



Of polar bears, pirates and the law

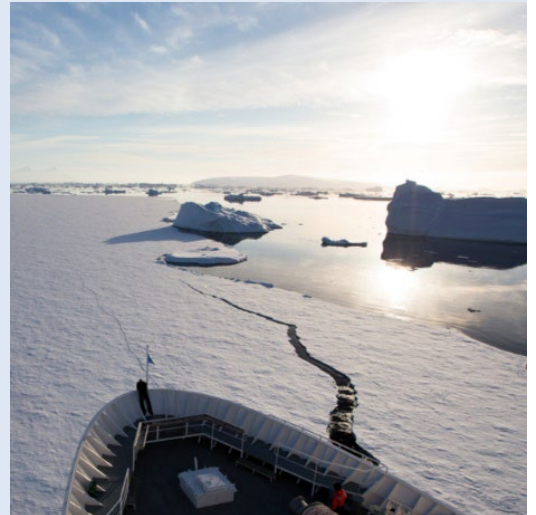
*CJC is pleased to welcome **Stephen Angove**, Associate and Master Mariner, to its dispute resolution team. In his first article at the firm, Stephen provides a personal insight into his career to date and his longstanding practical experience both on sea and on land.*

My seagoing career started in 1992 with a 10-hour train journey from Penzance to Newcastle as I embarked on my cadetship at South Tyneside College. As a “Dual Cadet” (both engineer and deck), it was often the case that people were not too sure what to do with me as I did not quite fit into the traditional pigeonholes that seafarers were more comfortable with.

My first ship, an 11-year-old, 260m long Suezmax oil tanker built in Glasgow, was an eye-opening experience for a fresh-faced teenager. I joined her in August, at Fujairah anchorage by launch, and the level of heat was another new experience for me. After clambering up the pilot ladder and accommodation ladder combination, with my suitcase being hauled up on the end of a rope by a couple of Filipino crew, I was confronted with a wave of noise. The deck was being grit blasted by a riding crew who were preparing the steel for painting. The ship needed it too, as my first walk to the accommodation block was akin to walking on cornflakes as the rust from the neglected steel deck crunched under foot.

Roll forward another 20 years and I was walking down the gangway of my last ship having signed off as Captain of a 31-year-old, 200m long cruise ship (modestly sized by modern standards) with a position waiting for me at a large international law firm. Despite the vessel’s age, the paintwork was certainly of a much more satisfactory standard on my last ship compared to my first.

By and large I enjoyed my time at sea, and I had some amazing experiences which included walking on Antarctic beaches with penguins, wading out from shore, waist deep in Arctic waters to build a temporary dock whilst an armed ranger stood watch for polar bears, having a BBQ on an uninhabited desert island (with permission), visiting numerous Pacific islands including Easter Island, Robinson Crusoe Island, Bora Bora and Midway, landing Police Officers on Pitcairn and being ordered to “repel pirates” armed only with a two foot wheel key in the Gulf of Guinea, to name but a few. But it was not all exciting: there were plenty of long watches on the same course, with not even a ship on the radar to break the monotony; there were long shifts working cargo, problems to be solved and maintenance to be taken care of. Even when I moved on to cruise ships it was not always glamorous - I recall on more than one occasion chatting to passengers dressed in a pristine white uniform at a cocktail party when just an hour before I was in a disposable boiler suit crawling around sewage tanks inspecting the steel and coatings with the Chief Officer. If only they knew what I had been doing all afternoon, they would be less keen on standing so close!



Much like my predecessor at CJC, Brian Rolf, the reason for my change of career path was to work in an environment that was more conducive to family life.

That was over eight years ago now. I still sometimes hanker to go back to sea - usually on a Monday morning after receiving several boxes of documents from opponents! I have even maintained my Certificate of Competency, completing all the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping refresher courses every 5 years... just in case. But then good seamanship is all about contingency planning, having alternative solutions, and asking, “what if”. In fact, the preponderance of a seafarer’s training is what to do in adverse circumstances and it is something so entrenched in my way of thinking that I still do it now. What if this happens, does this newly drafted agreement/clause/term cover it? What if the adverse situation facing vessel “X” does not work, is there a plan B? etc.

During the time since “swallowing the anchor” I have completed my Master of Laws degree and find myself again in a position where I am in a dual role, this time as a Master Mariner and Solicitor. I have also investigated and advised on a wide variety of casualty types including collisions, groundings, sinkings, fires and explosions, damage to/contamination of cargo and piracy as well as cargo shortage, general average, salvage, chartering and insurance related disputes.

In many cases at my previous firm, I was acting for cargo interests, so in moving to CJC I now find myself as somewhat of a “poacher come gamekeeper” with an in-depth insight as to what to expect when acting for Owners whilst being able to draw on my longstanding experience when representing cargo interests. I am looking forward to the new opportunities that CJC will have to offer.

For further information, please contact:



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