

Ian Derwent Meaker



b 7.8.1946----d 1969

Ian Meaker was a member of several teams, swimming, rugby and also a Bisley shottist. We played an Old Boys game in 1964.

We travelled often to sports meetings and spent many moments chatting at various galas while waiting for our races or relay races.

He was one of those whom one instinctively trusted and liked, coming from a family of competent and achieving individuals. His father Jack was a respected and capable, decorated SAAF pilot in WW II, as was his uncle. Later as SAA pilots they were the first to pilot the new Boeing 747, his dad one of the flight who piloted the demonstrations and later transport of SAA and SARH management (including my late father-in-law, SARH GM Johan Hugo).

During the War he had piloted a captured Italian Savoia 133 bomber from Egypt, at a point with Mrs Smuts, wife of the then Prime Minister. Ian was proud of his father, after SAA going into the liquor industry, making purchase of Pine Lake Marina a logical transition, opening "Johnnies Tavern" in memory of his faithful worker, John Solomons. Its early Nissen Huts and forests made for reasonable holidays alongside the Vlei at Sedgefield.

At school Ian was quite popular because his cousin, Moya Meaker, was the 1959 Miss World, often mistaken as his sister. The Landstem/Sunday Times papers at the time reported that she was involved with a SACS matric pupil who later became a leading advocate.

Ian was for two years a SA Navy diver and went into geological marine research.

Ian's death was a shock to those of us who still saw each other after school, Naval association and occasionally dropped into Forries, keeping touch.

There were conflicting reports of his death in an explosion in the Far East in 1969—whether quayside when a ship's tank's exploded (Cape Town media) or at sea.

Purely by chance I mentioned him to a surgeon I work with to discover that Ian's older sister, Wendy, had been married to this surgeon's brother, John, also a surgeon with whom I worked in Casualty in 1971, not knowing the connection to Ian.

The events of his death were learned firsthand a couple of months before this surgeon died on his birthday 10/11/12 in Charleston, South Carolina where he worked in charge of US VA Hospitals.

Ian had visited John Allison, then a GP in Mount Fletcher, and Wendy just before leaving for the Far East/Australia in 1969.

There was a deepsea pipe from the 160 ton American geophysical exploration vessel, Western Spruce, with an Oxygen attachment fed from a large deck cylinder on Portside with Propane on Starboard. It was intended to make underwater explosions for seismic readings. To those of us who work with gases, Oxygen and petroleums have a wide stoichiometric range—there was trouble opening the valve and it broke as it was hit with a large wood piece, oxygen spewing onto the diesel covered deck. There was a massive explosion and poor Ian was blown apart, no body recovered. This was March 22nd 1969. Two others were killed on the road tanker discharging the oxygen quayside at Port Welshpool, Gippsland. The inexperienced skipper with not even a Navigation Certificate with a limited pilotage certificate for Torres Strait had held no fire drill, crew told to run ashore if the temperature of the valve changed to 58 degrees--Just another of so many needless deaths of our fellows.

In the early seventies his younger sister, Penny, now in New Zealand, was a theatre nurse at Groote Schuur and she put me in touch with his father in Sedgfield and for years we stayed in his chalets and dropped in on motorcycle

trips. He was unhappy to speak of Ian, his only son, but appreciated the contact.

I often thought of Ian and the quirky accident as years before there had been a loved labourer, Johnnie, at the Pine Lake home who had managed to throw an exploding gas cylinder out of the kitchen preventing an earlier tragedy, hence "Johnnies Tavern".

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Survey skipper tells of blast that killed three.

No fire drills on death ship

The master of the seismic survey ship Western Spruce told a Marine Court of Inquiry yesterday that no fire drills were carried out before explosions destroyed the ship on March 22.

John Henry Howard, seaman, of Alabama, USA, said that no one on the ship had been instructed on safety precautions for loading liquid oxygen.

The Western Spruce was ripped open by a series of explosions while taking on liquid oxygen at Port Welshpool.

Three men — a ship's crewman and the crew of a road tanker which was discharging the liquid oxygen—were killed.

Judge Dunn, sitting with three assessors, is inquiring into the causes of the disaster.

Howard told the court he was employed by the Western Geophysical Company of America, owners of the Western Spruce. He held a mate's licence issued by the United States Coast Guard for ships up to 300 tons.

Seepage

He became master of the 160-ton Western Spruce in Devonport, Tasmania, about the beginning of this year.

Howard said there had been no allocation of duty between the ship's crew and the seismic crew in the event of fire.

No fire drill had been carried out while he was master, and the crew had not been instructed on precautions when loading liquid oxygen.

Asked by Mr. W. Kaye, of the Marine Board,



mandated a ship of 160 tons. He had never taken a course in navigation, and he had had no knowledge of liquid oxygen.

Earlier, Mr. Kaye told the court in his opening address that liquid oxygen was stored in a deck tank of 2000 U.S. gallons on the port side of the Western Spruce.

Propane was stored in a tank of about the same size on the starboard side.

The gases were combined for firing aqua-pulse guns in the sea for taking seismic readings.

The ship also carried 12 44-gallon drums of lubricating oil and 30,000 gallons of diesel.

The liquid oxygen was highly shock-sensitive and was an extreme detonation hazard.

It caused metal to crack by absorbing heat out of it.

Propane was highly inflammable, having a flash point of less than 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

Off the map

Mr. Kaye said the ship to Kelly: "If this stuff goes off it will blow Portland off the map."

"If that gauge goes over 65 get the hell off the ship. Don't wait for anything."

Shocks

Mr. Kaye said Kelly had had "some shocks."

One night, when the gauge exceeded 58 lb. and he could not get it down, he had gone ashore to get another man who had opened a valve which brought the pressure down.

On the last occasion when Kelly had acted when Kelly acted as watchman he had opened this valve when the pressure was between 68 and 69 but had been unable to reduce it.

After running ashore and reporting to the Western Geophysical Company office he returned to the ship and a crewman named Adams struck one of the valves with a piece of wood. The pressure came down.

Mr. Kaye said it could be concluded that one of the valves had been encrusted with ice. (He had explained the oxygen was a liquid