

We soon made friends with many people in Burnie. One man and his wife took us round on long trips in Northern Tasmania, including Devonport and a town near the centre of Tasmania where we visited a cement factory. The manager showed us around and complained about the Sydney Harbour authorities rejecting his plans for concrete piers at Circular Quay. He showed me all the machinery and said, "We only have a couple of American crushers to show you." I told him I was Danish, not American. He said, "The entire plant is Danish." We were friends from the start.

Representatives from the Tasmanian Potato Board invited the Skipper and me on a trip to Hobart at the weekend, including an evening at a famous nightclub, with tables reserved etc., a place called Wrest Point. We would be taken there by car, right through Tasmania, a lovely trip, leaving Saturday morning. But, you wouldn't believe it! The wharfies worked so hard that we finished loading Friday night and left early Saturday. Goodbye Hobart!

Heading for Tacloban in the Philippine Islands, with 38,000 crates of potatoes, all Americans in the Philippines were looking forward to French fried Brownells, after the dehydrated variety keeping us alive so long. A large Naval landing barge came alongside and invited us onboard for a picture show: admission: one crate of Brownells!

August 1945: End of War in Japan

On our way to Tacloban, something very important happened, to put it mildly. I received the news about the atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. [*On 6 and 9 August 1945 - Editor*] We were told Hiroshima was severely damaged and over a hundred thousand people were killed there, whereas Nagasaki was suffering a less deadly attack. I knew that city quite well. We were sent there often before the war and knew quite a few Japanese. The Great Northern Telegraph Company – my former employers – had a transmission station at Nagasaki, operating the Shanghai–Copenhagen telegraphic connection, via Vladivostok–Siberia–Russia. I have never heard what happened to the Danish technicians at Nagasaki during the bombing raid.

About a week later, still on our way, we learned the War was over! Peace was signed by General MacArthur and the Japanese onboard the 45,000 ton battleship Missouri at Yokohama, on the 15th of August, 1945.

Our Captain warned everyone onboard to maintain strict blackout - U.S.N. orders. It was feared that many Japanese submarine commanders may not be aware of the surrender. My thoughts went to Steven's Hotel, Chicago, the gigantic breakfast room, where I picked up a paper of a pile 4 ft high and saw the letters 'WAR' across the front page. Throughout that day, nobody talked about anything but Hitler's invasion of Poland and the Declarations of War by England and France. It was almost exactly six years ago, and now the World had had enough. The enemies had been thoroughly beaten and hard times lay ahead for friends and foes.

Having discharged our Brownells at Tacloban, we went to Manila with the rest of our cargo. Our Commander resigned in order to join his wife and daughter in New Zealand. We were good friends from the start, both being old China hands. Our new Commander - Andy - was a real Nordic type you find only in Norway. Compared to Norwegians, Danes and Swedes are only wishy-washy types! Not the real 28 carat Northerner born and bred in Norway! I am sure our Commander is an uninterrupted descendant from the Vikings of old. Heavily built, tall and incredibly blond - I have never seen a man his size and age with hair so blond! He almost gave up trying to buy a hat big enough for his large head in San Francisco. He was an Australian citizen, with an Australian Master's Ticket, probably the most difficult in the world to obtain. I believe years ago it was called a Kangaroo Ticket - compared to a Bamboo Ticket at Hong Kong - but not anymore: - both Bamboo and Kangaroo tickets are very highly regarded all over the world. He became my best friend onboard.

Sailing orders for Biak Island, where we were to spend 90 days. The island is about 60 miles south of the Equator and was part of the Dutch East Indies. The war was over and we were sent there to take away everything we could carry, including all American officers and men, the Commander of Biak Island and the Port Commander, several Captains in Charge of the Signal Corps and all the American GIs, all of whom were dark. The Captains at the Signal Corps had dinner a couple of times with me, after which they supplied me with gear for my home-made photographic enlarger, including two gross 24" x 20" photo paper, 300ft 6cm wide Panchromatic film in a big tin, developer and fixing salt, the latter, a drum weighing 60 lbs - plus hardener (for tropical use) - etc. etc. I had an old Kodak Camera I had bought in Peking Road in Shanghai, the centre of second-hand gear of all types, all very cheap. It cost me £1. It had self-timing and I had taken dozens of good photos, including one beautiful one of Marjorie on the beach at Newcastle, wearing a very smart suit, during our two months stay at Newcastle for general overhauls.

Our ship's carpenter, Mr Chips (normally selling antiques in U.S.A.), made a frame etc. for my old camera, so I could use it in reverse as an enlarger, with an opaque glass plate and a very powerful Milky Globe behind it. My early enlargements were only 20" x 24" and came out first class, after quite a few attempts. The first problems were exposure time and time in the developer. Once I had learnt that, I became more ambitious. I decided to make a giant enlargement, 6ft x 20". Now I really had an exposure problem! I decided to use three papers on my bathroom door, fastened by drawing pins. The exposure had to take place in a pitch-dark room, later developing and fixing the papers in the same dark room. I had a few failures experimenting with exposure time, also fastening the papers in pitch-darkness, three in all! I put a large sheet of paper on my

door, in order to get the focus right. The camera was clamped down to a solid table. I adjusted the exact distance from the exposure to cover the 6 ft x 20" and managed to get a very sharp picture on the paper fastened on the door. I had my notes for ordinary 24" x 20" size, both distance and exposure time. If you use twice the distance, you have to use four times the exposure time.

It was almost impossible to fasten three papers on my bathroom door in a completely dark room, but finally I was ready. Using my stopwatch and keeping it so near my old camera that I could see the hands turning and switch off at the right time. The result was perfect. Then, all three papers under my shower an hour, later dried slowly out of the sun. Finally, I glued the three papers together. "Never again", I thought!

A DC3 plane did courier service for us every week from Brisbane with mail and whatever the Army wanted sent up. The pilot, Mac, soon my good friend, always had dinner with me onboard when he was in Biak. I had glued my fiancée together and sent her with Mac to Brisbane and he sent her on to Newcastle. When she saw it, she thought I had gone raving mad! I think she burnt it.

Mac also took 8 cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes down and sent them on to my fiancée. She never received them - caught by the Customs. They offered my fiancée one carton if she would tell them who sent them off from Brisbane. She was ready to leave the country after that I but she didn't, I am glad to say.

One evening, when Mac had dinner with us he asked me if I would like to go up with him on a test flight the following day. I said, "Sure, I would love to." The next day I met him on the Coral Strip and we went onboard, Mac, his radio operator and I. After we had taken off, Mac began to talk about the new engine they had fitted instead of the one that had conked out. "We had one sent up, it stopped in mid-air, it's a bit awkward to land on one motor - I hope this one is better." So did I! Mac tried all kinds of what I called aerobatics. One moment the horizon was vertical, then he dive-bombed the *Nebraskan*, and the entire crew came up on deck, to see what was going on. He almost skimmed the water, right alongside our ship, and roared off again. Finally we landed after an hour, and several of my mates came rushing out on the strip to see if I was still onboard. I am sure I would be unsuited to be a test pilot.

My friend, the Port Commander in Biak, an American Army Captain, thought it would be awful to leave all the lovely food to the Dutch who wouldn't pay a cent for it. But our refrigeration plant had conked out completely, or rather both motor and pulley had disintegrated.

Our steward used the Army cool rooms ashore to store his food, but the Port Commander and I were discussing how on earth we would be able to keep enough food for over ten days for about 200 men on the way to Manila. We had spent a couple of weeks trying to find a replacement motor for our fridge, but without success. All the motors we found were either too big or small, or AC not DC.

I discussed the problem with two of my engineers, who were fitters. Our first job was finding or making a new pulley. Rudy, the Norwegian Second Assistant Engineer, found a large lump of cast bronze, which we all agreed would be big enough for a four-belt pulley. I put it in the lathe and started to turn it, but was stopped by my two engineers: "We will do it!", they said, "It's not your job, Chief". So be it, I thought. I hoped they really meant

what they said. They did. They worked all night, in two shifts, and had the pulley ready to be fitted to the motor spindle early in the morning.

But the motor was dead. It had been overheated and had melted all the solder out of the slots in the 48 commutator bars in which 96 wire ends of the motor windings were soldered. I showed my mates the armature, when a man had helped me to put it into the lathe: "Can you solder the 96 wire ends into the slots?" I asked them. "Not a chance", they both agreed. "Call Nick" I said. "I hope you have plenty of tin, soldering fluid and a big electric soldering iron," I asked him. "The best in the world!" said Nick. He was right - it was first class gear and easy to use. Well, to solder 96 ends, permanently into 48 commutator slots took me all night, 12 hours. Our two engineers then assembled it all without a hitch and put the entire plant back into operation. I didn't disturb them, I told them, "Leave me alone until our cool rooms are frozen." I must have been unconscious about twelve hours, when they shook me and told me that everything was O.K.

I called in at the Port Commander's Office and passed on the good news. I told him we were ready for his food any time it suited him. He was delighted, and so was I. The following day, almost all food stocked in the Commander's cool rooms was transferred to the *Nebraskan*.

Earlier during our stay at Biak, we invited an Australian Liaison Officer, a Major, to dinner onboard. On his way down, he shot a wild boar from his jeep. He was quite proud of it, and with good reason. It was put into our cool room and the Major invited to another dinner party onboard, with Roast Wild Boar on the Menu. A fortnight later we all agreed the boar was lovely food, washed down with a good Australian red (or two or more). Our Chief Cook had done a fine job. I can highly recommend the lovely strong taste to any gourmet - my first taste of wild boar.

Our entire operation at Biak had taken over 90 days. On the last night before we left, we were raising steam on the boilers and all 80 officers and men not on duty had gone to the open air cinema ashore to enjoy two full-length movies. When the large crowd returned onboard after midnight, all hell broke loose. Two firemen found their lockers broken into and \$1100 stolen! Our Captain knew exactly what to do in a case like that. He ordered all hands on deck and made the following speech: "I have placed a letter box on this deck and I want the man who has taken the money to put it in an envelope and drop it in the box, which is locked." He continued: "No-one will be around this part of the ship tonight, so I can promise you won't be detected, and when the money is returned, nothing further will be done and this incident will be forgotten."

Two hours later, the deck was deserted and no letter had arrived. The Chief Officer suggested to the Captain that the ship's crew search the ship from stem to stern. This was done. About half the crew went through all parts of the entire ship, searching thoroughly, but found nothing. A year later - in San Francisco - the Captain and I found the solution.

1945: Manila

We left Biak forever - no tears were shed - and we had a good

trip to Manila. Most of the American Officers were professionals - lawyers, university lecturers, college teachers, company directors - and civil engineers, the largest crowd of bright young men I have ever met. They were all looking forward to getting home to the States and get back to normal lives. Andy, my best friend and only superior, and I had obtained the rank of Colonels in the U.S. Army a long time ago, but we weren't very excited as yet. We loved the tiny Silver Eagle on our collars. Who cared about Army Ranks in New Guinea or in the Philippines anyhow? New York was another cup of tea. I had the time of my life there for a while, but we were all soon in civies again.

In the first afternoon, while we were heading for Manila, a fireman came to my office and showed me a letter, which was dropped down through a ventilator to the boiler room when he was on duty there. It was from one of his colleagues, addressed to him, it read:

"Give me back the money you have re-stolen, or I will report you to the skipper." He left the letter with me and told me he knew who had written it. I read it and noticed the handwriting was very unusual, in part: "Or I will report you to the skipper": the "I" was shaped like a cross. I had never seen an "I" written like that.

I thought I had already solved the mystery and immediately changed my name to Sherlock Holmes and went up and showed the letter to the Skipper, Andy, who agreed with me that we would get our man as soon as we could prove his identity.

The next day, I sent for the suspect. He came to my office and I told him I wanted a statement from each individual member of the engine room and boiler room crews, stating that they knew nothing about the stolen money. I gave him a typed sample of the statement and told him to copy it in his own handwriting and sign it - that was all. "I am not accusing you or anyone else of having anything to do with the case at all" - were my final words.

The fireman sat down at my desk and started to copy what I had written. "Take your time", I said. He sure did. I think it took him twenty minutes to do it. The letter "I" appeared five times in the statement and they were all lovely crosses - perfect! The Skipper called me Sherlock Holmes for months afterwards.

When we arrived at Manila outer harbour, two Army M.Ps., each with a 45 Automatic stuck in his belt, climbed onboard. Immediately a meeting was held in the Captain's office, during which I showed them the letter and statement from the suspect. The two MPs agreed right away the handwritings in both letters were identical. "Bring him up here," they said, "Leave him with us alone." We did that and sometime later they appeared with the fireman handcuffed to one of them. They went ashore in their launch and the unlucky man was jailed in Manila. Jails in Manila aren't very comfortable, they said.

Our star passenger on the trip to Manila we had just completed was undoubtedly the former Commander of Biak Island, a U.S. Army Colonel. I enjoyed many hours of his company on the Upper Deck, discussing almost anything imaginable in the ten days we were under way. I used the opportunity to hear his opinion about my Captain and myself obtaining the rank of Colonels. He said, "I think you fully deserve your high rank and your 100% War Bonus, when serving in danger areas, but I begrudge the fact that I am not entitled to a similar bonus - even when serving in the front line!" I agreed with him, but didn't regard myself qualified to discuss it.

In Manila, our first port of call, everybody in the U.S. Forces were celebrating the end of the war. I met a lot of interesting people there. A U.S. Army Captain (a lawyer, one of my old friends from Biak) introduced me to a Spanish attorney-at-law and his wife, with whom he was having dinner in one of the good restaurants. Two days later the Spanish lawyer and his wife invited me to dinner in their home, a lovely place with a big garden. A tiny daughter, aged 5, played for us on the piano. Signor Montessa gave me a vivid description of a battle in his street between a Japanese machine gunner and an American tank appearing at the opposite end. The whole family was hiding in the basement while the shooting took place, until all of a sudden the American tank opened fire and blasted the machine gunner off the face of the earth with a deafening roar. When we walked around in Manila, all the kids greeted us with: "Hello Joe!"

One night I had dinner at my hotel with the Spanish couple: I had known them nearly six months then. They invited me home for a chat, but I declined because I couldn't resist the temptation to go to bed upstairs whenever I felt like it. We had coffee in a large room, where dances were often held, although that night people were staying after coffee for a nightcap. I stayed a while after my friends had left and enjoyed the music and the good voice of Spanish singer who sang many old Spanish songs. After each song, the singer withdrew to the rear of the room and sat on a chair. After a while, I invited him to have a couple of beers with me. I introduced myself and he told me his name was Ambrosio de Morales. During the following few hours, when Ambrosio wasn't singing, he sat at my table and had a few beers with me. He told me he had been a movie actor before the war and was hoping to be in front of the cameras soon.

He sang *La Paloma* in Spanish and was rewarded by a thundering applause from the large audience. I thought the song was much nicer in Spanish than the same melody sung in Danish, which I had known since I was a boy. I told Ambrosio that, and he agreed to write down the words in Spanish. The waitress brought a sheet of paper and Ambrosio not only wrote the words in Spanish, but wrote it in a way, so I would be able to pronounce every word of the song correctly. It starts like this in Spanish: "Cuando sali de la Habana Valgo me dio, Madie me ha visto salie sino fui yo. Una linda quanchinango alla voy yo, lo cual me decia que ci sinor. Si a tu ventana Uegara untia una Paloma tratata con carinaque es si persona ..."

Still in Manila Bay, one day we were filling our oil tanks moored on one side of a large tanker, and on the other side was the old British liner, the *Oxfordshire*, moored for the same purpose. I went round to the port side and got the shock of my life! Lined up along the railings were forty or more skeletons, the remains of British Prisoners of War, rescued from certain death from the Japanese Prisoner of War Camp in Hong Kong. I have never seen a more horrible sight in my life. They were lined up to show the world what some Japanese animals can do to humans in a war. I have seen films of what the Germans did to the Jews, but this was not a film!

I remembered back to the 1st of December 1941, when we left Hong Kong Harbour with 40 other ships under British flag, a week before Pearl Harbour, having just returned from a cable repair we did for the American Navy in the mine fields at Corregidor, outside Manila. The officers told us they expected the Japanese any minute.

Apparently, Pearl Harbour was not as well informed. I hadn't seen any of our Corregidor friends. The wife of an old Danish friend of mine refused to leave her American friends, when the Danish Vice Consul begged her to seek shelter at the Consulate where she would be safe. Later, she and all the ladies with whom she stayed were mowed down by Japanese machine gunners. General Eisenhower said on Manila radio that Manila was the second-worst damaged city in the world, after Warsaw. The Japanese had fought from house to house and the destruction was mainly done by artillery and tanks, not aerial bombing like cities in Europe.

On the day of **New Year's Eve, 1945-46**, our Commander met two British Majors at our Office in Cebu and, as you would expect on a New Year's afternoon, he asked them, "What are you doing tonight, Majors?" They replied, "Getting stinko together and moaning about the fact that we have to spend New Year's Eve in such a God forsaken place!" Our Commander replied, "We would greatly appreciate it if you will help us celebrate New Year on our good ship *Nebraskan*, U.S. Army Transport. We are 82 men onboard and we certainly hope to make the first few hours of 1946 some of the best we have ever enjoyed!" The Majors were beaming! "What a lovely thing for you to say, Colonel!" was their comment and I am sure they didn't regret it. They stayed with us till well into 1946. We put them up for as long as they wanted to stay. Our charming guests had been through the D-Day Operation on the beaches of Normandy, 18 months previously. They both represented the public image of British Majors, with big red moustachios, covering the lower parts of their faces. I remember only the name of one of them and I am sure I shall never forget it: Major Smiley, who later that evening sang and sang, with a good voice. We didn't want to turn him off. We enjoyed immensely: "When Smiley's Eyes were Irish!" He must have sung it a thousand times, since he was six. Both Majors had good tenor voices and our own good and not-so-good voices joined the chorus with Christmas Carols. It also seems to me that Major Smiley at one time sang the aria from *La Boheme*, "Your tiny hand is frozen!"

Sometime during the evening I went down into the boiler room with a bottle of Scotch for the men on watch, but I found the entire crowd of boiler attendants celebrating down below, singing Christmas Carols and other songs. When I handed them my present, they sang, "For he is a jolly good fellow!" I thanked them for the show they had put on and also for being the best Black Gang I had ever worked with. I was pleased they had decided to hold their festivities down below - I could then be sure there was somebody in the boiler room, a dangerous place to be left unattended.

Back on the bridge, you would think we were opera singers rehearsing. I've heard worse performances than we all endured in the early hours of 1946. British Majors are good company, we all agreed, not least in the early hours of a New Year's morning, shortly after the end of a World War. I shall never forget that night in the Philippines when Smiley's eyes were more Irish than he would ever care to remember.

Of course, most of our friends in the U.S. Army were Americans, and our Commander and I both agreed you could hardly find better people anywhere. But our two Majors from Great Britain seemed more like people from our own home towns in Scandinavia - meeting them on equal terms. A European gust of wind.

Afterwards, we were wondering what we were doing staying in

the Philippines week after week, loaded to the Plimsol marks with valuable goods, thousands of tons, waiting to be dropped somewhere. A couple of months later we were told all our cargo had to be taken to U.S.A.

Part of our cargo consisted of Bailey Bridges, used in modern warfare. At Biak we had to leave quite a lot of valuable gear, including about a dozen Jeeps which the Dutch accepted with much pleasure. The Port Commander offered me his short-wave radio transmitter if I could find room for it onboard, but I didn't want to commit myself to dispose of it and I couldn't see any way of taking it to Australia when I landed there eventually. An entire hold was stocked with expensive Havana Cigars and Edgeworth Pipe Tobacco. Our Philipinos were given typewriters, by whom, I couldn't tell but they told me they had been allowed to take them. They never got rid of them, although they were very valuable. In Manila, the MPs stopped them - they were given to the crew who took over the *Nebraskan* when she was put into mothballs in Brunswick, Georgia.

After a while, we were sent to Batangas, in the Province of Batangas, 78 miles from Manila by road. We must have stayed there a couple of months and often went to Manila, hitch-hiking. Several times I managed to stop a staff car, thanks to the Silver Eagle on my collar. Sometimes we went by bus, half full of Tagalogs and other interesting people. It took a whole day to get there.

The steward, Cunningham, bought a nice little monkey in Manila. He became our pet onboard and played with our tomcat, they were good friends. I still have a snapshot of Elmer, the monkey, holding a bottle of San Miguel beer up high and emptying it to the last drop. Later, one day at sea, he was playing with our cat, and jumped up on the railing and fell overboard. The steward was in tears - we all felt a bit that way. He was sure he would never be able to get a lovely pet like Elmer again, and the whole ship was in mourning. Now, we had only Tom. He was blamed for playing too roughly with his little playmate, but Tom missed him as much we did. One day, an enormous tomcat invaded us. We tried to chase him ashore, without success. He hissed at and bit everyone. Tom did not intend to allow a blinking Philippino cat into his domain, so he charged and tried to tear his visitor to pieces. But, compared to the Phlipp., our Tom was a midget. We soon realized we would lose our certified *Nebraskan* tomcat, if we let them continue, so a sailor took the invader a mile inland to the other side of Batangas.

One day, I went down into the engine room to have a look at everything. I didn't do that very often, but this was my lucky day! When I arrived, the Canadian 2nd Assistant Engineer grabbed my hand and shouted "Fire!" He pointed to the boiler room "CO2!", I roared! "Bring them in here!" In less than a minute, I had five big bottles. I tore the valves open on all of them in a few seconds and slid them out into the middle of the flames. I could hear the bottles blast liquid CO₂ into the fire. Then I realized the most urgent thing now was to blank off all the big ventilators up top, blowing air down into both engine and boiler rooms. The flames stopped roaring and diminished gradually, the fire died out completely in an hour. Nick came running down when the fire was under control. He was happy our good ship was saved - he had been ashore.

The fire had started under the boilers where three inches of oil had settled. If the fire hadn't been put out immediately, then the heat would have built up an enormous pressure in the two full

settling tanks, and they would explode, leaving the entire ship a blazing inferno. A torpedo in the boiler room would have the same effect. At the Institute of Marine Engineering we had learned a lot about fire fighting. You have only a couple of minutes to stop a dangerous fire. If you are delayed more, you have lost your ship.

1946: To San Francisco

Finally, out of the blue, we received sailing orders for the following day, to go to San Francisco. "Not bad", we all agreed, after, New Guinea, Morotai, Biak, Manila, Batangas etc. "They can keep the lot" I thought. I rang Montesa and his wife and wished them all the best for their future. My wish came true a year later: Montesa was appointed to the high office of District Attorney of Manila by President Roxas. I thought of his tiny pianist.

We turned over the main engine when we had full steam on our four boilers. The engine telegraph rang: *Full Ahead* and we were on our way to Yokohama to fill our oil tanks for the long trip across the Pacific. In Yokohama, nobody was allowed ashore. I had seen all I wanted to see of Yokohama in 1939. I didn't miss anything. Soon we were on our way again, settling down. A passenger, a First Lieutenant, in charge of the cargo, was good company the following couple of months. I played chess with him. I also played with my old partner, the Chief Officer.

When we arrived at San Francisco Bay, we moored on the Oakland Side, at the wrong end of the 8½ mile long Oakland Bay Bridge. I had stayed at San Francisco shortly after the War started. I had to change to another ship from the *Empress of Canada* to a Japanese Liner, leaving from Vancouver, because of the war. I thought San Francisco was similar to Sydney – my hometown – although no city in the world can be compared to the beauty of Sydney.

We received overseas mail, I got the letter I was looking for from my girl. It was lovely! I also received a magazine addressed to the Chief Engineer, *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan*. It was The San Francisco Refrigeration Service Contractors Association Monthly. I studied it, it was interesting. The former Chief Engineer was apparently engaged in refrigeration at some time in the past. It gave me an idea of what I could do when I returned to Australia.

Andy our Skipper and I went ashore across the longest bridge in the world over navigable water. It was nice to be on Terra Firma, after crossing the Pacific. We settled down at the Palace Hotel, where we had a good dinner after a long session at the famous bar, facing an enormous painting, covering almost the entire wall. It showed The Pied Piper, followed by a big crowd of children. We thought it was beautiful. We just couldn't tear ourselves away from it, for a couple of hours. The steaks at the Palace Hotel were good and succulent. We found out that Caruso and John Barrimore had stayed at the Palace Hotel during the earthquake in 1906 and that the hotel had suffered no damage at all.

2	NO	JURROCK,	THOMAS	43 Yrs.	2nd Officer	7 May '40	P.I.	Yes	Yes	28 M	Swedish	Swedish	72"	105	Claims Never Reported
3	NO	BOSSLER,	John F.	16 Mos.	3rd Officer	10 May '46	Manila, P.I.	Yes	Yes	23 M	German	U.S.A.	74"	195	
4	NO	WILSON,	Oscar	20 Yrs.	3rd Officer	10 May '46	Manila, P.I.	Yes	Yes	42 M	Scandinavian	British (Nat)	68"	146	Claims Never Reported
5	NO	MC COURT,	Ray J.	20 Yrs.	Carpenter	4 Oct. '45	Aust.	Yes	Yes	48 M	English	British	70 1/2"	143	Claims Never Reported
6	NO	STEVENS,	Treg W.	4 Yrs.	Boatman	15 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	21 M	English	British	71"	144	Claims Never Reported
7	NO	KEMP,	Edward F.	17 Yrs.	A.B.Seaman	7 July '45	Aust.	Yes	Yes	33 M	English	British	66"	170	Claims Never Reported
8	NO	LIU,	Ching Foo	8 Yrs.	A.B.Seaman	29 Sept. '45	Singapore, P.I.	Yes	No	26 M	Chinese	Chinese	67"	175	Claims Never Reported
9	NO	MC DONALD,	John D.	16 Mos.	A.B.Seaman	14 Mar. '45	Aust.	Yes	Yes	18 M	English	British	70"	154	Claims Never Reported
10	NO	JARANA,	Antonio	7 Mos.	A.B.Seaman	14 Jan. '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	18 M	Spanish	Filipino	68 1/2"	160	Claims Never Reported
11	NO	BARROSO,	Cepriano	28 Yrs.	A.B.Seaman	1 Dec. '45	Cebu, P.I.	Yes	Yes	46 M	Filipino	Filipino	63"	118	Claims Never Reported
12	NO	HUBBETT,	David A.	2 1/2 Yrs.	A.B.Seaman	20 Nov. '45	Manila, P.I.	Yes	Yes	20 M	English	British	75 1/2"	198	Claims Never Reported
13	NO	SHAW,	Thomas W.	1 Yr.	Ord.Seaman	17 Mar. '46	Bah., N.G.	Yes	Yes	18 M	Irish	U.S.A.	70"	162	
14	NO	WHITS,	Robert J.	6 Mos.	Ord.Seaman	25 Mar. '46	Bah., N.G.	Yes	Yes	19 M	Irish	U.S.A.	69 1/2"	145	
15	NO	GOTINA,	Jesus M.	2 Mos.	Ord.Seaman	8 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	20 M	Spanish	Filipino	69"	125	Claims Never Reported
16	NO	ADAMS,	Harry	12 Mos.	Ord.Seaman	8 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	44 M	English	British	67 1/2"	143	Claims Never Reported
17	NO	LARRAZABAL,	Albarto	1 Yr.	Ord.Seaman	23 Nov. '45	P.I.	Yes	Yes	25 M	Spanish	Filipino	68"	155	Claims Never Reported
18	NO	WELTO,	Damaso	6 Mos.	Ord.Seaman	6 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	38 M	Filipino	Filipino	62"	161	Claims Never Reported
19	NO	ISEDLING,	Francis J.	3 1/2 Yrs.	Sh. Team, Clerk, Sr.	6 June '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	23 M	German	U.S.A.	72"	150	Claims Never Reported
20	NO	VILLALON,	Godofredo A.	18 Yrs.	Chief Radio Operator	14 Jan. '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	42 M	Filipino	Filipino	67 1/2"	160	Claims Never Reported
21	NO	ELMWOOD,	William	23 Yrs.	Chief Engineer	15 Mar. '43	AUST.	Yes	Yes	51 M	Swedish	Swedish	74"	199	Claims Never Reported
22	NO	NEEDLES,	William J.	17 Yrs.	1st Engineer	18 Oct. '44	San Francisco, Calif.	Yes	Yes	34 M	Irish	U.S.A.	74"	160	
23	NO	RISORICK,	John F.	2 1/2 Yrs.	2nd Engineer	25 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	36 M	Dutch	U.S.A.	68"	150	
24	NO	KIDD,	Ellis R.	4 Yrs.	3rd Engineer	14 June '46	Manila, P.I.	Yes	Yes	29 M	English	British	70"	160	Claims Never Reported
25	NO	TBS,	Edward W.	2 1/2 Yrs.	3rd Engineer	25 May '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	30 M	German	U.S.A.	70"	150	
26	NO	ELESWOOD,	Abouel H.	7 Yrs.	Deck Engineer	8 Jan. '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	25 M	Egyptian	Egyptian	63"	127	Claims Never Reported
27	NO	BARAVIAN,	Antonio	7 Mos.	Fireman	16 Mar. '46	P.I.	Yes	Yes	22 M	Filipino	Filipino	64"	114	Claims Never Reported

Part of Nebraskan crew list on arrival in San Francisco

1946: San Francisco to New York, via Panama

We had orders to go direct to New York from San Francisco, via the Panama Canal. We were looking forward to it! Before we left San Francisco, we took onboard a load of lovely Californian vegetables and fruit, the kind we had never had the luck of eating in New Guinea or in the Philippines. We set course for Balboa where we had to enter the Canal. It runs almost due north from its entrance at Balboa, on the Gulf of Panama. In passing from the Pacific to the Atlantic, a ship has to enter three locks. I was downstairs all day, manoeuvring my engine, making sure we neither damaged the *Nebraskan* nor the Panama Canal. We finally arrived at the Atlantic End without a scratch to the *Nebraskan* or to the Canal.

A copper steam pipe of one of our many winches was leaking. A Scot picked it up and took it ashore to weld it. I knew it was in good hands. When he knocked on my door the following morning and reported the pipe was O.K. and assembled in place, I invited him to have a Johnnie Walker Black. "Too early", he said, until he saw the label, after which he had a couple of drams. He looked more cheerful when he left.

Nick, our First Assistant Engineer, knew one of the twin towns at the Atlantic end of the canal - Christobal-Colon - very well. He introduced me to a friend who was a member of the Colon Club. I had dinner with them there and Nick promised to take me around to do some shopping, duty free. The shops were open all night and I bought some nice presents for my wife-to-be in one of the biggest shops. A beautiful gold filigree brooch - the only one the man had. The shopkeeper was honest, he told me it was silver filigree, gold plated. My wife still wears it on occasions. I bought many other things duty free including a pair of nylon stockings for Marjorie's birthday; they were not available in Australia then. I sent them by air mail and they arrived duty-free in an airmail envelope right on her birthday. Before we left Panama, we all stocked up with Scotch whisky. You could enter any U.S. Port with \$100 worth of goods duty-

free. I had about \$200 worth of goods when I finally arrived at New York, but the Customs Officer said, "I am sure you didn't pay more than \$100 for it all!"

Reiswick, my Second Assistant Engineer, always drank Bourbon whiskey, and often invited me in for a couple in his cabin. I didn't like the stuff very much, but when I returned from my expedition at Colon, about 2am, I brought him a bottle of Johnnie Black. He liked it so much that he never drank anything else as long as I knew him. We would go into a bar in New York, he would order Johnnie Walker Black: if it was not available, he would leave.

1946: New York

We arrived at New York Harbour after an uneventful voyage from Panama. We were welcomed by the giant Goddess of Liberty, in the middle of the harbour, my old girlfriend from the time I lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. New York is a colossal place and was the world's largest city then. I always liked the people in N.Y. It is not a city for tourists. They usually feel out of place there. It belongs to the New Yorkers and they love their City. Shortly after we arrived, our Cargo Lieutenant and I had dinner at the Dixie Hotel on Times Square in the centre of New York. After dinner, I tipped the dark waiter two silver dollars. "You probably need them more than I do!" he said, and handed them back to me. "I probably do", I said, and pocketed the money. My friend, a New Yorker himself, was up in arms! The two dollars was actually 20% of our bill. Afterwards I thought, "How wonderful! They are so well off now that they can afford to give you back your tip." When I lived in New York in the twenties, the dark gentlemen occupied the rear section of the trams!

A week later, our Second and Senior-Third Assistant Engineers, both Americans, who had never visited New York before, told me they would like to spend a couple of days in the city if it could be arranged and if I would join them. I had a talk with Mel, the First Assistant Engineer, about taking their watches for a couple of days. He was quite willing to do that, as he was from San Francisco and had no interest in New York. We all agreed it would be a good idea to stay there a couple of days.

Niel had taken over all responsibilities onboard, from Saturday to Monday, we agreed it was the best time to be shown the wonders of New York. We settled down Saturday afternoon at the **Dixie Hotel on Times Square** [250 West 43rd Street, now Carter Hotel - Editor], where Ray, Tim and I had a couple of Scotches before dinner to boost our appetites. A violinist, Mr Patric, played and entertained us and other guests. He played Jealousy, a lovely melody, well played. I told him, it was composed by Jacob Gade, a Danish composer. Mr Patrick didn't believe me. I should have bet on it. He dug into his music and agreed. A waiter told us dinner would be served in the dining room shortly, so we moved in there, in order to choose what we were going to eat. There was quite a variety.

The dinner was good, with an expensive Californian red in support. After dinner, we moved back into the lounge and continued with what made Scotland world famous. After a few hours, our waiter got himself a bit mixed up. Ray shouted, "What kind of Jungle Juice are you giving us now? - call the Headwaiter!" The latter didn't arrive, but the Juice was changed in a jiffy and our waiter

apologized profusely. Tim had put a phone call through to his wife, with whom he hadn't talked since he went to New Guinea. She wasn't at home, but the call would be put through when she arrived. It was getting very late when we decided to book a large room upstairs. The night porter insisted there was no vacancy, until Ray used modern diplomacy. The room was very large, with bath and a lovely view of Times Square. I suggested a trip to Wivel, a large popular night club nearby, with a Danish chef.

At **Wivel**, they served Roast Duckling with sugar-glazed potatoes, Danish Style – any hour until 4am. We took a taxi and arrived there two minutes later, when the floor show was in progress, with scantily-dressed skating ladies showing their skill and what else they liked to show, to the tune of Skaters' Waltz. This kind of floor show had become very popular in New York's largest hotels and night clubs. Before the show was ready to start, an extra floor, with a surface of beautiful smooth ice, moved out slowly from below the rear wall and the dance floor became a skating rink. After the show, the skating rink disappeared slowly under the rear wall, leaving the dance floor for the guests.

We settled down to Roast Duckling and small doses of Aquavit, Aalborg. My two friends agreed with me: we had finally returned to civilization – after years in New Guinea. And as the night wore on, we felt more and more civilized. So much so that about 4am I got a wonderful idea. I said, "Ray, call the headwaiter. Tell him I am an old friend of the famous Danish tenor Laurits Melchor at the Met, and if the band leader approves, I would like to sing with the orchestra." Ray looked at me as if he was facing a firing squad, but he did what I asked him to do, as usual.

The headwaiter and the band leader arrived almost immediately. They both insisted they would love to hear me sing. The leader, with an odd smile on his face, asked me what I would like to sing. I said, "La Paloma in Spanish." He looked greatly relieved. I am sure he expected me to say Handel's Messiah. Before he called me up, I noticed he turned the microphone off!

That won't make much difference, I thought. I looked down on Ray and Tim, each of them with a big question mark imprinted on his face. Back to reality. I nodded to the band leader and went up to the orchestra, he turned and faced his men. They began to play, and I sang **La Paloma**, from beginning to end with a voice you could hear in Brooklyn. THUNDERING APPLAUSE! I still can't believe it, so many years after. Ray and Tim almost fell off their seats clapping. One of the guests shouted, BRAVO!

Shortly afterwards, the band leader took my arm "I'm sorry, we close at four". He said, "Would you and your friends like to join us for a drink in the kitchen?" "Sure", we said, and we were soon seated at a long kitchen table, with all the members of the orchestra. They all congratulated me and the leader apologized for turning off the microphone. "Mike or no mike," he said, "I never heard applause like they gave you! You can have an encore with us any time you like." "Were you a bit worried about me, before I began?" I asked him. "Yes, until you started, but you were far better than I expected. Actually you have quite a good approach. You seemed so sure of yourself, that's half the battle", he said. We chatted with other members of the orchestra. They wanted to know more about us, the *Nebraskan* and some of our experiences during the war and what we were going to do when we all split up and left the

Army. We didn't need any more drinks, but our new friends were dry and they enjoyed theirs. When we finally decided to call it a day, it didn't take long to get a taxi. I couldn't help comparing Sydney to New York, the world's largest-city- she never sleeps!

It was broad daylight when we arrived back at The Dixie singing, "We are going home to Dixie - hurrah! hurrah!" at 5am. The night porter asked me, "Who is Mr Tim? His wife is on the phone. She has rung several times while you were away". Tim crawled into the giant phone box, talked with his wife a minute, then started to snore, sitting on the floor, leaning against something invisible. You can do that when you have been to a good party. After we had given up trying to bring him back to life, which Mrs Tim must have appreciated, I apologized to her the best way I knew how. She was very understanding - wives sometimes are. "And who are you?" she asked me. "An old soak", I told her, "Chief Engineer on the *Nebraskan*. Tim will ring you back as early as we can wake him in the morning", I promised. We sat on the beds in our big room upstairs and laughed almost half an hour, before we keeled over and died.

All hands on deck! 1pm. After a nice lunch, alcohol content nil, I we went over to the Roxy Theatre on Times Square opposite, saw a film, and heard Dina Shore sing 'Doing what comes naturally'. She was then top of all performers, judged by the audiences at the Roxy, including Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra.

Ray said, "You have been a good guide, Bill, but how you had the nerve to stand up in front of that large audience at the Wivel last night is beyond me." I told him, "I have sung for big audiences on a few occasions in my small hometown in Denmark when I was young." We had planned to have dinner at the **New Yorker Hotel**, nothing but the best. It's a beautiful 40 story building. This time, we had roast turkey with cranberry sauce, very nice.

The New Yorker skating ladies had the same type of Skating Rink, we saw at Wivel and wore less clothes - no protests from the guests. And, as no one was singing Spanish songs, we missed the thundering applause. We were back at Dixie at a decent hour, this time in our natural state, silent, very careful not to disturb the guests at the hotel. The following morning we were all up about nine, resembling ordinary tourists. We went to the Bronx Zoo by bus, later to Central Park and the National Museum for a while and late in the afternoon we boarded the Staten Island Ferry, crossed the harbour and walked the last half mile to the *Nebraskan*. We all agreed we had enjoyed the sightseeing tour of N.Y.

I never liked to live onboard a ship in port, unless I was a passenger onboard, so the following day I began to look for accommodation in **Brooklyn**, the large suburb on the East River. I had lived there many years ago when I was an Able Bodied Junior Marine Engineer on the Copenhagen - New York Run. I called in at one of the homes on 8th Avenue and asked the lady if she knew of any vacancy nearby. "Right next door", she said. The landlady, a widow, was very kind and we settled it in five minutes: \$10 per week. It was a modern home, with nice bathroom. I arranged to move in a couple of days later. The price had doubled! Back onboard, I saw Ray. I knew he had his wife's car parked nearby. He took me over the next morning with all my goods and chattels and I moved in. Afterwards, we had a couple of Carlsberg beers in a bar nearby. Most of the men there had a Scandinavian accent and they didn't like the local beer either.

Two nights later, the *Nebraskan* moved to the longest pier in the world, two miles long, on the **New Jersey side** of the harbour. The morning after, I heard a couple of very excited Australian sailors above my cabin, shouting, "The Harbour Bridge!" "Without the pylons!" someone added. It was the Bayonne Bridge connecting New Jersey and Staten Island – it was a mighty good copy, or vice versa?

[The Bayonne Bridge was opened on 15 Nov 1931, just 4 months before the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The same golden shears were used to cut the ribbon for each bridge. - Editor]

One Sunday I went over to New York with our Australian Chief Officer. I had worked out a program for the day: First Sonia Henie's Skating Show in the centre of New York. She was World Champion Olympic Skater, born in Norway, had won three Olympic Gold Medals, 1928, 1932 and 1936. When we entered the foyer, we saw a big Sold Out sign, but I managed to get a couple of cancellations. I had seen a lot of skating then, but never on stilts. When we left Sonia, it was dinner time. I had written on a slip of paper '**Jack Dempsey's Restaurant**'. I was very young when he was the Mohammed Ali of his time. At Jack's, we had a few beers and I asked the waiter if Jack was likely to appear? "We haven't seen him for weeks", he said, "but if he comes in, he usually arrives on a Sunday – you never know." Half an hour later, I walked Jack. I was near the door, so I shook his hand before he was discovered by anyone else. "Autograph please!" I had only a letter from my fiancée. "What do you want me to write? Love and kisses, Jack?" "I'll do that part", I said, so he wrote, "Good Luck, Jack Dempsey" on the back. Well, Jack had a good Chef, the dinner was good.

[In 1935, Dempsey opened Jack Dempsey's Restaurant in New York City on Eighth Avenue and 50th Street, across from the third Madison Square Garden. The restaurant's name was later changed to Jack Dempsey's Broadway Restaurant when it relocated to Times Square on Broadway between 49th and 50th Streets. It remained open until 1974. He died in 1983. - Editor]

Our next item was Bizet's *Carmen*, the most popular of all operas, it was fantastic. *Carmen* looked like *Carmen* and what a lovely voice, I'll never forget her. I don't know if my friend enjoyed it as much as I did, but we all gave *Carmen*, a standing ovation for half an hour, which she fully deserved. My friend was very cranky when we were ready to leave. I'm very sorry, he was not quite as carried away as the rest of us. The New Yorkers are the greatest opera lovers in the world, hence the fact that opera stars have to graduate at the Met, before they are universally recognized.

While we were moored at the longest pier in the world alone (we had to pay \$2.00 for a taxi to the end), Andy, our Commander, and I usually took the steam launch to the **main office, N.Y.P.E.** at Brooklyn. One day, I met Charles there, my old skipper from my last ship. He told the Marine Superintendent that I wanted to be transferred to his ship on the trans-Atlantic run.

"Not me," I said, "I have crossed the Atlantic 31 times – that's all I need." "I know why he won't come, I met his fiancée when we were together in Sydney. He won't waste any time, he'll soon be on his way to meet her again!" He invited me to dinner at his home in Elizabeth, New Jersey, not far from where we were on the *Nebraskan*. At the dinner party I met Charles' wife, his brother-in-

law and a pretty nineteen year old girl, the youngest of his nine daughters. We had a long chat and the dinner was lovely. All of a sudden, Charles' wife said: "Bill, you and Charles must have had quite a time together in Sydney!" I nodded and went on chewing a piece of toast, when she continued, "I have always had a feeling Charles had a girlfriend in Sydney." I nearly choked. Charles hammered my back to clear my throat and said, "One girlfriend? I had a dozen!" "At least!", I said, "quite a Harem." This was all that was necessary to clear the air and my throat. Charles' training and experience impressed me no end, but I didn't like the odd smile on his daughter's pretty face, when she looked at me. Charles was born in Germany, but had been in the U.S. Army in both World Wars. Later, he told the Super I was a good engineer. This grew into a super reference by the man himself, before I left for Australia. By the way, the great Superintendent was Swedish.

Ray, my Second Assistant Engineer, lived at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. He invited me to spend a week at his home, in September 1946. To get to Pennsylvania, we had to get a train at Pennsylvania Station in New York, but unfortunately it didn't leave until 5am. So we walked and walked around in the city all night, watching people going to the pictures about midnight, mostly shift workers. In my young days, I had been on the 12-4am watch for many years, so I didn't get very sleepy about midnight, but Ray had never had that experience. So he settled down quietly on a long bench and snored away, until a New York cop brought him back to reality! "Can't you let me have, just half an hour?" he begged. The cop shook his head, and when a New York cop shakes his head, that's final. Poor Ray, he almost fell down the steps to the Pennsylvania train, five o'clock in the morning. We were received with open arms when we arrived at Ray's home and met his wife and young son, Jackie, eleven. He played Second Clarinet in a band and practised with a record, playing First Clarinet.

He was a fine young fellow, appearing in gridiron harness which his father had bought for him at an exorbitant price. I was shown my room, facing the garden. It had a wild squirrel calling at the window every few hours for a feed from a box Mrs Ray had given me. The squirrel looked at me on the first day - we hadn't been introduced. Then I was accepted and we became friends. Ray and I walked around and we met many of his friends. One was a mine worker. He owned half a street. They worked hard and were paid well. For me, Wilkes-Barre had become a welcome break in the daily routine on the *Nebraskan* and I felt a bit more civilized when I left after meeting real people.

N.Y.P.E., **New York Port of Embarkation**, an enormous building complex in Brooklyn, employed 35,000 people during the war, sending large convoys with millions of men to England, the rest of Europe and elsewhere, in addition to supplies and ammunition. Like the *U.S.A.T. Nebraskan* was doing in the South West Pacific and later the Atlantic, originally dispatched from Fort Mason, San Francisco, I had many good opportunities to become acquainted with the NYPE's operations involving the entire world, including our ship. The operations after the war were almost identical to those during the war, but in reverse: bringing back men and materials to their countries of origin, almost exclusively U.S.A., from the biggest war experienced by man. The man in charge of dispatch and arrivals of shipping at New York Port of Embarkation, was none other than the

Marine Superintendent in his enormous office, surrounded by masses of electronic gear, keeping him in touch with every ship in port.

Our Captain and I called in almost daily to hear news about what we and the *Nebraskan* were going to do in the near future. Our ship had been **unloaded at Staten Island** before we went over to the Long Pier on the New Jersey side of the harbour.

1946: US Citizenship

I had migrated to the U.S.A. and I would be a U.S. Citizen in two months, because I had served in the U.S. Army over two years. Later, I, or rather my future wife, changed her mind, and I applied for my second Immigration Permit to Australia. Our Captain had also decided to migrate to Australia again, so we both went to pass our medical and applied at the Australian Consulate General in Radio City for an Immigration Permit to Australia. While there, I asked the girls at the Australian Information Centre how I could make a call by phone to Australia from New York. They didn't know, so I promised to find out and let them know. I consulted the Information Centre on Times Square, found out about it and told the Australian girls about it. Pennsylvania Station was the answer.

I booked a call the next evening at eight. I had written to Marjorie that I would ring her at the Hospital at Waratah, Newcastle where she worked at 11 am the next day. I had written down what I was going to ask her. Afterwards, Marjorie complained she hardly got a word in during our conversation. I am sorry about that, but it was so lovely to hear her voice – my only excuse!

My phone call was put through in August 1946. I realized then it would be a long time before I could return to Australia and my better half. A tax collector collected \$1000 from me, I sent a copy of my receipt to the Australian Tax Dept. in Sydney. I received a letter from them by return mail, informing me that a refund would be sent to me "at an early date".

When we had been in **New York over two months**, still at Long Pier, New Jersey, about 70 officers and crew were discharged, including Ray and Tim. When they came to say goodbye, Ray said, "Bill, until my dying day I shall never forget when you sang *La Paloma* with the orchestra at Wivel, and also our kitchen party following after, until 4am, with the orchestra lined up at the long kitchen table!" We exchanged best wishes for the future of all of us.

1946: *Nebraskan* to Georgia for "mothballing"

A day later, we left on the *Nebraskan* for Brunswick, Georgia, being towed by an enormous diesel electric tug, via the Atlantic Ocean, off the East Coast of the U.S.A., to mothball our ship. Our Captain suggested we raise steam on all our boilers and have the engine ready in case we should run into a tornado or something down south. We had a skeleton crew of eleven men, and somebody in the know had produced a large carton of deep frozen Swift fillet steaks. So on the way down, I peeled potatoes and Andy, our Commander produced beautiful French fried potatoes to go with Swift's culinary selections. It helped to keep us alive, with a good margin, on our way down. We were also well supplied with liquids to help make our

gala dinner just that.

From the time we left, we were put on compensation of \$6.00 per diem, while we weren't being fed onboard the usual way. The weather remained fine all the way to Brunswick, so we didn't find it necessary to use our own power at all.

A few days later, we were anchored in **Brunswick Harbour, Georgia**. A big crowd of engineers and inspectors came onboard, and went down into the engine room and in the shaft tunnel to inspect everything. They put an extra seal on the Cederval, where the propeller shaft goes through the stern into the sea. Everything was passed as O.K. and we had a few drinks with the Superintendent. I offered him 13 typewriters, stored in the engine store rooms. They were given to our firemen at Biak Island. They had tried to get them ashore in Manila in order to sell them there, but the MPs stopped them. They weren't stolen goods: the Fort Commander at Biak had passed them and allowed them to be sold elsewhere, but he issued no permit.

Before **we left Georgia** in the evening by train for New York, we had a lot of talks with the locals, most of whom were black. We quite enjoyed to listen to their Southern drawl.

When we finally arrived back in New York at Pennsylvania Station, Andy and I had to take a taxi to Brooklyn as we had quite a bit of luggage with us. I think it took us over an hour to get there, over the Brooklyn Bridge, built over a hundred years ago. Home to Eighth Avenue, we were now landlubbers, without a ship. We continued to get \$6.00 extra per day for being homeless. Andy and I decided within a few days to book our passages to San Francisco by train, report to Fort Mason, and get a **boat to Australia**.

Before we left New York, we were paid off at NYPE. A man in the office said, "Why are you in such a hurry to get back to Australia? You are on full pay as long as you stay here, plus \$6.00 a day extra - what is wrong with that?"

I was in a hurry to get back to Marjorie, after an absence of two years! Andy wanted to get home to his wife and his son Peter he had never seen. We hoped to spend the rest of our lives in Australia, but we didn't realize it would take us so long to get back there, in my case 4 months from September 1946 to January 1947.