

After spending his first four voyages as a cadet on *Rakaia*, John Crowder returned as her Chief Officer in 1965. During a voyage that year, he found himself assisting with an appendectomy! The operation took place in very rough weather, and John Crowder's description of this event is accompanied by photographs of the heavy sea conditions taken by Paul Phillips, who was an apprentice on *Rakaia* at that time.

**A VOYAGE TO REMEMBER  
BY  
JOHN CROWDER**

It was July 1965, and we sailed from Opuia for Durban, not exactly the shortest sea passage. I was Chief Officer of *Rakaia*, and Fred Angus was in command. We had just passed through the Bass Strait in heavy seas and westerly gale conditions, and we were only making about four knots.

Rab Davidson, from Moniaive, was the Surgeon, and he told me that a Steward's Boy had complained of severe stomach pain. He feared that he would probably have to remove his appendix. At four knots it would have taken *Rakaia* about four or five days to reach either Melbourne or Adelaide. I reported to Fred Angus, who asked me if I was used to blood and guts, I seem to remember.

Anyway, the hospital was set up for the work in hand. Russell Birkinshaw, the Radio Officer, was the anaesthetist. He was to administer three parts of ether and two parts of chloroform (or the other way round) onto a pad covering the young fellow's face. Fairly basic, but it seemed to work. Speed was reduced, and *Rakaia* was put onto her most comfortable course, with the gale about four points on the starboard bow.

Rab Davidson, who was about sixty-five years of age, had been a medical student under McEwan in Glasgow, who in turn was a student of Lord Lister. He came up with the Lister Spray in the latter part of the nineteenth century, so we had a direct link to the very beginnings of anti-sepsis. It was no mean undertaking.

The operation was a success, and the Steward's Boy survived, and we continued on our way to Durban. This was quite an eventful voyage, not least because of the antics of our Chief Engineer, who climbed the main mast and refused to come down. He was paid off in Durban.

Apart from all this, it was an interesting voyage, as we had small parcels of dairy products for quite a few ports, such as Tema in Ghana. At this early stage, New Zealand was preparing for the UK's entry into the Common Market. We arrived in London on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1965.

Here, Rab Davidson announced that he had booked The Pinafore Room at the Savoy Hotel for a Dinner to commemorate the successful conclusion of the Appendix Operation. The Steward's Boy, and his parents from the East End of London, were all present for a most convivial evening.

The next voyage, we had a return match at The Pinafore Room for Rab Davidson's retirement.

**Editor's Note:**

It is interesting to note that Russell Birkinshaw wrote an article about this event for inclusion in a book called: 'A Pinch Of Salt', which was first published in June 2000 (ISBN: 0953854604), and Russell's article appears on pages 96 and 97 of that book.

Since John Crowder wrote his article in 2008, Paul Phillips, who was an apprentice on *Rakaia* in 1965, has contributed the following four photographs that he took on the day of the operation.





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