

The following article was found on a fascinating website run by Ian Coombe, from whom permission to publish in our Captain's Log was sought.

Ian sought permission from the late Dona's husband, who replied with the following email:-

Dear Sir:

With reference e-mail correspondence that you had with Mr. Ian Coombe regarding the sea story that my deceased wife Dona has written, I give you full permission to use the information for your shipping purpose.

You might, perhaps, be interested in some personal comments on your background.

BEIRA. I worked in total 6 ½ years in this port. For 4 years (1954-58) I was solely responsible manager for m.v. 'Holland': cargo and financial results. The ship (Dutch flag) was based in Beira but loadings took place in the Quelimane - Antonio Enes range. Personal contacts were maintained between myself and the shippers of sisal, coprah, mangrove bark and tea. The job was exciting but also very demanding.

SAFMARINE. Our Company, Nedlloyd, operated a joint shipping company between South/East Africa and Australia called 'Safoccean' i.e. Safmarine and Royal Interoccean Lines, a division of Nedlloyd. The management of Safoccean was in hands of Nedlloyd Durban, where I was the Managing Director. 1979-1982.

Once a month we had a Safoccean Board meeting, alternating in Cape Town, Durban or Johannesburg. Board members were Marmie Marsh, chairman Safmarine, George Fullerton, Safmarine Capetown (ex famous cricketer for South Africa), myself and Harry Borland, Nedlloyd's Financial Manager in Durban. The Chairman was Dr. Cronjé, chairman of Nedbank situated in Johannesburg.

Having worked for Safmarine, you must have at least heard of Mr. Marsh also.

UNICORN. In shipping in Durban I met Murray Grinrod (Chairman) fairly often because we had both interests where we competed or where they were parallel and not crossed.

CLAN LINE. In Beira, 1954-58, I met a very charming gentleman, named Frank Turton, Master of the 'Clan Sutherland'. We used to play golf together at the Beira Golf Club and we once had him at home for dinner while, later we were our guests on board his ship for curry lunch.

I wondered whether you ever met him or heard about him. I have fond memories about Frank.

Sincerely,

Coos de Vries

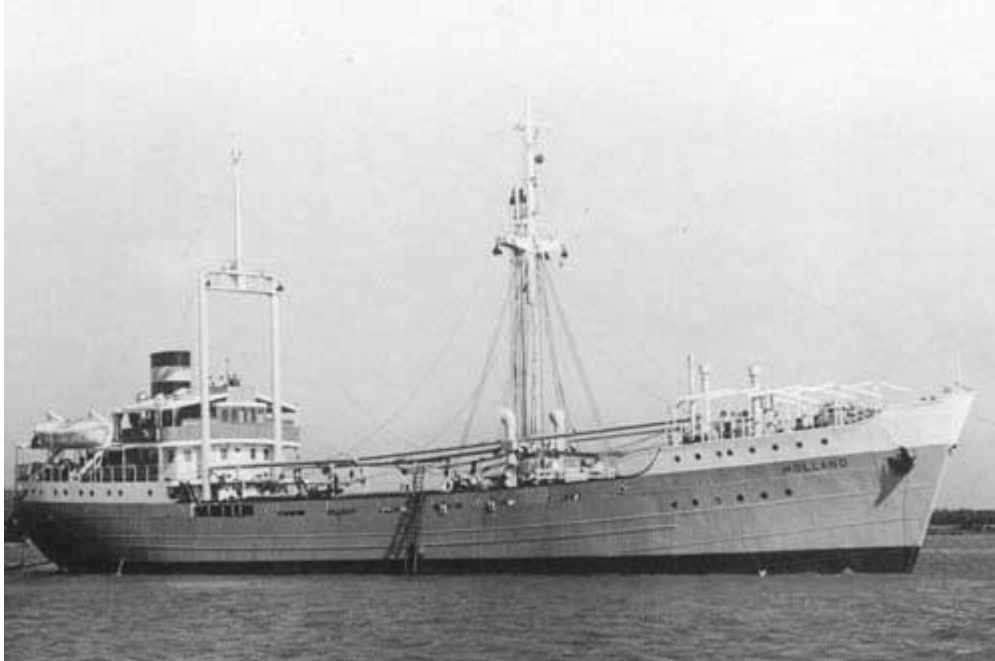
Some of our readers may remember Coos, the ship in the article and may even have met the late Dona.

Enjoy her story.

Doug Young, Editor

In 1958 Dona de Vries, Canadian spouse of Coos de Vries, who worked in the Beira (Mozambique) office of the Holland-Africa Line, obtained permission from Captain A.G.P. Post, Master of the m.v. HOLLAND, to make a trip on the ship.

Dona passed away in September of 2004 and from notes left behind, the under mentioned report was taken. This story was also published in 1958 in the RHODESIA HERALD in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).



M/V HOLLAND - Courtesy Coos de Vries

Has your work lost its challenge?

Do you feel at sixes and sevens with your family?

In short, would you welcome a complete rest, a holiday free of work, raucous voices, demanding telephones? Then let me suggest that you tie yourself to the deck of a coaster for a few refreshing and inexpensive weeks and cruise away your cares!

Not long ago I embarked as the only passenger on a pocket-sized freighter calling regularly at Beira. Veteran travelers, hearing my plan, cautioned against the heat of a small cabin, rough menus and, worst threat of all, inescapable boredom.

Now, having returned, I am happy to report all these pessimistic charges greatly exaggerated. Obviously coasters are not luxury liners, nor do they purport to be, but even before the pastel buildings of Beira fade from sight, it is clear that it may be warm on board but certainly it is much warmer and more humid on land.

As soon as the ship begins to respond to the gentle swell of the ocean, skin and clothing are dry, perhaps for the first time in weeks, and from the resultant feeling of physical well-being, a new mental perspective commences to generate.

Landmarks, the black and white striped lighthouse, for example, take on the aura of glamour and charm known only to visitors and this is the point where holiday truly begins and workday world is left behind. With luggage stowed in a compact but adequate two-bed cabin, the traveler is free to settle on the miniature deck in a comfortable cane chair to read and relax uninterruptedly.

Even the coastline, flat, uninteresting and fringed with an uneven bristle of scrubby trees, conspires to allow the voyager undisturbed relaxation. As compensation for this dearth of scenery, however, a coaster trip does offer a visit, almost daily, to one of several communities, some of which are sizeable, others mere dots on the map.

The number and point of call vary from trip to trip according to cargo demands, but, generally speaking, from three to five calls are made between Beira and the northern terminus, Zanzibar.

The largest of these, Quelimane, is the first call north of Beira.

Lying well inland on a winding river, it is a colorful, busy town with wide main street, lovely modern homes, and attractive shops dispensing everything from pocket adding machines to the latest model cars. Here a new wharf greatly facilitates loading cargo and small, red forklift trucks, like diligent beetles, rush the cream-coloured bales of woolly sisal from warehouse to ship. Tour

of inspection completed, the visitor can return to the ship for a refreshing mid-morning tea and a welcome breeze from the water. Next call on the itinerary is usually Macuse.

No need to question the *raison d'être* of this small settlement or its northern neighbour, Pebane, for in all directions coconut palms splash the sky, their fringed fronds crackling sharply in the slightest breeze.

Graceful, grey-mottled giants, these trees cannot fail to impress the visitor as they stand in silent avenues carefully hoarding their seeds in the false security of their height. Beyond Pebane with its sandy bluffed beaches, black streaked with ilmenite ore, the traveler notices a coastline becoming more rugged and irregular, as well as a water horizon broken by a persistent peppering of small coral islands. A thrill is in store for him as the ship turns toward the river entrance of Moma, the next point of call, for here shifting sandbars make navigation hazardous.

At half speed the vessel heads directly for the beach and, when only a few hundred yards from it, wheels sharply to port to crawl cautiously along a path of quiet water lying, incredibly, between two bands of surf. Not only is surf seething on both sides but occasionally a bared bar, pink frosted with flamingos, forms a sand channel to left and right. Then, gliding through a narrow river entrance, the ship anchors in a wide bay. Soon natives, whose features and whirled turbans hint of Arabian influence, stream from a warehouse bearing sixty kilo sacks of copra on their shoulders.

As in Macuse and Pebane, these sacs are tossed into waiting lighters and sometimes, under poor night visibility, into the waiting river.

Good humor undaunted, the native plunges to the rescue. Northward again with possibly a call at Antonio Enes, where it is possible to enjoy the dubious comfort of a chair ride across the exposed mud flats, or at the beautiful bay of Nacala, or Porto Amelia, all the while keeping company with a shoreline jagged with the pencil peaks of ageing mountains.

Then, a few peaceful days later, the greenness of Zanzibar appears!

Few places in the world have more attraction for visitors than this picturesque page from the past, this slim, emerald island. The town itself, perched on the beach, presents a bold face in the brilliant sunshine. Fluttering in poletop isolation, a plain red square marks the Sultan's walled, white palace and nearby, a high tower pinpoints Zanzibar's tallest building, Bet-el-Ajaib, or the House of Wonders.

Behind these two edifices and huddling round them clusters the town, a Hampton Court maze in multi-colored plaster, which at once delights and confounds the visitor. In and out the narrow treetops and apparently blind alleys he wanders, delighting in the infinite kaleidoscope of life in Zanzibar, the next corner always luring him on. He sees gay bolts of cotton hanging from street stalls; dark workshops where shadowy men are tailoring or bookkeeping; colorful fruit stalls with wizened owners perching hawk-like above their meager wares.

He discovers modern jewelry shops behind whose varnished counters squat craftsmen building bracelets and mosaics in the fluttering light of a flame. He wonders at the exquisite ivory and ebony carvings taking form beneath the crude tools and deft fingers of a native. He marvels at the inescapable contrasts of exotic silks and perfumes being sold by a barefoot, unwashed vendor; the magnificence of Zanzibar's ornate, brass-studded doors too often affixed to unworthy hovels.

Occasionally his peaceful stroll is interrupted by the jangling serenade of interminable bicycle bells, whose owners careen around corners with reckless optimism. Just as often he flies for the safety of a doorway as a motorist passes with fenders barely missing the walls close on each side and he thinks it appropriate that the narrowest street in town is called 'Suicide Alley'!

Of course no visit is complete unless a cursory glance is cast toward the dhows, those elegant fragile craft which, for centuries, have utilized the monsoon in their annual trek from Persia to Zanzibar. Some ornate, others decrepit, each is a hive of industry with a heterogeneous crew loading and repairing. Looking like modern pirates, these dark-skinned men, swarthier still from sun and wind, stroll the quay with elaborately sheathed daggers in their belts. With long curly hair and often crooked sticks in their hands, they look simultaneously like shepherds loosed from the Bible and yet daring and ferocious like Ali Baba's famous thieves.

Theirs is an exotic cargo-luxurious carpets, vital spices and, not too far back, the illicit slave trade.

Cargo having been discharged, too soon the empty ship leaves Zanzibar behind and bounds lightly southward but the clove-scented island with its polyglot population, its wealth and poverty, its glamour and squalor, is not quickly forgotten.

Then, after a few quick calls for cargo, Beira comes once more in view.

In reviewing his water journey, among other things, the traveler realizes that he, as a land dweller, has come to know few of the thrills of a life at sea, the sudden violence of an adolescent cyclone; the unobstructed panorama of a sunset as large as the ocean itself; the breathtaking beauty of a full moon creating liquid silver from the dark water; the exuberance of a leaping, graceful group of dolphins; the crystal clarity of flying fish skimming from wave to wave; the sweet lullaby of soft silken foam dissipating itself on indigo waves. He is almost certain to decide that he has had a novel holiday and a restful one, a jaunt which has accomplished all he wished, provided new sights which are always a stimulating catalyst for future conversation and reading, freedom from routine and time to think or even not to think.

What more then can a traveler ask?

IN MEMORIAM - DONA DE VRIES 2004