

# Steam Tramp to Shanghai.

By Best Overend

We hove to in the long jagged mounds of green water. I stood on the bridge, swaying slowly as I held on to the canvas dodgers. I watched the heavy waters from the Heads of Sydney Harbour and felt the salt spray on my lips. It was only then that I realized I was in for a grand thing.

I looked down as the pilot climbed over the side wall of the deep well deck, some three floors below, the inside a clay red and the upper edge and the outer ship wall a dull streaked black, wet with water. As he slowly disappeared down the clumsy wood-stepped rope ladder, I went over to the port bridge house and leaned through the window and watched him swinging, sometimes almost in the waves and sometimes high, the ship like a standing building with the sea falling away. The boat for him rose and fell, surged and crashed. The Captain shouted to the Chinese crew on the forecastle to let away

slowly. The Chief officer stood by forw'd looking helpless. When English was shouted at him in the wind he grew confused. He was a White Russian, and only able to gesture uselessly. The crew slackened the rope off slowly. The pilot shouted and cursed up at us. He was a big and an old man, growing tired, as he hung there banging on the ship's side. Twice the smaller boat climbed up under him with the water, twice he tried to step into her. But each time the water drew away, and he clung back hurriedly on to his ladder. The third time he jumped heavily and clumsily, and fell in between the seats. His bag was let down on its line, caught by one of the two rowers, and suddenly everything was let go. The smaller boat fell away aft, and everyone was very relieved.

I was glad, because I had watched the standing cliffs of the Heads, close on each side, grow bigger and bigger as we slid down the rollers. With seemingly no way on, the land jumped and jerked as we appeared to drift on to the broken rocks standing away from their sea shelf. The skipper waved finally to the pilot and walked to each telegraph and rang for full speed. We slowly straightened out, passed through, and went north. There, outside, the waves took us aft half sideways. We had a sickening slide down and a slow climb up, but all the time the shore, seemingly close with the white water of the breaking rollers under the cliffs, passed. I was ordered down below with two of the Chinese crew to see that all port-holes

were closed and locked. This was my first duty as Third Watch Officer on a ship that was now owned and manned by Chinese.

It had never been entirely clear to me why I had left a comfortable office for a year until I went down the companion. However, as I collected my two Chinese, both grinning as they stood waiting with the big monkey porthole wrenches in their hands, I realised that I had not wanted to settle into suburbia. Apart from a fairly sure fortune, this amounted to nothing but business worries and business pleasures, and the few occasional architectural delights a commercial practice holds. It had been too soon for that. I lowered myself down the companion leading to the main deck and went aft, swinging drunken along the boards running straight in their tarred lines with the ship. Maybe in two or three years, I thought. Maybe, when I was thirty, I would go back and settle down.

Below, the ship was a medley of swinging, banging doors. In the long series of darkness of about four hundred cabins, I grew tired of the work, as we slowly headed aft and forward, deck by deck, checking over each cabin for swinging doors, running taps, lights, and portholes. The beds were unmade. And the ship, some seven odd thousand tons of her, was as empty as only an empty ship on the high seas can be. In the clanking darkness of the lowest third class cabins, packed in the long slope of the stern, the water in the aft tanks swung to and

fro. The rudder steamed and rattled above as its shaft jerked in the collars with the waves, and already there was six inches of cold sea water along the corridors and in the cabins. It was a miniature flood as it ran across with the roll of the ship.

The two Chinese were willing. We checked and locked everything to which we had to attend. I was glad that I had been on the ship for a day before and had grown accustomed to her plan and section, for I didn't lose my way or miss anything. We left the water surging down below because we could do nothing about it. Later, I grew accustomed to going about the ship by myself. It was my first duty after leaving a port to search the ship alone, with a torch, for stowaways. After several ports I became less afraid at what I might find in the long wavering black passages and the banging water-ridden darkness below.

The ship, my new mistress, had been a big coastal vessel, grown old in service and hungry for coal. With new ships coming along and the high prices for scrap iron, she had been sold to a Chinese firm, to break or to use along the China coast. The Chinese crew had come aboard the day before, and when I joined her it was with a thrill as I had watched her grow large from my launch. I had even climbed aboard with the beginnings of proprietorial feelings, a pride which grew as I lived with her through the tropics and through their hot lazy harbours. It was

always as pleasure to get back to her.

Beside the Chinese, there was an old White Russian as Chief Officer. He was a Baron, commander of a destroyer flotilla during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. Later, during the Great War, he commanded a flotilla in the Baltic. He had also commanded the destroyer escorting the Czar upon his annual yachting trip to Finland. Old in the service of the sea, and as broken as only a White Russian can be, his wages for this trip were to keep his family in Shanghai for a year. There, like the other thirty thousand of his kind, he had nothing but a name. Speaking only a little English, he had no country and no passport; and nobody wanted him. He had paid fifteen Shanghai dollars for a small piece of paper, issued by the Chinese government, which stated that he might be permitted to land in Shanghai at any time until it was seen fit to cancel this priceless concession to humanity.

There was another on board, as Chief Engineer. Volatile and melancholic, with enormous black moustache, he was dreadfully proud of his engine room, and always fighting with his Chinese engineers. The Chinese firemen and trimmers were always taking their shovels to him. Nobody understood what he said but the Chief Officer, and as few understood the Chief Officer, there was always plenty of trouble.

The Second Officer was an upper class Chinese named Chiang. He was a Chinese gentleman, with all the charm and all the deficiencies of his class. The Captain was a China Coast English skipper, employed by the Chinese company to bring the ship to China.

Having had no experience whatsoever, my duty commenced at eight in the morning on the bridge and terminated there at four in the afternoon. There was one hour free for lunch. The deck was hard for the first few weeks, and, as any seaman will tell you, one does not rest on the bridge of a ship. But every day I attained the youth's ambition - complete charge of a liner upon the high seas. I paced the bridge, regretting the absence of the passengers, for the seven hours each day. It was precisely twenty six paces across. One passed the quartermaster at the wheel between the thirteenth and the fourteenth, with just a small swing at the tenth each way to clear the actual wheel house. With eagle eye I scanned the horizon.

But one of the good things is the impersonal ship. She swings, she sways, and gives to the waves. The sun also swings as the davit shadows move across the white boards. You go to sleep watching them, although you feel that the sand and misty black pattern on the left should be watched in case it comes too near. There are still wrecks on the South Eastern Australian coast; too

firmly bitten into the intimate shore to be worth salvaging. That might be good because their metal would only be used for some bloody war. Better to leave them to interested tourists, to warn them to attend boat-drill, and to rust away.

During the long hot hours, there was perennial interest in watching the life of the Chinese crew upon the fore-well deck. There, some three decks below the bridge, the toilet of the firemen and trimmers were performed in public. The washing of sleep from eyes and head and body before going on, and the washing of the grey which covered their bodies as they came off, and before they took their food. Sometimes, when the food was already laid out on the deck-hatch canvas, they did not wait for their washing. Most often though they sluiced themselves down before donning a clean singlet and black silk trousers, cut slightly wide and short, before taking up the chopsticks.

The crew's galley formed the centre aft portion of the fore-castle, and from the chimney when the wind was forward, or the ship's speed sufficient, the odorous smoke came back in brown stinking wisps to the bridge. Usually, however, it was possible to avoid it. The height of the bridge, with a sufficiently steady breeze, took it to one side or the other. There, below, in the forewell deck, forgathered the celestial

stokers. They hissed and sang and chattered as they settled on the hatch for their chow. It was possible to discern them under the coal dust. In the scuppers, one was being most obviously sick, in a loud and entirely normal manner. There he bent, under the fish drying in the sun on the rope that also supported the blue trousers. These were river Chinese from the Yang-Tse-Kiang, and they did not like the sea. They squatted around a little wooden bucket full of rice. There was usually a bowl of yellow giblets, a bowl of fish soup, and another of some bright meat. They shovelled the rice into their own bowls, then held them close to their mouths as they further shovelled it in with chopsticks. They could never get away from this stoking business. Like professional men, they always took their office home.

Our 'boy' then approached to advise that chow had been prepared and was waiting in the Saloon. He was an old man and had no nose at all. But he tried to be bright and he had a charming smile. I was seldom in a hurry to go below, for the broken refrigerator made our meat look and smell tired. Very cleverly, the fish had become multi-coloured too; and it shone in the dark. The Chief Officer always pointed that out. Not twenty five years before, notices were put up over wholesale foodstuffs known to be bad, with the declaration: "Fit for Sailors". Our boy cooked marvellous bread.

The food for the crew came forward in sacks, or in open baskets, and the chunks of meat and fish were cleaned in salt and water on the forewell deck. When the fish was to be eaten, it was cut in half and cleaned, each surface worked with salt, and spread on the deck filthy with hawked Chinese saliva and ship oil. After, the portions were tied on a line from the fore-castle to the starboard bulwark. The half fish swung in the breeze and the fishy shadows swung across the decks as they would in the idle dreams of any self-respecting cat. Sometimes, the smell came up to the bridge. That the fish and the meat had been cleaned on the deck, mixed with spittle, oil and the dirt from the engine room sandals made little difference. Upon this deck teeth were also cleaned, with the saliva spat down upon it. The constant hawking and spitting of the Chinese seemed to give the necessary seasoning. It is an odd fact, no one can clean their throat with such feeling of loud and conscious pleasure as do the Chinese.

Despite all this, it was lonely on the bridge. Only occasionally did the Quartermaster speak, usually to answer, parrot fashion, as is the way with the sea, my orders concerning the alterations of course or my admonitions concerning the erratic course he was holding. Naturally all quartermasters complain about the manner in which the ship holds her course. Every ship, which they control, is worse than any before. I checked our course many times. The larger main compass stood up by itself on the platform in the centre of the bridge. I had

shouted forward when the quartermaster had been half a point off. Thinking to show him how easy it was for a white man, I took the wheel myself and had swung her hard over to pick up the lost half point. She had taken her time coming round. First you thought that the rudder was too small and the wheel too easy for a ship this size. But then she came, faster and faster, and no matter how you had swung her over the other way, she had not stopped swinging until you were two points off in the other direction. You felt a fool. Once ten thousand tons starts swinging there is little which will hold it. Your course aft is like a white snake, and you hope that nobody will come up until it has faded.

The sweat grows cold on your body, and the whiskey and water, which the boy brings, is warm. Above is the bridge, shining under the sun, and your feet still throb and burn from its' clumsy wooden kiss. Away on the left, to the leaden line, lie the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. A kingfisher flashes in blue as he sinks and sighs to the rigging. As he shoots and darts across the deck you can see his bewilderment, and as he sits you can see his relief. In the forewell deck is a dragonfly, arrived from God knows where. He shoots in a silly sort of way, from place to place, and you can see he's not sure what the hell. And its twenty six drunken paces from bridge house to bridge house. On the thirteenth you stop short to see it's N.83.W. The Chinese helmsman shifts uncomfortably on his feet as you look over his shoulder. In your silence he sees authority, and he knows that woe will betide him if he's off

his course or day-dreaming. Any sailor can sleep on his feet. Below, as you lean and gasp out the windows that line the side bridge houses, the lead green waves rise up and slap the black iron plates of the ship. They are pushed back, flip-flop, into dumpers or suddenly dash from under the bow into shoots. Fish sometimes come and surf there. They usually appear at three. If you wish, you throw biscuits from your saucer into the sliding water fifty feet below. The wave comes up aft quite quietly, like a hunter over a hill. The ship lifts slightly and her bow dips and her mast swing sideways. The wave bunches on each side as she lunges forward. As it bunches, it parts under the stern, and the ship settles down and she lifts forward to greet the clouds. The divided waves come up along the length of the ship and rise hungrily to the scuppers. But as it comes to the bow, the waves from the prow break it and spread it out into a lace of white foam. Then the ash spurts out its filthy insult; as the ship passes the foam is stained a ragged grey. And all the while the water clings and drags along the black plates for the full length of the ship, and you can see and feel its reluctance to let you pass. As you're lying on your sweat-wet sheets, trying to find your Sleep-God, the sun comes through the sickly awning and the pitch bubbles slowly and silently between the boards. Your leather sandals, they sometimes stick and sometimes slide. They never have that hollow wooden click of the fireman.

In the Lombok Strait we received a radio message from our

Chinese owners. Alter course from Sourabaya to Probolinggo. There we were to receive further orders from their agent and to load scrap iron for Japan. Probolinggo turned out to be south east of Sourabaya. There appeared to be no harbour, and the Sailing Directions gave very little indication except that we would lie off the land at a roadstead.

To the north east of Java, the currents are strong and the sea seems of no mind at all. It weaves and winds in a most amazing way. There are always palm trees, and other odd land things, floating within its movements. Here and there flocks of birds feed in masses, resting on stray logs covered along the top with white droppings. You know that they haven't seen land for a long time and that there is some circular motion to the currents. We pass the volcano Komba, smoking in the sun. Under enormous clouds, the weather went grey and hot and the barometer dropped in a most alarming manner. Reflected in the heavy black velvet water was the peak of Sangeang, rising a sheer six thousand feet. The clouds piled still higher in shapes very much faked. With villainous faces, the Chinese boys, in blue pyjamas, started rigging the heavy booms from the foremast, dropping the heavy wood masses and the heavy steel wire ropes haphazardly upon their fellows below. They were a casual lot.

Probolingo turned out to be just a green headland. After we

had dropped anchor, I went ashore with Sparks in a native craft. It was a triangular sail on a log, with a smaller log as outrigger. The upturned ends looked like Turkish slippers. Ashore, the banks, but one, were shut for lunch. An attractive native girl phoned through to the hotel and lent us our carriage fare and credit for drinks. The language was an amalgam of Dutch-Malayan-Javanese ashore. Civil prisoners kept the streets and tracks between the tall palm trees clean. You entered the tiny carriages from the back; the driver whipped the small, impudent, pony as you tinkled off with the little bells ringing. The Dutch beer was superbly cold. It was apparent that the invaders had brought something.

This hot and lazy place was a district of sugar, tobacco and spices. We had called for the old worn-out machinery of the plantations. These climbed and leaned against the enormous mountain peak which rose sheer from the town. Later, the bank manager refused to cash my travellers cheques. After a little flattery, he gave me fifty percent, and promised to send the balance, if they were good, to our agent in Sourabaya.

No sooner had the anchor been dropped in the dawn light, than the ship was surrounded by tugs dragging huge native barges. These swarmed with dignified Javanese, who rushed on board and immediately began to cook poor quality rice, flavoured by perhaps one tiny fish. Whilst conducting their more personal

sanitary affairs over the side, they drank water and smoked cigarettes wrapped dexterously in a leaf. It seemed poor enough food, and Sparks always bundled up his table scraps to exchange for tobacco or bananas. When we went ashore, he was always annoyed because the natives shouted rudely about his colour, he dearly wanted to be white.

The tug crews immediately dropped fishing lines and waited silently. With the native winchmen squatting in their coloured pyjamas at the steam controls, the hatches of their brown barges were opened to disclose the most incredible amount of utter rubbish. In wire nets, ton after ton of this stuff was swung aboard, and clanged down into the ship's bowels. The Japanese were paying sixty three shillings, Sterling, for every barge load. Off the Sourabaya entrance channel we collected a Dutch pilot, then steamed slowly, for four or five hours against the strong tide. Scraping the bottom all the way to the harbour, the sand churned in great swirls, aft, as the ship momentarily expected to stick. We were now some four miles inland and lay three hundred yards off the entrance to the creek leading to the city. As we anchored, there was considerable naval and aerial activity. In the naval basins, the men of war came and departed as the planes took off and landed in the wider water channels. I took a sampan ashore that afternoon. These come to the companion and shout and wait for hours. They always ask for absurd sums. When you are ready to go ashore, you tell them no, then turn to go inboard again, whereupon they come down to the

correct fare. To everyone, except Sparks, this was half a guilder. He could always get anywhere half price. On board there was a rhythmic creak as the bamboo oars swung in their twisted circles. If there was a breeze, up would go the triangular sail and she would heel over and go along with a rush, the long prow, like a swordfish, diving and spraying the waves. It was always good to feel her go over after the larger dignity of the ship. You felt freer so close to the water, and more intimate with the life of the sea.

The city was reached along an asphalt arterial road through the tropical fields. Some of the fat tiny Japanese taxis had three wheels, others four. The architecture of the official buildings was Dutch, but everything else was a riot of all possible styles; a mixture of the maddest of modern fashions combined with the squalor of the decayed classical. Every trick of the Classicist and the Modernist was to be seen in exotic exaggeration. Here was a place which every young Architect should see as a disciplinary measure. It might have taught him the ludicrous side of passion. Up town the large cafes were open to the street. They had good orchestras and opera singers - not selfishly reserved for the patrons alone - good food, good Dutch beer, and Bols gin.

Sparks joined me later. He had traded a small monkey for a shirt from one of the natives along the sea front. When I got back on board later, I discovered Chiang had bought two green parrots with red curved beaks. All they did was to set up a

mournful squawk, squawk, squawk. It finally got on everybody's nerves. Sparks also bought a dozen tiny coloured birds in a bamboo cage. He fed these religiously for several days. But their number seemed to grow less and less, until there were only two. He left them on the lifeboat cover outside his quarters on the boat deck. The two that were finally left were terribly frightened; they never sang as they watched their friends picked off by rats, one by one. Of course it may have been the hungry crew. Everybody wanted to own something. With so many animals aboard there was a grave possibility that we would have a food shortage at sea. All the engineers bought the green parrots with the red noses. Each of the crew bought smaller and smaller birds, as their relative buying power fell, till everyone had something except the skipper and myself.

The prize of the lot was an enormous white parrot. Chiang had bought it for the princely sum of ten guilders. That was a proper bird. When he decided that he would exercise his lungs a little we needed no whistle to warn vessels in our vicinity; he had a high pressure boiler in him which was force fed and lifted the portholes off their hinges. He was cheerful about it all, and cut open the fingers of all the curious passers-by with nonchalant impunity. We had a short name for him. It is unprintable. He knew what it was. In the early mornings and in the short dusk of the tropical twilight, just after the sun went down, he used to regale the ship, those aft as well as forward, and also the trimmers down below who heard him through the funnels, with long stories of his prowess with women. His

feathers would fluff up as he thought of himself, and he would execute mighty dives of flight through the air. Like the man on the flying trapeze - chained to an iron triangle swinging from the awning superstructure - he let off with a gay abandon the short sharp bursts which loosened the plates of the ship's side. But everybody respected him and loved him and tried to feed him and pet him in his quieter moments. He was an old warrior and a grand investment, and he learned very quickly all the filthier words in Chinese and English. He already knew them in Dutch, Malayan and in his own language. His health and powers were always a source of conversation, and his humour of a sufficiently indifferent and powerful kind that it was even a pleasure to be wakened by him. It meant that he was well and flourishing. Nothing got him down except blowing in his face. He was still trying to cut away with his beak the solid half inch of iron to which he was tethered when he finally got off the ship in Japan. In the hands of a grinning quartermaster, he stopping only to hurl his enormous insults to everyone about him, particularly the Japanese police launch alongside, they were not amused, we were.

When I came aboard in Sourabaya, for the last time, the old ship was well down. We had increased our draft some seven feet and had a pile of loose steel on the aft lower deck to keep her level. This stuff was well tied down with wire ropes and chocks. But it meant that we were to roll more than a little; a small amount of steel goes a long way when well up. The extra seven feet was a lot to drag around.

Tremendous fights started down below the next morning. The cook had been giving the crew three pounds of meat per person per day instead of the regulation two. Now it had run out and they wanted to know what he was going to do about it. For most of the day the bos'n kept sharpening his knife at the grindstone against the carpenter's bench in the forewell deck. This was just outside the galley, and the cook kept coming out to hurl insults in Chinese. He made great play with his chopper. It was a heavy nasty weapon and he was the bigger man. Actually, they had all been very well fed. In addition to meat, they had received two pounds of rice and one pound of vegetables per day.

We steamed north to the equator. Celebes lay on our right; to our left you could imagine the coast of Borneo. In this enclosed sea, full of floating palms and debris, there were also thousands of sea snakes twisting and twining their way through the water. They would turn sideways, with a flashing twist of white belly as they passed. They looked vicious, and I was pleased to be on board.

Navigation coasting is fascinating. Your eyes grow as tired as your arms holding the glasses, but you feel that you cannot afford to miss anything. There is a dream lighthouse in this region. The North Watchman, or Tuguan, is a solid mass of tropical foliage tipped at the summit with a white house. Encircling are bronze hornlike reefs, with native craft fishing off the tiny silver beaches. They were marionettes through the glasses. We alter course momentarily to avoid hitting two lazy

whales on holiday. Finding your position is a game. You take the chart, a mass of fine lines and figures, pick out three or four peaks in the distance, take their bearings, find the massed contours on the chart, and plot the angles with a soft pencil. Where they all intersect is your position. Only the third line will prove the position, and you carefully mark the chart with this soft pencil and print the time and the log. All these positions should lie along your marked course. Of course they never do. There is always the swinging of the ship, the Chinese quartermaster, the set of the currents through which you pass or your own plain carelessness.

I usually had the parrot up for company in one of the wheelhouses. But in the heat of the day he would just stand there. Only seldom did he answer to his own name. He just swung there as if to escape the heat. We would stand together looking from side to side. He picking ever and anon at his feathers. I picked at my sunburn or at my leather sandals. The deck was hot with the direct sun. He was thinking of his green forest delights and I of the fleshpots on shore. With neither of us was there the suggestion of the dilettante or self denial. For when you try an exquisite thing within reach once or twice, it becomes a great tearing want, a desire impossible to fulfill. Actually this intensity did not worry us because it was good and warm, and with plenty of cigarettes - cheap in the East - you could easily forget your ever present hunger.

We took our final course, N25E, for Osaka. The crew expected

China. An uneasy feeling grew through the ship. The bos'n had now collected a most fearsome number of knives and had spent all his spare time sharpening these down below. After an infernal row, with much running out, gesturing and menacing, the smaller, uglier, quartermaster reported: "Plenty trouble bos'n man, chow go sleep all gone". This meant that the bos'n and cook had again withheld a portion of the crew's food, hidden it to sell at the next port, then had it stolen by the firemen whilst they were asleep. After all their altercations, these two had apparently entered into an unholy alliance.

East of Formosa, the cyclonic depression moved towards us from the South-West. The ship gradually began to grow youthful again, and to swing wildly and dive deeply before coming through the breath-taking, then breath-giving, skyward leap. Again I watched the barometer closely, hoping for a genuine typhoon. It held up normally. I was the only sorry one aboard. Inexperience makes fools of anyone. The swell came up aft on our quarter, and with the steering hard, the Chinese quartermasters at the helm were always glad to get off watch. With the swing of the ship through the rudder they were always complaining about their hands. It seemed little to complain about when you took the wheel for a few minutes.

In the afternoon the typhoon blew itself out, and we came into Japanese waters five miles off Okino Oagri Island. Through the water haze - which is the child of a typhoon wake - the government buildings, barracks, radio stations, power stations,

and what appeared to be two half made aerodromes lying north and south, all stood large through the glasses. Having faithfully served the Empire and Australia for thirty years as an interstate liner, and in war as a troopship, The Steam Ship Karoola passed into the southern outpost of another Empire. They did not welcome us. Their wireless station refused to answer our insistent signals. This was not surprising, it was typical of their stupid attitude to the Chinese. Later we ran into heavy rain squalls which led to the annoyance of whistle blasts every two minutes to warn other traffic. After an hour or so you get tired of dragging at the sodden whistle line.

In the morning, and during the whole of the next day, there was constant friction, and sometimes fighting, between the firemen, engineers and the deck staff. Because we were in Japanese fishing waters the skipper ordered that a man be placed on the focs'cle head as a lookout. This was the catalyst. Late that afternoon, when the squalls had brought in visibility to a hundred yards or so, the trouble started. The refusal to obey direct orders is mutiny. This is a heinous offence on the high sea, as the lives of all on board, plus other vessels, are endangered. Receiving the instruction from the skipper, the Chief Officer first gave the order. Because of his previous laxness, the crew took no notice. It must have been humiliating. With this disobedience, Chiang received the order again in the early evening. There was hell to play on the

bridge. He called the bos'n; the flow of Chinese between these two was amazing. Each exchange seemed to cap the last until the roof lifted. No man went forward, and the deck crew gathered in a little knot below, in the forewell deck, to hear the latest bulletin from above. Attracted by the row, and knowing what was going on, I came up and stood beside Chiang and the bos'n, more in sorrow than in anger. At least that is how I tried to appear. My handcuffs were bulging out of my overalls and I held my twelve inch coal chisel. I had slept with it for the past week or so. It was cold in my hand.

Gradually the trouble transferred itself from being an exchange between the Bridge and the deck, to one across the hatch. Even Chiang seemed out of it then, and I began to feel really frightened. The skipper ordered Chiang below to talk quietly with them. He went in an extremely unwilling manner. We waited on the superior place, above, and heard him speak from the chart room deck. Presently, Chiang came up to the bridge again and spoke directly to the skipper for the first time: "They refuse to take any orders Captain. They say they work too hard. They say they will not do it". "Go down and tell them I'll jail the lot of them in Osaka if there's any more trouble". Then he suddenly bellowed over the bridge, "Hey you, Bos'n. Get your men up there for'd when you're told".

The parrot screeched suddenly behind us, where he was swinging with the ship and with himself. He held a piece of apple in one claw, clinging with the other to his perch. He dropped the

apple fragment, and hitched himself with his beak up to his triangle of iron piping. His chain rattled as he screeched again. Under the port rail, the one now bucking into the weather, stood the group of engineers. Some looked up at us, others looked across the white dull grey canvas of the well deck hatch. There seemed a breathing space. Within their forecandle, they had been shouting and brawling all day with the firemen and the trimmers. But now the engine room crowd had allied themselves with Chiang, the Chinese leader of the deck staff. This tipped the balance of power to our side. As we stood above them, the bos'n and crew now shouted together. They wanted us to come down and fight. Fortunately no attempt was made onto the companions leading from their forewell deck to the deck below the charthouse. In any case, these would have been easy to hold. They were narrow iron-tunneled stairs, one on each side of the ship, and if they tried to get to the main bridge, we could have stopped them, assuming the neutrality of the engineers in any actual fight. Then the two tunnel stairs leading to the boat deck - of which the forward part was the chart room and captain's deck - could have been held by one man determined to hit anything within reach. However, between this chart room deck and the upper one - the last - anyone could have climbed. For the upper bridge deck extended back over the boat decks almost to the funnels, and it would have been easy to climb round its perimeter.

The parrot was correct. After much discussion, the engineers shouted up to Chiang. Might they go over the hatch and kill the

sailors and the bos'n and throw them over board? All they needed was for Chiang to give them the authority. Chiang, not surprisingly, said nothing. Again the Captain shouted to Chiang to give the order. "For Christ's sake, can't you do something?" I said to Chiang. "He's a crazy-man. The bos'n is a crazy-man", he replied. I went back up the companion to the main bridge. The skipper and I were silent as the shouting and gesturing slowly died away beneath us. "Can't we do anything about it?" I said to the Captain. He said nothing, and went down below.

The fishing vessels took their chances throughout the theatrics. We did not actually strike a Japanese ship and the trouble blew over by the time we steamed into Osaka. According to the Chief, it was mutiny on the high seas and the crew would be jailed in Japan. It was amazing to me that we did not run ashore on one of the many islands during that night. This was because the skipper usually marked the time when they were likely to be about and would make a point of being on deck. With his powerful night glasses his eyes were usually those that first made them out in the faint light from the stars. At four p.m. we sighted shore again. Through the haze there was a line of men-of-war off the lighthouse, which stood high on its bluff. During the night we steamed up the land and sea funnel which leads to Osaka. On occasions this geography lifts and intensifies the various tidal waves that afflict Japan. In the early dawn we dropped anchor outside the moles and waited for the pilot to take us in. At 8.45 a.m. we rang off

engines. I found it a pleasure to swing them over and listen for the answering tinkle. It was probably to be the last revolution those engines were to turn. I felt sorry for their death.

This is an edited extract from a larger work by Best Overend and Tronn Overend entitled: **Tramp to Shanghai: a young man's tale before the war.** (Available as a free *iBook* from the iTunes store) Companion pieces, **Impressions of Shanghai. 1937** and **Prelude to War: On Duty with the Shanghai Police Force. 1937.** appeared in **Quadrant** Vol. 56(11) November 2012 and Vol. 57(3) March 2013.

The *S.S. Karoola*, owned by the McIlwrath, McEacharn's Line, ferried passengers between Geraldton and Brisbane. In 1937, it was sold to the Chinese, who immediately on-sold it to the Japanese for scrap. Best Overend (1909-1977) - a Modernist Architect from Melbourne - joined the ship in Sydney for its last, two month, voyage. Island hopping through the Dutch East Indies, collecting pig iron for Japanese munitions in the coming War, Best Overend was Third Watch Officer. With absolutely no experience of the sea, and at twenty seven years of age, his proficiency at a drawing board was applied to ships charts and navigation. But there was also the perceptive eye of an Architect. In words and water colours, he captured the ever changing shades and shapes of the Tramp as it steamed North. From Osaka, he travelled to the International Settlement in Shanghai. First he worked as an Architect, and later, as the Japanese advanced, a policeman. The photographs and water colours from the voyage can be viewed in the *iBook*.