

SOUTH AFRICAN SHIPPING

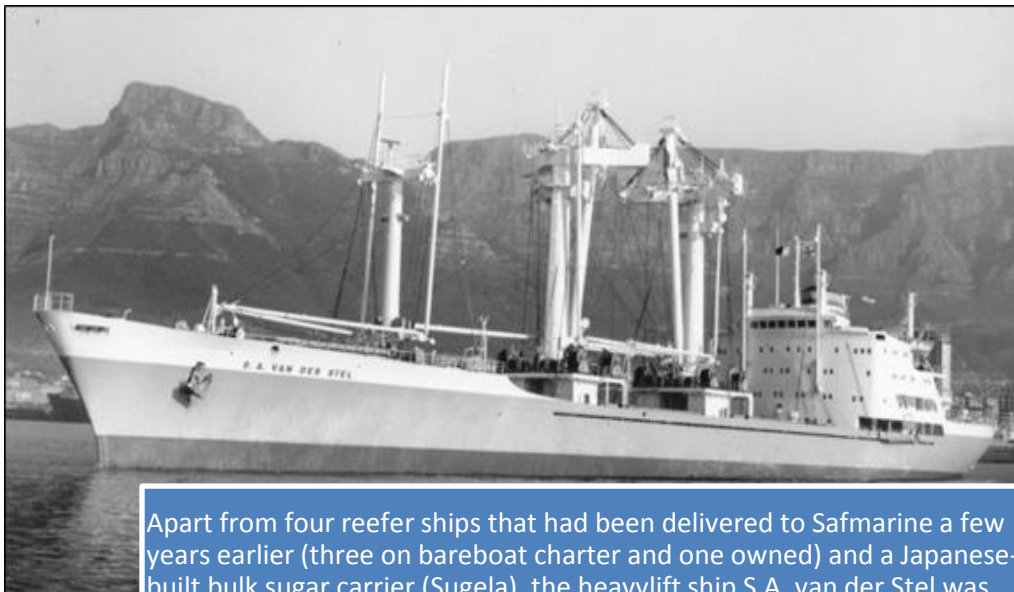
PART TWO – 1960 TO THE PRESENT

4. 1961 – 1976

4.1 CONTINUED LOCAL SHIPPING OPERATIONS

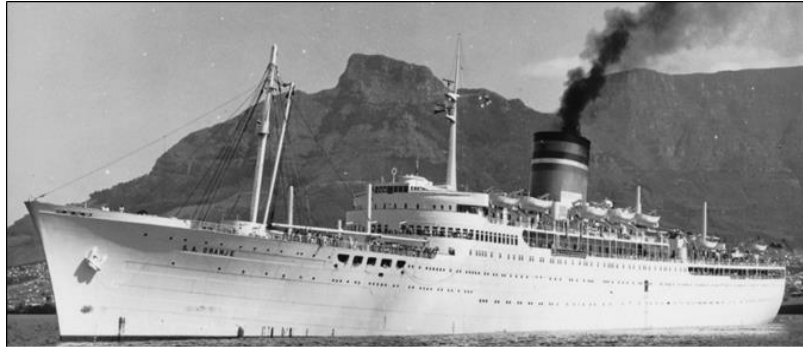
This period was characterised by extensive restructuring of the South African shipping industry, and saw the industry at its zenith. Salient milestones of this period include:

- In 1959, the **Industrial Development Corporation** purchased a significant shareholding in **Safmarine** that enabled the company to build three modern reefer ships and to buy three others that it had on bareboat charter; to modernise its fleet by building eight fast freighters; and to expand into the bulk trades by ordering (in some cases with major charterers) four handysize bulkers and one capesize bulker.



Apart from four reefer ships that had been delivered to Safmarine a few years earlier (three on bareboat charter and one owned) and a Japanese-built bulk sugar carrier (Sugela), the heavy-lift ship S.A. van der Stel was the first vessel of the fleet renewal and expansion programme to arrive from her Dutch builder's yard in South Africa in 1966. She was followed by S.A. Weltevreden (from Holland), S.A. Huguenot and S.A. Alphen (from Japan) and S.A. Nederburg (from Ireland). Two years later, a further trio – S.A. Constantia, S.A. Morgenster and S.A. Vergelegen – were completed in Japan. Two more reefer ships (S.A. Hexrivier and S.A. Zebediela) came from Holland. *Photograph : Brian Ingpen Collection.*

- **Safmarine** entered the passenger ship sector by purchasing two Union-Castle mailships, thereby gaining a two-seventh share in the South Africa-UK mail service that had been operated by British interests since 1857.



The mailship S.A. Oranje (ex Pretoria Castle) was one of two mailships bought by Safmarine to give the company a two-seventh share in the mail service. She and S.A. Vaal (ex Transvaal Castle) operated in Safmarine colours from 1966, both were reflagged to the South African flag in 1969, but continued to be crewed largely by Union-Castle personnel. The ageing S.A. Oranje was scrapped in 1975, and when the mail contract ended, S.A. Vaal was the last passenger mailship to leave Cape Town for Southampton in September 1977.

Photograph : Brian Ingpen

- **Safmarine** also entered the tanker sector when, from 1966, it began to manage the IDC-owned tanker fleet that in time grew to eight vessels. Later, three VLCCS were built.



The Safmarine-managed 78020-deadweight tanker Lankus, delivered in 1966. Two crew disturbances occurred aboard, culminating in the South African ratings being replaced by Spanish ratings. After her sale to the Colocotronis group in 1972, she had two further owners before her sale to the scrapyard at Ulsan. The stern section was demolished while the forward section was converted to a dumb barge for carrying scrap steel from the yard to Pohang for smelting. *Photograph : Brian Ingpen/George Young Collection*

- After the grounding of the tanker Wafra at Cape Agulhas in 1971, Safmarine, via its tug division (**Saftug**) was commissioned by the government to build two large salvage tugs as emergency towing vessels to be stationed along the South African coast. (This was the world's first such project).



Built in Durban and delivered to Saftug in 1976 as S.A. John Ross, SA Amandla (now owned by African Marine Solutions (AMSOL)) and her sistership S.A. Wolraad Woltemade (built in Scotland and renamed later Wolraad Woltemade) were the most powerful and fastest tugs. They collectively undertook hundreds of salvage and ocean towage operations, including some of the most complex. Wolraad Woltemade was scrapped in 2012. *Photograph : Andrew Ingpen*

- The coasting sector was restructured in 1964 when the mining house Union Corporation took a significant share in African Coasters which merged with Smith's Coasters to form **Unicorn Shipping Lines** in 1966. When Safmarine bought Thesens in 1965, it sold the coasting company to Unicorn in 1966 in exchange for a shareholding. The capital injection from Union Corporation allowed Unicorn to replace older ships and to build new ships, including eleven that were built in Durban between 1969 and 1983.



Unicorn's first Trampco-type vessel Vergé (later renamed Range) and her sistership Ridge were built in Durban in 1973. Two slightly modified vessels that were also built in Durban, Gamtoos and Gouritz, entered service in 1976. . *Photograph : Brian Ingpen Collection*

- **Unicorn** extended its dry cargo operations to West Africa, South America, the Indian Ocean islands and to Israel.

- Besides its containerised and break-bulk coastal services, **Unicorn** entered the coastal oil products trade with the purchase of tankers to move products between southern African ports.
- Diamond recovery from the seabed along the west coast to the north and south of the Orange River mouth began in the early 1930s, but **Marine Diamond Corporation**, operated by the American Sam Collins, began in earnest in the 1960s with specially-fitted and custom-built barges, tugs and other craft, including some converted whalers whose operations had been outlawed by the global moratorium on whaling. Although Collins's operation was short-lived, Consolidated Diamond Mines (**De Beers**) that also began offshore diamond recovery off the west coast, continued, initially using converted coasters and later using larger and more sophisticated vessels. (Although the diamond recovery operations continue, most of it is conducted now by Namibian vessels mainly under the control of Namdeb.)
- When the world-wide moratorium on whaling came into force, two former whale factory ships, Suiderkruis (formerly the Norwegian vessel Kosmos IV) and Willem Barentsz (formerly a Dutch vessel) were converted to operate as fish factory vessels off the west coast. Although both of these large were registered in Cape Town initially, they went to operate further north, and were reflagged.
- To transport South African Antarctic teams to and from the ice, the government ordered a specialised vessel from Japanese builders, and in 1961, the country's first polar supply vessel, RSA, was delivered.
- The advent of two specialised salvage tugs and the need to provide harbour tugs that could handle the large vessels destined to call at South African ports, prompted SAR&H (later known as South African Transport Services and then Portnet and finally Transnet National Port Authority) to order over 20 multi-directional tugs, some from local yards and some from foreign yards. (Safmarine, acting for Iscor, ordered two tugs from a French yard and one from a Durban yard for the Saldanha Bay iron export terminal.) Locally-built pilot launches replaced older pilot tugs, while two new floating heavylift cranes came from a Durban yard.



W. Marshall Clark, one of the first group of Voith-Schneider multi-directional tugs built in Durban for the South African Railways & Harbours Administration, later South African Transport Services, and later Portnet.

Photograph : Brian Ingpen

- **Skipcor** moved vehicles between Port Elizabeth and other local ports from 1969 until 1970 when Unicorn Lines bought the company.
- **Durban Lines** and its ships were absorbed by Unicorn Lines in 1975 when Mozambique became independent and trade with South Africa declined.
- **Globus Reederei**, the parent company of **South African Lines**, was bought by Safmarine in 1973 and its ships were transferred to Safmarine operations, some under the South African flag and others continued under German flag.



South African Lines' Walvis Bay anchored off Cape Town. She and a number of other SAL ships were absorbed into the Safmarine fleet in 1973. All of the ships took the Safmarine nomenclature's prefix of S.A. - . She became S.A. Walvis Bay. *Photograph : Brian Ingpen /George Young Collection*

- The **SARship** operation was reduced to one ship that was replaced by a custom-built bulker for the coal trade. Chartered ships augmented the capacity of the fleet when required.

4.2 SOME SHORT-LIVED LOCAL ATTEMPTS TO ENTER SHIPPING OPERATIONS

- **Southern Reefer Shipping** (1962-c.1978) operated two small reefer ships – mainly moving fish cargoes.
- The near-derelict freighter Good Fortune operated under three different companies between 1968 and 1972 when she went to scrap. (She spent much time laid up.)
- **First Freighters** operated three Liberty ships between 1965 and 1967. Inadequate planning and management led to the company's demise.
- **Faros Shipping Enterprises** (1971) took charters for the contract to move coal from Lourenco Marques (Maputo) to Cape ports. Corruption in the tender process led to the demise of the company.
- **Green R Line** was formed in 1969 for the South African coastal trade. Because of the fierce competition from Unicorn Lines and the containerisation of much of the coastal trade, the company ceased trading in 1976 and its vessels were sold.
- **Rennies Coasters** was formed in 1961 and operated two vessels. One ship was chartered to Smith's Coasters, but later withdrawn and operated independently. Eventually, competition from Unicorn Lines and limited trade changed the operation. One ship was sold and the other was lost at sea in 1979 when the company ceased trading. Associated with Rennie's Coasters were **Zambezi-Africa Line** and **Cape Natal Line**, the latter operating two small coastal ro-ro containerships. Machinery failure and competition from Unicorn Lines forced the company to cease trading.

5. 1977 to 1999

The main characteristic of this period was the entry of South Africa to the container era, and the introduction of modern, sophisticated product tankers for coastal and international operations.

- With jet travel becoming popular, the approach of the containerisation of the South African trade, high portage bills and high fuel costs, passengership services were in decline. One of Safmarine's mailships had gone to scrap in 1975, and the other made her last voyage in 1977 as the mail service closed.
- South African involvement in Antarctic and paleo-Antarctic island scientific programmes required more scientists and more equipment to be moved. A new polar supply ship came out in 1978, replacing the original vessel.



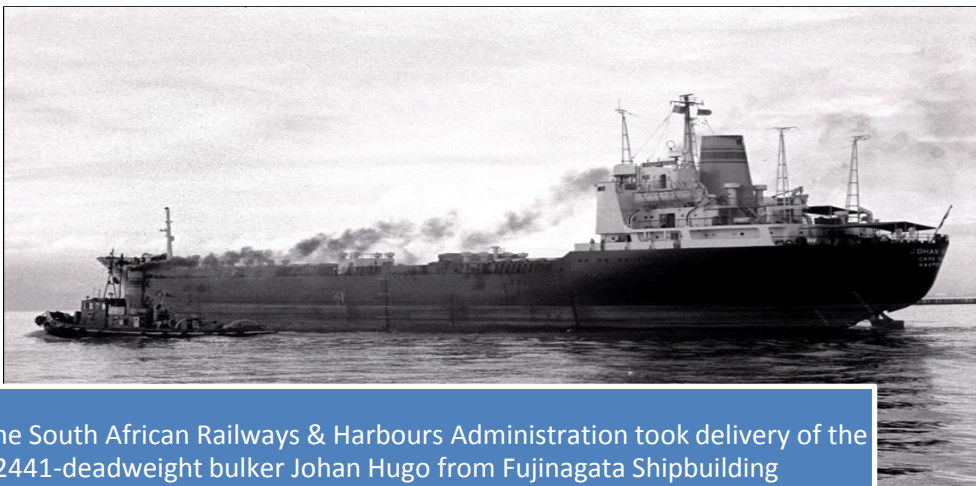
The polar supply vessel S.A. Agulhas was built in Japan in 1978. Until the arrival of S.A. Agulhas 2 in 2012, she served the South African Antarctic base and also the scientific research bases on Gough and Marion Islands. Thereafter, she was used as a cadet training ship. During a voyage to London in 2013, she berthed alongside HMS Belfast in the Upper Thames, and is the only South African ship to have passed under Tower Bridge, London. *Photograph : Brian Ingpen*

- The introduction of containerisation in 1977 brought shipping operations under various consortia, including DOAL, and their locally-flagged conventional freighters ships were replaced by a 2500-teu German-flagged containership.
- Safmarine introduced four "Big Whites" (2500-teu ships) for the main South Africa-Europe Container Service, a smaller containership for the South Africa-Mediterranean trade and two for the Safari Service to the Far East. With their cargo capacity, each of these ships replaced five conventional freighters, reducing costs, including the number of crew required.



Safmarine's four "Big Whites" were exceptional ships that came into service from late 1977 (S.A. Helderberg) to 1979 (S.A. Waterberg → shown above) and were scrapped after nearly 33 years' service. During their last few years they were owned by another company and operated on the Safmarine/Maersk services on bareboat charter basis.
Photograph : Brian Ingpen

- Safmarine also reflagged many of its ships to counteract the effect of trade sanctions. It added several more handysize bulkers and Capesize vessels.
- Safmarine re-entered the passengership sector with the purchase of the cruise ship *Astor*, crewed by some South Africans and foreign nationals. A second vessel was built to replace the smaller ship.
- As the use of coal in Cape ports was declining (powerstations being closed with the opening of Koeberg nuclear powerstation; coal-burning tugs and trawlers had been phased out; less industrial and domestic use of coal; coal-fired locomotives had been phased out), the remaining SARship was sold in 1984.



The South African Railways & Harbours Administration took delivery of the 12441-deadweight bulker Johan Hugo from Fujinagata Shipbuilding Company, Osa, a Japanese shipyard in 1966. She carried coal from Lourenco Marques (Maputo) to Cape ports until she was withdrawn from service in 1984.
Photograph : Brian Ingpen

- Although it had introduced fully-containerised and multi-purpose coastal services, **Unicorn** evolved from a containership and general cargoship operator to coastal tanker operations. It built two small containerships, two larger containerships (1780-teu) and four product tankers in Poland, but ultimately, its coastal shipping services

changed and, by 2000, the last identifiable Unicorn-owned multi-purpose ship on the coastal service had been withdrawn.



Rainbow (ex Engen Rainbow), one of Unicorn's Polish-built 44720-deadweight product tankers, operated on the southern African coastal service from 1996. *Photograph : Andrew Ingpen*

- **Grindrod**, parent company of Unicorn, purchased **Island View Shipping** in 1999, giving it access to international bulk shipping.



Handysize bulker IVS Hunter on sea trials. Photograph : Grindrod Collection

- **Safmarine's** container division was sold in 1999 to the AP Moller Group of Denmark and its bulk division was sold to the Restis Group of Greece. Although some of its containerships continued to trade to South Africa, some ships began carrying increasing numbers of foreign crews.
- The fishing industry expanded. Five major trawling companies and other fishing enterprises continue to operate, employing mainly local crews.
- The fleet of harbour craft continued to operate and new tugs were added to the fleet.



Two of the new generation of multi-directional tugs, Enseleni (foreground) and Palmiet (background). *Photograph : Brian Ingpen*

6. YEAR 2000 TO PRESENT

The thrust of shipping in this period has been the advances in containerisation that replaced almost all of the conventional shipping trading to South Africa. Another characteristic is the increase in size of containerships trading to South Africa, and some of 8000-teu capacity are now regular callers. All are foreign-flagged.

- From 2005, **Safmarine**, a Danish-owned company, took delivery of “second generation” containerships for the South African trade. Apart from one older vessel, all were foreign-flagged as the company was taking advantage of more friendly tax regimes and other benefits for shipowners elsewhere. Those “new generation” ships were replaced on the South African trade by larger chartered ships. When Safmarine’s technical and crewing divisions moved from Cape Town to Singapore, foreigners replaced many local seafarers. However, gradually, all the Safmarine-branded ships were transferred to other trades and were repaced by Maersk Line vessels. In 2020, the Safmarine brand was withdrawn, leaving no remnant of the once famous south African shipping company that was the country’s largest shipowner.



Safmarine Nokwanda at anchor off Cape Town. She was the second of the new generation of Safmarine containerships on the South Africa-Europe trade. *Photograph : Andrew Ingpen*

- **Unicorn** continued its tanker construction programme, building vessels in Korea and China. Bulkers were also built for **Island View Shipping**. All of these vessels (over 40 fully-owned or part-owned) have been flagged out to take advantage of more friendly tax regimes and other benefits for shipowners. While as many South African officers, cadets and ratings as possible are employed aboard these tankers and bulkers, most of the seafarers aboard are foreigners.



Southern Unity, the first of Unicorn's 37000-deadweight product tankers built in Korea. *Photograph : Andrew Ingpen*

- The Department of Fisheries built patrol vessels, which, with the existing research ship fleet, are all locally-flagged and crewed.



Fisheries Protection Vessel Sarah Baartman *Photograph : Andrew Ingpen*

- The fishing industry continued with five major companies (using trawlers inter alia) and numerous smaller companies operating smaller ships.
- In 2009, the only South African-flagged commercial ship – the containership *Safmarine Oranje* – went to scrap, leaving no commercial vessel registered in South Africa.



Safmarine Oranje, the last commercial ship on the South African register in 2009 – until two Capesize ore carriers were registered in Port Elizabeth in 2015.
Photograph : Ian Shiffman

- The **Department of Environmental Affairs** ordered a new polar supply ship (*SA Agulhas 2*) to replace the existing vessel (*SA Agulhas*) that became a cadet training vessel. Rising costs and the lack of adequate charters meant that the role of *S.A. Agulhas* (1) as a cadet training ship ceased and, apart from rare charters, the ship was laid up and in 2020, it appeared that she would be scrapped.



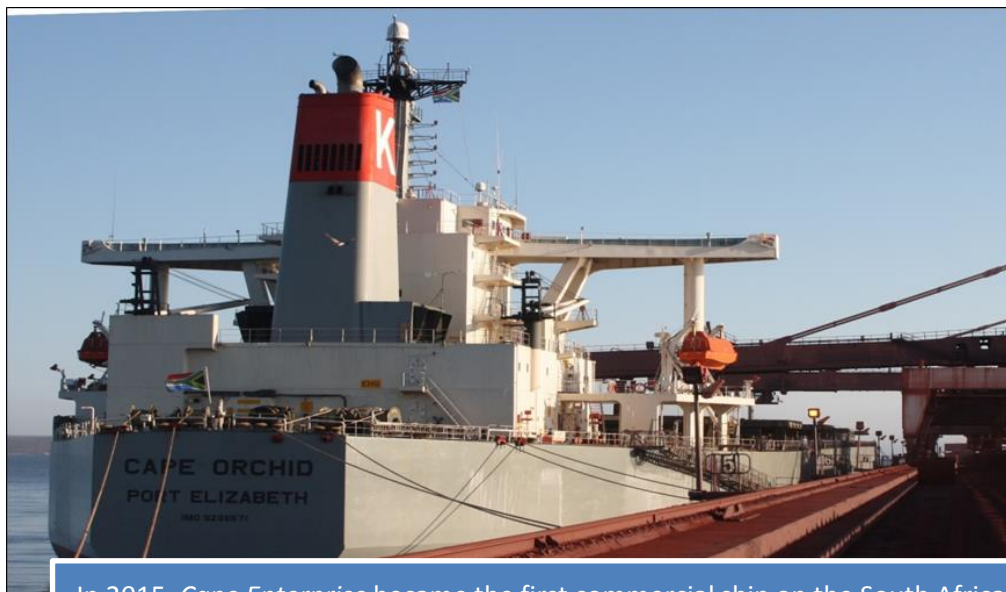
The later polar supply and research ship S.A. Agulhas II arriving on her maiden voyage. Photograph : Robert Pabst

- One of the original South African **salvage tugs**, *Wolraad Woltemade*, was scrapped while the other *S.A. Amandla*, continues as the country's emergency towing vessel. However, changes had occurred in the owning Company. African Maritime Solutions (known as AMSOL) is the owner of the tug and several other vessels – smaller tugs and offshore service vessels, and it manages ships, and undertakes various services for shipowners and operators such as ship-to-ship fuel or cargo transfers. However, its origins go back to the 1970s when Safmarine – then South Africa's largest shipping line - formed Saftug to own and operate two large and powerful salvage tugs as emergency towing vessels on the South African coast. In 1986, Saftug merged with Land & Marine Salvage, to form Peninsula Towing, known as Pentow Marine. After a restructuring of the company in 1999, the large Dutch salvage company Smit bought a majority share and later took full control of the South African operation. A subsidiary, Smit Amandla Marine, was formed in 2004 to operate the emergency towing vessel contract that the company had held since 1977. An important development occurred in 2016 when the Company was bought out by South African interests and AMSOL – a completely South African company - was born. It operates one of those two powerful tugs – *S.A. Amandla* - built in Durban back in 1976 and holds the important government contract to operate the tug as an emergency standby towing vessel on the South African coast – in case of an accident or in case a ship breaks down off the South African coast. With the tug often playing a central role, the local team of salvage experts has undertaken numerous remarkable and successful salvage and ocean towage operations. Besides damaged ships that require the services of experts in ship-to-ship transfers of liquid cargoes or in removing fuel from damaged vessels, occasionally part-cargoes need to be.



S.A. Amandla off the Cape Peninsula coast. Photograph : AMSOL

- In 2015, two Capesize ore carriers, *Cape Orchid* and *Cape Enterprise*, were transferred to the South African registry, although both are on long-term bareboat charter from K Line of Japan.



In 2015, *Cape Enterprise* became the first commercial ship on the South African register since the containership *Safmarine Oranje* went to the breakers in 2009.
Photograph : Brian Ingpen

- A tug replacement programme saw the construction in Durban of nine omni-directional tugs for South African harbours



The omni-directional harbour tug Umbilo, one of nine similar tugs built in Durban in a tug replacement programme (the fourth such building programme involving omni-directional tugs) for South African ports and concluded in 2020.

Photograph : Brian Ingpen

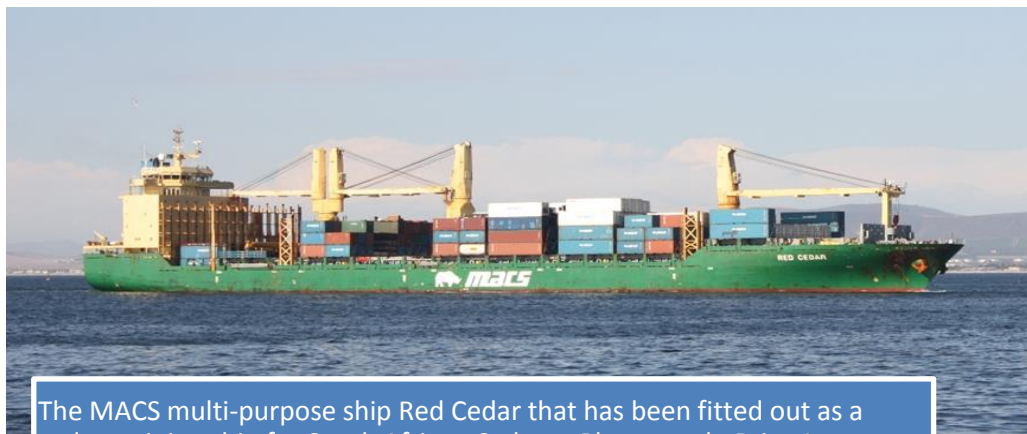
7. CREWING

- Local fishing craft were crewed mainly by local fishermen, a practice that continues to the present. Local whaling vessels were also crewed largely by South Africans, although a number of Norwegian, Italian and Dutch masters and whalersmen (especially the gunner) were also employed.
- The entry level for employment as an officer aboard the harbour craft once was a master's foreign-going certificate of competency. Thus, every officer in the harbour service (masters, mates aboard tugs and dredgers; pilots; assistant port captains, deputy port captains, and port captains and nautical adviser – now known as chief harbour master) was a qualified master mariner. Ratings were drawn from local population groups. Similarly, most of the engineering officers serving in harbour tugs and dredgers held chief engineers' certificates of competency.
- Coasters operating out of Durban had mainly white officers and Zulu ratings, while those operating out of Cape Town also had mainly white officers and so-called coloured ratings, as did most foreign-going ships, including Safmarine. Safmarine-operated vessels that traded from Durban had Zulu ratings. This policy changed in the 1970s when the shipping companies employed the most suitable officers, irrespective of race. As there were insufficient qualified South Africans to fill all the officers' positions at sea, dispensation was granted for companies to employ suitably qualified foreign nationals. As the IDC-owned and Safmarine-managed tankers were not registered in South Africa, and as few South Africans had tanker experience at the time, many tanker officers were British or Dutch.
- Grindrod (Unicorn Tankers and Island View bulkers) continue to train cadets, a practice that goes back to Unicorn Lines' cadet programme that began in 1965. However, most seafarers aboard ships in this group are foreign nationals are employed on a contract basis.



Second Officer Tyron Campbell aboard the bulker *IVS Kinglet*. Photograph: Tyron Campbell

- When locally-owned ships were flagged out, more foreign nationals were employed both as officers and ratings. This was done to widen the scope for recruitment and because, in some cases, foreigners' salaries were lower.
- The **A.P. Moller Group** (Maersk Line) announced in 2020 that it no longer will employ South African cadets or junior officers.
- Although not registered in South Africa, two multi-purpose ships of Maritime Carrier Services have been fitted out as cadet training ships to train South African cadets.



The MACS multi-purpose ship Red Cedar that has been fitted out as a cadet training ship for South African Cadets.. Photograph: Brian Ingpen

Note :

1. With 42 owned or partly-owned ships, Durban-based and JSE-listed Grindrod remains the largest South African shipowner. It has flagged its ships out to take advantage of conditions that are more conducive to shipowning than those experienced in South Africa (e.g. more friendly tax regime; more appropriate labour legislation; employment freedom.)

2. *In 1970, Safmarine alone had 23 commercial foreign-going ships flying the South African flag, and Unicorn had 25 commercial ships (mostly operating on the southern African coast) flying the South African flag. Currently, only two commercial ships (the Capesize ore carriers Cape Orchid and Cape Enterprise) are flying the South African flag, although both are on long-term bareboat charter from K Line of Japan and are crewed by Filipinos.*