

An, Ninh and Thy Nguyễn – First Trip out of Viet Nam



Tribute to a ship called President Madison

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Description:

TRIBUTE A SHIP CALLED "PRESIDENT MADISON"

In the summer of 1982, my family along with other freedom seekers left Vietnam in a small fishing boat. Our destination was set northerly toward Hong Kong Refugee Camp. On the third day of the journey, we came face to face with a major typhoon with high-velocity wind and extremely choppy water. Luckily, we were rescued by an American Ship Liner bearing ...the name President Madison which belonged to the President American Liner (PAL) shipping company. The ship was on its way from Hong Kong to Singapore.

After being rescued, we were deposited at the Singapore Refugee Camp on Hawskin Road. Here, my shipmates began to their process of resettlement in different part of the world. To my knowledge, some were going to Canada, Australia, and the US. For my family, we chose to the US as our new home and arrived in July 5, 1983.

As for me, my life continued on as anyone. However, a part of me had always felt that something still has not being completed. That is to find and to say "Thank you" to the one(s) who is responsible for the rescue of my boat from the angry sea and brought us to safety. I began my search after I graduate from college in 1993, but no prevail.

In the summer of 2003, I was astonished to receive a copy of **The Sea Chest**, Journal of the Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society, December 1991. It was sent to me by Ms. Patricia Hartle, from Seattle, WA, to whom I owned a great deal of gratitude. In it, there was a story of my boat being rescued and it was written by the late Captain Laurence Gellerman.

Sadly, the Captain passed away in 2002 and his ash was returned to the sea, just outside of the San Francisco Bay. To Ms. Hartle, my fellow shipmates and my family is and will be forever in debt to the late Captain Laurence Gellerman and his crews.

I would like to share the article along some of the pictures that were taken during the rescue. To those who had been in this situation like I was, you understand the incomputable value of these images. Should you have any comment or question, please don't hesitate to contact me. Please share your stories too if you have then. Thanks.

Ben Nguyen

Privacy Type: Open: All content is public.

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THE BOAT PEOPLE

by Captain Laurence Gellerman

IN JULY OF 1982 I WAS MASTER OF THE CONTAINER ship S. S. PRESIDENT MADISON. On a passage from Hong Kong toward Singapore, I got a call from the Watch Mate. He said, "Look out of your office window. There is a boatload of people waving at us." Our ship was in a position off Bombay Reef. This area was often called "Refugee Alley." It was also known for attacks by pirates in the guise of refugees.

I had long felt the premonition that sooner or later I would have to decide. Do I obey International Law and Tradition, or do I assume that they are pirates and go on my way?

I went up to the bridge and telephoned the engine room. The situation was explained briefly to the engineer on watch. He was told to notify Chief Engineer Leo Reames, and then start reducing speed to 60 rpm. I told the mate on watch to get Jon Harrison, the Chief Mate, and tell him to report to the bridge.

We then started a Williamson turn. This maneuver is usually used in a man overboard situation. The rudder is put over on the side toward the person in the water. For instance, if the person went over on the starboard side, the rudder would be put over to starboard to move the propeller away from the victim.

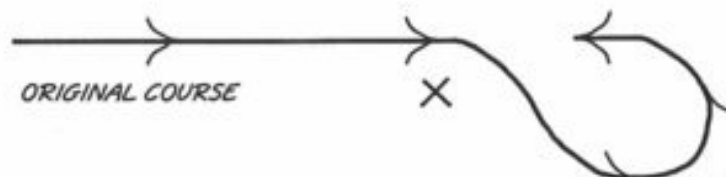
When the vessel is about forty degrees to the right of the course, the helm is put over to port. The vessel is

then brought to the reciprocal of the original course. This puts the ship in a position where she will pass close to the person in the water (see diagram below).

When the Chief Mate came to the bridge, I gave him the following orders: Call all hands in the Deck Department, including the off watch Mates. Take a sea painter from one of the lifeboats. Stretch it from the forward mooring chocks on the main-deck, starboard to the break of the deck near the gangway. Allow a bight to hang about two feet from the water at the pilot ladder station. Rig the pilot ladder with two man-ropes. When we have the boat alongside, permit one man to come aboard. Search this man for weapons and identification. We will decide then what to do about the rest of the people in the boat. I gave the Chief Mate the ship's 38 cal. pistol. During my career as Master, this is the only time I ever removed the weapon from the ship's safe.

We got the engine down to slow ahead, and the ship on the opposite course. The Mate on watch had managed to keep track of the boat on radar. Hence, I was able to locate them visually with binoculars.

We approached the boat on dead slow speed. They got underway, came alongside, and made fast to our sea-painter. Jon Harrison did as instructed. He allowed one man on the ladder, then pulled the bottom of the ladder up out of reach with the



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