Ships come & go, danger always lurks

The latest war on transport waged by the Houthis in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (the Gate of Grief/Tears – how telling!) reminds the 1967 Six-Day War, which closed the world's main shipping artery for eight years. An online search for an image to depict that event led us eventually to a... desk drawer! The presented print comes from the collection of the late Jerzy Miciński, editor of the monthly magazine *Morze* (*The Sea*). It is a letter sent by the chief engineer Jerzy Ciesielczyk from the Great Bitter Lake in 1972. Wait, from where exactly? The 1967-1975-clossed Suez Canal that got over a dozen of ships trapped. The image came as an illustration of a letter carrying a story about a buoy that's visible in the foreground. As a top-mark, it bears the logo of the Great Bitter Lake Association that united the crews of the stuck ships, with '14' pointing to the number of the vessels (the moored-together as 'islands' Yellow Fleet as it became known – because of the dust covering them). *Morze* did not provide a caption, nor did it name the background 'island.' So, starting from the right, we have the German *Münsterland* (Hamburg-America Line – HAPAG) and *Nordwind* (Hansa Line), the Swedish *Nippon* (Svenska Ostasiatiska Kompaniet) and *Killara* (Rederi AB Transatlantic), and the French *Sindh* (as trapped; later *Essayons* of Messageries Maritimes). These formed the largest 'island' of *Müwinikes*: about 54,300 dwt



Photo: Jerzy Miciński's collection

(so roughly today's container carrier of some 4,000 TEUs). These classical general ships, with a forest of masts and derricks, passed away together with all the great company names mentioned in the brackets (although some disappeared because of mergers!).

Ships have their fate, too

"Habent sua fata navibus," a Latin phrase (originally about books, so "libelli" instead of "navibus") springs to mind when looking into the history of 12 small passenger ships built by the Wisła Shipyard in Gdańsk in 1963-1969. They were of the PP-120 class (so ferries for 120 persons), mainly bearing female names. They served intra-harbour traffic in Gdańsk, Szczecin, and Świnoujście till the late 1980s. The early 1990s privatisation of state-owned operators saw them scattered in search of a new life. Two got scrapped, some cruised in other ports, and four were sold abroad. We already recalled the fate of *Norwind* (ex-*Irmina*), who took up a cultural gig by playing its stage prop role in *The Flying Dutchman* opera performed in the Klaipėda's shipyard. Only (or as much as – it depends) four PP-120s have survived to this day. Three stayed in Poland, serving as cruising restaurants. The fourth, *Balbina*, never stopped performing her original job. Up until 2017, she had been carrying workers to the island-located Gryfia Shipyard. Two years later, *Balbina* could be found in… Stockholm! Renamed *Emelie II av Hammarby Sjöstad*, she plies in the livery of Ressel Rederi between the city centre (Nybroplan) and Hammarby Sjöstad. *Emelie II* (there's also *Emelie* [without I] in Ressel Rederi's fleet) received a new bow with a ramp, a stronger engine, and, as we expect, also a coffee bar. Polish ship-lovers have one more reason to visit the capital of Sweden. And as one can read on one of the posters inside *Emelie II*: "seascape or concrete, what do you want to see when you commute to work?" Now, that's a rhetorical question if we ever saw one!



Photos: Jochum Ressel/Ressel Rederi









Photo: Adam Daszewski's collection

Flood-borne railway

A century had passed since a certain V. Kaskinen unlocked the camera shutter standing (or should we rather say sailing or paddling?) somewhere between the town of Hyvinkää and the village of Kytäjä north of Helsinki, capturing a flooded narrow-gauge (750 mm) railway that was 14 years old at the time (1924, so another 43 years of work to go). Like most European investments of this kind, it was a private, privately-operated railroad. This particular one linked the largest landed estate in the Nordics (16,000 hectares!) with a state-owned rail network. Empty cars with seat posts suggest that the train is coming west to the village for a shipment of logs or sawn timber (as most of the Kytäjä estate was covered by backwood). The passengers seem undeterred by the flooding (oh, the Finnish sisu!), which must have occurred frequently; yet, flood-no flood, the railway operated as if nothing had happened. Water seldom comes across as neutral: if it does no harm, it gives joy!





Photos: Finnish Heritage Agency/V. Kaskinen

The first step towards world domination

A neat picture of the Douglas DC-6 *Torkil Viking* recalls not only the 70th anniversary of the first ever scheduled flight over the Arctic – from Scandinavia (Copenhagen) to North America (Los Angeles) – but also a whole period after WWII when transcontinental passenger traffic exploded thanks to the availability of four-engine planes, delivered mainly by Douglas, Lockheed, and Boeing. Their huge production capacities, developed during wartime, found their outlet in the civilian market. The first regular service using landplanes – namely the Douglas DC-4, very similar to the depicted DC-6 – started in October 1945 and was operated by the short-lived American Overseas Airlines (AOA). TWA and PanAm were quick to follow, while their European counterparts, including the newly founded SAS, did not lag. SAS's first flight from Stockholm to New York took place in September 1946, with the following month seeing a trip to South America. SAS started like AOA with the DC-4, which had an unpressurised cabin, replacing them with the brand-new DC-6 before long. Similar to its predecessor, it was intended as a military transport, but by the time the prototype flew, the war was over.



Douglas deftly redesigned it for civil purposes, equipping the craft with a pressurised cabin and with more powerful radial piston engines (which earlier powered famous fighters such as Black Widow, Corsair, Hellcat, Thunderbolt, and other fast military planes). But don't be mistaken; the innovation of reliable transoceanic flights, made possible by the war, wasn't enough to solve the demand puzzle created by the conflict that forced millions to cross the oceans. The supply side for returning soldiers, war brides, prisoners of war, refugees, migrants, etc., was still provided by shipping. We had to wait for the jet era to eject ship bunks in favour of recliners.





Photos: SAS