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MARITIME

Inside Talk

Tom Baldwin



The days of living dangerously: The Sun crew always put their lives on the line

MARCUS HOOK, Pa. — Now that Sunoco is selling its ships, it's time to salute a few guys who sailed on the big "gray and whites, with the diamond on the stack."

Sun Co., which used to operate a fleet of more than a dozen large tankers, says it is virtually quitting the marine industry, and it is asking buyers to at least interview its crews.

The afternoon was so hot you could listen to yourself sweat. Able-bodied seaman Danny Card stood watching carefully on the starboard stern. The ship, home from the Gulf of Mexico with a load of crude, inched slowly toward the dock.

Mr. Card knew a lot could go wrong. This is a dangerous time. The deck gang has its job to do, but standing around waiting for the payoff is all the rest of the crew, showered and shaved, getting in the way.

A third engineer, freshly degreed out of Kings Point, stood on the hawsers faked out across the stern.

Suddenly Mr. Card shot across the deck and hit the third engineer with a flying tackle that sent both men sprawling. The hawser whipped beneath their feet as they rolled on the steel deck.

"Sorry, Third," Mr. Card said. "That line would've dragged your leg into that chock. It was gonna' rip you in two."

Brushing himself off, the third engineer smiled weakly.

"Y'know," he said. "That was the first thing they taught us back at Kings Point. Never stand on a line."

There have been many "Tinies" in the Sun fleet, fellows so small their shadows would darken large rooms.

Big guys are always named "Tiny." Radio operators are all called "Sparks."

One Tiny, this one from Lewes, Del., was swept overboard in big seas off North Carolina.

Man overboard! But Tiny kept his specs on

The Williamson Turn is not just a theory. It works. The ship finally came around into the precise direction it had been coming from.

There he was, big bald Tiny, visible every 30 seconds, rising up on a wave, wrapped in his lifejacket,

arms and his paint-splattered T-shirt, the light blue one with all the holes. Tiny never lost his glasses.

Jimmy Donahue was a bosun. No giant, Mr. Donahue kicked his legs like a preschooler at the chow bench. Mr. Donahue was the smallest man in the fleet who did not have written medical permission to be that way.

One day down in the cargo tanks, a much larger man became overcome by fumes. He went woozy. Mr. Donahue grabbed the man by the belt. With only one hand free to work the ladder, Mr. Donahue hauled the blacked-out sailor step by step to the tank top, 50 rungs straight up, to fresh air and life.

Another man of smallish stature, with the vigor of a lion, was named Yap-Yap.

He wasn't called Yap-Yap for nothing

Yap-Yap possessed the utter inability to stop talking.

He talked to himself, to total strangers and to doors, walls and

hand tools. Yap-Yap talked in bed, everywhere. The man could argue with himself and lose. He talked to his eggs before he ate them. He talked to paint before he spread it on a deck.

When he talked to the weather, Yap-Yap believed he improved it. Bolts suddenly started snapping one day on the flange that held the cargo hose against the intake valve of a Sunktanker.

Precious seconds flew by while a crewman located a steel pin and slammed it into the flange faces.

Until then, Yap-Yap held the ship and hose together with his bare hands, sparing the Sabine River and parts of Nederland, Texas, a coating of crude.

The way Yap-Yap saw it, he talked the flange into not bursting.

Second Mate Carl Brown came bounding down the gangway late one night to be greeted at his home port, Marcus Hook, by his wife and a station wagon full of kids and blankets and pillows, part of the jumble when the family piles into the car to drive over to the docks to wait up and greet Dad.

The next day, the station wagon was back at the dock, and the kids and dog and blankets were there too, tangled up in another bout of pillows and toys.

Ships may be going, but bravery remains intact

But things were different. It was 24 hours later. Dad was departing now, off to sea again. His brief stay was ending. The glow had vanished.

Gone were the smiles and hugs, the jumping up and down and the reaching up of the littlest one. Tomorrow would not be a family

Christmas.

Chief Mate Pete Saviskey about keeled over with fright one dark night when a Navy Orion submarine hunter, flying unseen directly toward the ship's bows, at an altitude not much higher than the stack, flicked on its brilliant search lamps a half-second before the roar of its engines exploded across the otherwise quiet bridge.

Mr. Saviskey became the ultimate "fawn frozen in the headlights."

He landed in a pile of himself. "End of the world. It was the end of the world," he kept repeating to anyone who would listen.

Dennis "Slim" Hanschmann, whose clothes fit him like a coat hanger, was known for bravery. He possessed commitment to his job. He had drive. He also was the only guy on the ship who was thin enough to squeeze through the cable connectors and climb all the way to the top of the posts.

So who got the "going aloft" bonus pay when the post tops required new paint? AB Hanschmann, of course, who only now, after his ship has been sold out from under him, discloses his lifetime fear of heights. "They said go. Up I went," he recalls.

A lot of other seafarers routinely put it on the line — The Joe Fraleys, senior and junior; Bob Sanford; Shorty; Trotter; Dog Man; Bad Whiskers; Big Stone and Little Stone; Ray Helfrich; Whistler; Pete the Pumpman; Red Man; Willy from Mississippi; Leroy from Chester; and Frankie, who was not real open about where he was from.

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Maryland farm's neighbors slam dredging project

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE — Against the wishes of some neighbors, a company founded by two former Maryland politicians is seeking to dump tons of silt and mud dredged up from Chesapeake Bay shipping channels into two Eastern Shore corn fields.

The Baltimore company was established earlier this year by former Department of Natural Resources Secretary Torrey C. Brown and former Department of Transportation Secretary O. James Lighthizer.

Neighbors of the proposed site fear the dredged up muck may contain harmful contaminants.

"They are making a dump in an area of prime farm land and residences," said Tracy Stone, co-owner of a bed-and-breakfast named the

that anyone would want to spoil something so beautiful."

Sam McSorley said he feared runoff would pollute his 16-acre lake, home to thousands of migrating geese and ducks in the winter.

"It's just sickening," said Mr. McSorley, 72. "It really upsets me and I worry that we don't have the power to do anything about it."

The company said Monday it would use two pieces of land totaling 500 acres in the Tolchester community: Heart's Desire Farm and Chantilly Farm.

The company proposes to dispose of 15 million cubic yards of dredge spoil, enough to raise the ground 10 to 12 feet, Mr. Brown estimated. The entire complex would be ringed in by a 15-foot-tall berm to prevent leakage.

The project would take up to five

original topsoil would be put back and the land can be farmed again, Mr. Brown said. The state or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would likely pay millions of dollars for such a service.

Clarification

Monday's Helen Bentley column, Page 2B, mentioned a rumor that NIT League members had threatened to pull their rail freight away from Sea-Land owner, CSX Corp., unless Sea-Land supported ocean shipping reform. Both Sea-Land and NIT League, however, say that no such incident happened. For the NIT League to do so, in fact, would have been illegal.