

**An extract from the book " TURBULENT TIMES: The Memoirs of Ronald McIntosh"
By Ronald McIntosh**

On my return home in a convoy from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Liverpool in September 1941, I was transferred to the Saint Essylt, a brand new diesel-powered ship built in Sunderland, which during her short life was the pride of the Saint Line fleet. By the time I joined her, on my twenty-second birthday, I was quite an experienced sailor, comfortable with my job and my shipmates, and I was pleased to be part of the ship's company of such an up-to-date vessel on her maiden voyage. What I didn't know was that I was about to embark on an unplanned voyage round the world.

The assignment we were given for the maiden voyage was to take military equipment and stores to Allied troops in Singapore. With France out of the war, the Mediterranean was closed to through traffic so we had to go the long way round, via the Cape of Good Hope. After the lengthy voyage south we refuelled at Durban, where the famous soprano, Perle Gibson, sang through the public address system to more than five thousand South African troops as they left for the Middle East. We then spent a few days in Bombay loading extra stores - and as it turned out bringing smallpox on board - before leaving for Singapore.

We were at sea when we heard the news that the capital ships HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse had both been sunk by aircraft of the Japanese invading force. I can still vividly remember the shock and incredulity with which we greeted the news - it was as if Buckingham Palace and the Bank of England had both been razed to the ground in a single London air raid. So we were not surprised when we received orders to make for Fremantle in Western Australia instead of Singapore. Thirty-six hours later Singapore fell and we realised just how close we had come to walking down the gangway into a Japanese prison camp. Once again my luck had held.

By then we knew that our well-liked second officer, Alan Brightwell, had caught smallpox in Bombay. He was a quiet, rather studious man belonging to a strict non-conformist sect in Wales, and we gathered that he and his family objected to vaccination on religious grounds. He died shortly after we changed course to bypass Singapore and we buried him at sea - always a moving ceremony.

It had fallen to me to take the patient his food and to carry out the minimal nursing services we were able to offer him and so, although my vaccination was right up to date and I had no symptoms of the disease, it was decided when we arrived at Fremantle that it would be prudent to leave me behind while the Saint Essylt continued on her way to whatever destination she was directed to next. I was accordingly taken to the quarantine station on a small island off Fremantle, where I spent four not unpleasant but rather boring weeks, which gave the doctors time to establish that I had not in fact contracted the disease.

At the end of this period during which, as the only resident in the quarantine station, I was royally looked after by the nursing staff, I flew to South Australia to join my next ship. This was the Lycaon, an old stalwart of the Blue Funnel Line, built in 1913 for the China trade.

