

Vancouver Sun

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James K. Nesbitt's column

Victoria--Recent mention here of pioneer shipping men Captain R.W.McMurray and A.C.Burdick and of the beautiful old Princess ships, has brought comment from F. Charles Aitkens, 8389-152nd Street, Surrey.

I enjoyed this letter very much and think you will too:

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"Your mention---brought back fond memories of my service as a radio operator all over the coast, especially at Gonzales Hill, 1927-28.

"I often spoke to Captain Neroutsos on the phone and met Captain McMurray when I used to take my summer holidays as a wireless operator on the Princess ships (by arrangement with Hawkins of the Marconi Company--no pay.)

"At that time government radio operators could apply for passes to Vancouver and Seattle. I got to know Mr. Appleyard well as a result of visits to his office to get the odd pass. I spoke to him from the Hill at all hours of the day and night. He was often hard pressed, but was always kind and considerate.

"Nights on the Hill were dreadful for young single fellows, but there were others around Victoria who worked nights too; the chap at B,C.Pilots who took our traffic over the phone. George Bonavia was marine editor on The Colonist.

"I sometimes went down to The Colonist and watched old Harry, the telegraph wizard, with his crippled hands, taking press in Phillips code at a fantastic rate. Then George and the sports man and I would go to the Poodle Dog and eat steak.

"I once called on A.C.Burdick when I thought of quitting the Department of Marine, and was thinking about a job on the Salvage Prince. He was, as you said, a kind and considerate man. I have found in service and civil life that the bigger they are, the more considerate they are.

"When learning to fly in 1928 with the Victoria Aero Club (Sidney Pickles), Nick Carter, my instructor, and I crashed in the club aircraft and wrote it off, and banged ourselves up a bit.

"Also in 1928, Mr. Appleyard asked me if I'd take my leave and work as an operator on the Princess Louise while she was doing day cruises.

"They paid me, and I over-nighted often in Seattle, where I could visit an old friend, Bud Verrinder, who was then mooring there. It was an easy and very pleasant job.

"Last year, while on our way home from Nepal on a Norwegian cargo ship we were tired up not far from the Princess Louise, now a good class restaurant near Long Beach, California. My wife and I had lunch there, and I showed her the radio shack and the bunk I slept in for more than a month.

"The old spark set has been replaced with a modern CW set, but the officers' cabins and staterooms are fitted up with genuine old furniture, shaving mugs, etc.

"They also have a good selection of photos of some of the skippers, and one of the welcoming ceremony in Victoria when Louise arrived from the builders.

"As we sailed outbound on the Hoegh Dyke, my wife took a picture of Louise with me looking fondly at the old ship. By the way, I think my wife and I sailed from Athens to Mykonos Island (Greece) in 1962 on an old Princess ship, but I couldn't discover which one it was."

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This letter now forms part of the record of our marine history and I have filed it with the Provincial Archives for the uses of posterity.