

Captain Henry F. Tschudi

Daring to be different

by Celia Lindqvist, Tschudi Shipping Company AS

Tschudi Shipping Company has roots back to 1883 and is now run by the fourth generation of the Tschudi family, Felix H. Tschudi. Our values are based on the foundation of four generations. Third generation, Captain Henry F. Tschudi (Felix H. Tschudi's father) was engaged in the family ship-owning business from 1945 – 1992. When recently asked about his maritime career, he kindly gave the following summary. "Daring to be Different" can certainly be recognized in aspects of his career.

How were the first years of your maritime career?

"My father and grandfather both pursued maritime careers in our family ship-owning company Tschudi & Eitzen and it was therefore natural for me to follow family traditions.

My career started with the shipping company Wilh. Wilhelmsen - it was normal practice to gain experience from other shipping companies before joining the family company. On the 5th June 1945, at the age of 19, I signed on as deck boy on vessel M/S Tampa then as ordinary seaman onboard M/S Troya. Further as deck hand in the Norwegian Royal Navy on the submarines Uthaug and Ula. I was also onboard two English merchant vessels M/S Katha and M/S Salween sailing between England and Burma.

After completing my Navy service in 1950, I then attended Merchant Marine Academy. After graduating from the Academy,



◀ Daring to be different

I continued my career with Wilh. Wilhelmsen as third officer on M/S Touray and then second officer on M/S Torreas.

My first assignment with Tschudi & Eitzen was as Chief Officer on M/T Simona in 1953. At the time, this seemed a bit strange as I actually had no tanker experience! The previous Chief Officer had signed off several days earlier than planned for a job ashore and a replacement was urgently needed. Fortunately, this went well!

I also sailed for Tschudi & Eitzen on M/S Sitanja and then as Captain onboard M/T Simona, M/S Simara and M/S Sistina. In the lower ranks life onboard was quite simple. We performed various tasks: watch keeping duties, helmsman and look out duties, cleaning and painting. As an Officer and Captain I had more responsibilities but that was quite OK.

One vivid memory from my early days as Captain was when the pilot onboard tried to persuade me in stormy conditions to go close to the shore in order to ease his disembarkation outside Rotterdam. In strong winds, this can be a very risky operation which I refused and informed that he would either have to jump overboard or stay onboard to Dover. He ended up accompanying me all the way to Dover!"

What would you say are the most memorable events in your career?

"In 1959, when I started my Tschudi & Eitzen career ashore, there were three ships in operation and three idle - in other words, "bad times".

A few years later in 1964, an exciting opportunity arose which resulted in a new Tschudi & Eitzen venture, transshipment of oil also referred to as ship to ship transfer (STS). Due to the depressed market, the Pakistan National Oil Company had circulated a contract for the transport of "clean" and "dirty" oil products in the market for several months. This contract covered the transport of 375 000 tons of refined oil products from Kuwait and approx. 560 000 tons fuel oil from Priolo, Sicilia in 24.000



The two halves of Greek Tanker "Marianna II" onboard Sibig Venture.

dwt vessels to the estuary of the River Karnapuli at Chittagong in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Due to the shallow river it was necessary to transship at the mouth of the river into smaller 16.000 dwt vessels and part load with 8.000 tons oil in order to be able to sail up the river and access the port of Chittagong.

There had been virtually no interest in this contract and my brother Hans (who was then a tanker broker with Lorentzen Chartering) and I decided to fly to East Pakistan to negotiate the contract. We soon saw this as an interesting business venture as we already had M/T Sibella 24.000 dwt in our fleet which could be used. During negotiations with the Pakistanis we concluded that we would purchase, at a low second hand market, two additional 24.000 dwt vessels: M/T Sitakund and M/T Sidacca and three 16.000 dwt vessels: M/T Sisangu, M/T Sigupta and M/T Siponto.

When the 2 year Chittagong contract was completed, the Suez crisis had arisen and the canal was subsequently closed, the market peaked and the vessels sold at a good profit! We were however able to use the 3 new tugs Sinader, Sistella and Sinni and 3 barges, already contracted for this operation, for conventional salvage and towage. This was the starting point for ITC as you know it today.

During this period, another exciting new venture arose for Tschudi & Eitzen. The three OBOs Siboen, Siboto, Sibotre (72 500 tons - Panamax size) were contracted. The first was delivered in 1968. Tschudi & Eitzen was one of the pioneers in operating the combination carriers for ore, bulk and oil.

After Camillo Eitzen died in 1969 and my father Felix H. Tschudi retired in 1970, I took over as sole chief. I was in charge with Director Rolf Fabricius Hansen as my "second in command". In 1980, Axel Eitzen came in as an equal partner.

One other thing I would like to mention is my idea for new tug and barge projects - well, actually my idea did not materialize but in the end did result in the conversion of the tanker Venture Espana into one of the first submersible heavy lift vessels - an extremely exciting concept. The vessel was renamed Sibig Venture and classified as the world's largest of its kind. Sibig Venture attracted a lot of attention and was given international media coverage in 1988 for the transportation of the two halves of the protective barrier for the Ekofisk storage tank from Rotterdam to Norway. Later Sibig Venture transported an Aframax cut in two from Greece to Korea."

On reflection is there anything you would have done differently in your career?

"With the Suez crisis, freight rates increased to very high levels. All oil transport from the Arabian Gulf to Europe was via the



M/T Simona under command of Captain Henry F. Tschudi, 1955.

Cape of Good Hope. Ship-owners started to contract and build VLCCs (very large crude carriers) like crazy. Tschudi & Eitzen was however of the opinion that good things don't last forever and was not part of this trend.

During this period we did however achieve very high time-charter rates for the two OBOs in the spot market. We also believed that the market would rise further and this gave us an opportunity to widen our horizons and think bigger, the answer was an Ultra Large Crude Carrier (ULCC). We managed to get a building slot with Uddevallavarvet in Sweden to build an ULCC of approx. 490 000 tons. We were however sceptical to being the first owners of such a giant vessel and were more than happy when a Swedish ship-owner built "Nanny" the first in this ULCC series. In October 1973 the market collapsed but the contract was already signed. In 1976, just before the yard was about to purchase the steel for the vessel, we were able to cancel the building contract. This however resulted in an arbitration with the outcome that we had to build two 50.000 bulk carriers and pay the shipyard a USD 30 million cancellation fee as compensation. These were built and converted to OBOs, the first was Sibofir and the second in that series was sold before delivery. These OBOs were the first vessels to be equipped with FRAMO deep well pumps and in the end 17 such vessels were built by the Uddevalla yard."

What is the biggest difference from your time to today?

"The biggest difference is the nationality of the crew. Crews

are primarily foreign and employed through crewing agencies. The vessels are very often foreign flagged and operated by external managers. The era of national flag and national crews is largely over. The relationship between ship-owners and the vessels is quite different from when I started my career. Not so personal. The shipping industry has now taken on a global character in ownership and operation."

What in your opinion is the key to success?

"Each generation has to be entrepreneurial with determination and commitment to new strategies. Future business should be based on:

- Common values - sharing beliefs on how things should be done
- Loyalty - a common determination for success and strong personal bonds
- Stability - building for future generations encourages the long-term thinking needed for growth and success."

Captain Tschudi reflects further:

"In the course of 125 years, it is strange to think of all the people who have contributed to the company and all those who have vanished into history."

But one thing is for sure. Captain Henry F. Tschudi will not sink into oblivion in Tschudi history - he will always stand out as one of the great contributors.