

mv Athol Voyage 10/5 Report. Chapter 2

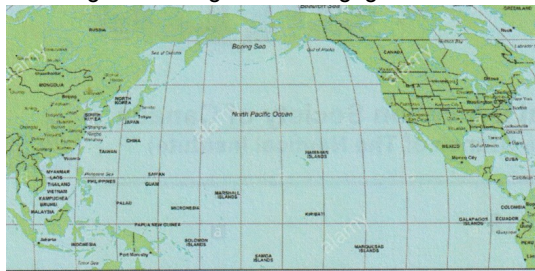
It was November 22nd and the ship was approaching Atka Island. Strong southerly winds prevailed and it was assumed that a suitable shelter would not be available at Nazan Bay. So the course was altered for Cape Idalug on Amlia Island. The wind was now much stronger and visibility reduced to about a half mile. The vessel was preparing to enter the bay when they sighted the *Viking*, an American crab-fishing boat, and VHF communications were established. The boat's Skipper advised that Cape Idalug was not suitable and he advised they go to Nazan Bay. Another American fishing boat, the *Seaview*, generously provided a spare large-scale chart of Nazan Bay (U.S.C. & G.S. No. 9010) and with considerable difficulty was able to pass the chart aboard. At 1020HRS the course was again altered for Nazan Bay. The following cable was received from Vancouver: -



from Vancouver: -

MASTER ATHOL USCG PERMISSION GRANTED YOU ANCHOR ATKA ISLAND AND RESECURE DECK CARGO = MONAGHAN TRANSMACAN

Two hours later the vessel approached Nazan Bay in poor visibility and strong winds. With the aid of radar and using extreme caution, the vessel anchored at Nazan Bay inner anchorage. The bay is well sheltered from the seas and is a safe anchorage with a good holding ground. However the anchorage is exposed to westerly winds that funnel down the mountainsides. (As a point of interest it was later learned that the *Athol* was the first large vessel to visit the bay since World War Two).



Restowing at No. 1 hatch began early in the afternoon but because of strong winds and continuous rain the work was slow. By 2100 that day the wind had reached gale force and it became difficult and dangerous to lift cargo with the UCG. So it was decided to quit for that night.

At 0600 hrs the next morning an attempt was made to continue the restow but it was still too dangerous. Later that morning another attempt failed because of snow flurries and severe weather. Cables explaining the situation were sent to the Owners, CTCo, Oceanroutes and the US Coast

Guard. A cable received from Japan asked for the draft fore and aft when arriving at Kawasaki. Throughout that afternoon and night the wind persisted at gale force with freezing rain. Bridge watches were maintained and the vessel's position regularly checked.

On November 24th the wind began to abate so at 0430 hrs work resumed. It was necessary to shift cargo from the hatchcover to the wings before restowing it back on the hatchcover. Using a gang of longshoremen this work might not take much time, but lack of proper equipment and expertise made the task more difficult. However, using crowbars and wire ropes the job was completed by mid afternoon. An hour later the chains had been tightened, the boom lowered and at 1710 hrs the vessel weighed anchor and departed Nazan Bay. At 1920, off the northern tip of Atka Island, in position 52° 26'N 174° 09'W, the vessel resumed her voyage. A cable for the US Coast Guard said: -

USCOAST GUARD KODIAK RESTOWING OPERATIONS COMPLETED AND SAILED NAZAN BAY 250500Z MANY THANKS

Other messages were sent to the Owners and CTCo showing an ETA Kawasaki for December 2nd.

To Oceanroutes the message read: SAILED NAZANBAY 250500Z INTEND FOLLOW ROUTE RL ATTU GC 4400N 15000E RL INUOBE

SAKI PLEASE ADVISE = MASTER

The vessel proceeded to the western end of the Aleutians, Attu Island. The weather in this part of the Bering Sea was slight.

A message from San Francisco read: -

MASTER ATHOL EXPECT BRIEF PERIOD HEAVY SOUTHERLIES VICINITY 175E BECOMING WESTERLY UNTIL 160E NORTH 40N

CONCUR INTENTIONS = OCEANROUTES

A message from Tokyo read: ADVISE WHETHER REQUIRE SURVEYOR ON ARRIVAL ALSO EXTENT LOSS SO ARRANGE DISCH

TALLY WISHING YOU SMOOTHER BALANCE = LANDAHL

The Master's reply was: LANDAHL NIPPONMARITIME TOKYO THANKS YOUR MSG LOSS TO PERSONAL PRIDE AND

CONFIDENCE ONLY SAME CANNOT BE SURVEYED STOP NIL CARGO LOB ETA KAWASAKI NOON SECOND = MASTER

That night the vessel crossed the Date Line and the clocks were advanced 24 hours to 0001 hrs on November 27th. That

morning the ship rounded Attu Island and set a course of 240°(T) for the intended route. Soon they encountered a very

heavy southwesterly swell and speed was reduced. Some

timbers came loose at No. 1 again. The course was altered and

with speed reduced the crew secured these timbers once more.

A course of 270°(T) was set because the ship rode well on that

course.

At 1600 hrs the wind and swell abated and in DR position 53°

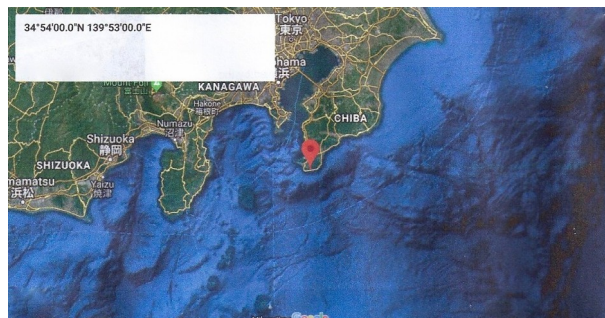
00'N 169°26'E the course was altered to 235°(T) for the

intended route.

That night a study of the weather report showed a pair of

depressions ahead of the ship. Accordingly, at 2300 hrs, in DR

position 52° 05'N 167°25'E the course was altered to 180°(T) to



allow room for the depressions to pass. This course was maintained until noon on November 28th in observed position 50° 02'N 167°09'E when it was determined to head directly for Nojima Saki (right) on course 233°(T). Throughout this day the weather was moderate and the vessel continued at optimum speed, but at 0600 on November 29th the wind freshened and veered to the SW. The swell was confused and it increased in height. At 1000 the course was altered to 180°(T) and the speed reduced. At 1130, in DR position 46° 57'N 160°52'E, the course was changed to 140°(T) and the speed further reduced. By noon the wind was from the west force 8/9 with a predominantly westerly 10 - 12 feet swell.

At 1600 on the 29th, in DR position 46° 21'N 161°40'E, a freak wave about 30 feet high struck the ship from just abaft the starboard beam. The vessel rolled to 36° by the inclinometer and shifted the entire deck cargo over to the port side. Immediately the helm was put hard over to port and the course changed to 110°(T) so that the remaining waves were taken right aft or on the starboard quarter.

It was found that the deck load was now overhanging the portside by about one foot, held on only by the chains. Damage to the No. 5 exhaust vent and the bulwark rails was apparent.

The ship now developed a port list of about 8° so fuel oil and ballast water were transferred to compensate.

The weather deteriorated further and the wind force increased to 9/10. The swell rose to 18 feet. The vessel's speed was reduced and the course altered to discover the most suitable position.

Cables were sent to CTCo. and to the owners with the following details: -

FREAK 30 FOOT WAVE SHIFTED NUMBER FOUR FIVE DECKCARGO OVERHANGING PORTSIDE ABOUT ONE FOOT APPARENT DAMAGE TO HOLD VENTILATOR AND BULWARK RAILS STOP EXPERIENCING VERY HEAVY WEATHER BEST ETA THIRD DECEMBER = MASTER

The vessel continued heading eastwards due to gale force WNW'ly winds and a very heavy swell. It was not prudent to strain the vessel and the already shifted cargo by heading into the wind and seas.

On the morning of November 30th a cable was sent to Oceanroutes Tokyo: -

292100Z 4600 16530 NUMBER FOUR FIVE DECKCARGO SHIFTED OVERHANGING PORTSIDE ONE FOOT STOP HEAVY WESTERLIES PERMIT EASTERLY COURSE ONLY PLEASE ADVISE URGENT = MASTER

At 1530 hrs that day, in DR position 45° 35'N 167°40'E, it was finally possible to turn the ship and set a course of 250°(T).

The speed was further reduced. An answer came from Oceanroutes: -

MASTER ATHOL EXPECT 45 KNOT WESTERLIES NORTH 45N 30 KNOTS NORTH 36N AND 18 FOOT SWELL EAST 155E NORTH 40N = OCEANROUTES

The vessel continued on her course and from 0800 hrs on December 1st the speed was gradually increased. That morning the Master and Mate thoroughly inspected the deck cargo and then sent this cable to CTCo, Tokyo: -

LANDAHL NIPPONMARITIME TOKYO AFTER CLOSE EXAMINATION SITUATION DECK CARGO FOLLOWING STOP ALL CARGO ABOVE HATCHTOP LEVEL FROM TWO TO FIVE MOVED ATHWART TWO FEET OVERHANGING PORTSIDE ONE FOOT EXCEPT VICINITY MASTHOUSE STBDSIDE CARGO INTACT BUT PORTSIDE OVERHANGING STOP OVERHANG HOLDING BY CHAINS ONLY STOP NUMBERONE RESTOWED CARGO AGAIN SHIFTED FORWARD HELTER SKELTER SOME LOOSE ON FOCSLE DECK RESECURED WITH WIRE BEST POSSIBLE STOP PORTSIDE ALONGSIDE SOLID PIER WITHOUT FENDERS PREFERRED CAN ENDEAVOUR BUMP CARGO AGAINST PIER WHEN DOCKING UTILISING TUGS FAILING WHICH NECESSARY UNLASH DISCHARGE SECTIONWISE PREVENT VIOLENT REACTIONS STOP MINOR VESSEL DAMAGES APPARENT NO CARGO LOB AS YET STOP DUE DELICATE CONDITION DECKCARGO AND UNFAVOURABLE WEATHER REGRET UNABLE PROCEED FULL SPEED CERTAINTY OF TOTAL LOSS CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED IF CHAINS PART 010000Z POSITION 4140N 16340E HOPEFUL ETA FIFTH WILL KEEP ADVISED STOP PLEASE RELAY TO TRANSMACAN AND OWNERS REGARDS = CAPTAIN MONTEIRO MASTER

Having studied the weather report it was found that a low just east of Honshu was moving towards the ship. Accordingly at 1500 hrs in DR position 43° 50'N 162°35'E the course was altered to 270°(T) in order to pass north of the depression.

However, prevailing conditions, the risk of the depression altering its heading and a further low developing in China and heading seawards caused another alteration. At 1600 hrs, in position 43° 50'N 162°25'E, the ship altered course to 180°(T). That night the weather conditions improved substantially and speed was gradually increased.

On December 2nd the weather deteriorated again. The 2118Z (0748SMT) weather report from Tokyo indicated the storm: GALE WARNING = DEVELOPING LOW 1008 MBS AT TWO TWO NORTH ONE THREE ONE EAST SOUTH OF MINAMIDITO JIMA MOVING EASTNORTHEAST 20 KNOTS WITH WARM FRONT TO 24N 135E 25N 133E AND COLD FRONT TO 18N 124E = WINDS 30 TO 40 KNOTS EXPECTED WITHIN 500 MILES RADIUS FOR NEXT 24 HOURS.

After the noon sight the course was altered to 255°(T), heading once again for Japan, expecting to pass north of the centre of the low. The following position report was despatched: -



The weather improved and speed was gradually increased. The 0318Z weather report from Tokyo read: -

GALE WARNING = DEVELOPING LOW 1002 MBS AT TWO NINE NORTH ONE FOUR TWO EAST SOUTH OF KANTO MOVING EASTNORTHEAST 40 KNOTS WITH WARM FRONT TO 28N 150E AND COLD FRONT TO 23N 139E WINDS 30 TO 40 KNOTS WITH 400 MILES RADIUS FROM CENTRE AND NEAR FRONTS.

That evening the following cable was despatched: ALGONQUIN CROYDON REQUEST PERMISSION WIFE CHILD JOIN VESSEL DURATION PRESENT STAY JAPAN OWN EXPENSE = MASTER

The weather situation was watched closely that night and, at midnight, with a barometer reading of 1022.0 mbs it was assumed the low would continue as forecast and pass 300 miles south of the vessel. Then, on Dec. 3rd the 2118Z weather report from Tokyo told a different story: -

GALE WARNING = DEVELOPING LOW 992 MBS AT THREE SIX NORTH ONE FOUR NINE EAST MOVING NORTHEAST 40 KNOTS

WITH WARM FRONT TO 32N 162E AND COLD FRONT TO 30N 148E 19N 137E = WINDS 30 TO 45 KNOTS WITHIN 400 MILES RADIUS FROM CENTRE AND FRONT.

This was the first indication that the low had changed direction. Course was altered to 270°(T) expecting the low would resume ENE direction. The wind direction did not indicate an alteration in the low's direction. Then the barometer began to fall rapidly with a corresponding increase in wind force, and the swell grew larger. Two timbers were washed overboard.

Cables were sent to CTCo agents in Japan plus the following to owners: -

ETA KAWASAKI 0900 SIXTH DRAFT 3109 EK TWO TIMBERS FOCSLE LOB STOP ARRANGE ADVANCES DOLLARS 10000 YEN 500000 ARRIVAL PROVISIONS PAYABLE ICANSHIP STOP AVOID REPEAT PRESENT MISHAP STRONGLY URGE INSTALL WEATHER FACSIMILE AND OMEGA NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEMS PRIOR SAILING JAPAN CONSIDER ESSENTIAL FOR SAFETY WITH THIS CARGO AND OPERATIONAL AREA REGARDS = MASTER

At noon, in DR position 39° 30'N 158°15'E, the wind was S x E force 9. There was a 10-foot swell from the south. The sky was cloudy with light fog and the barometer had fallen to 986.5 mbs. Soon afterwards the wind force increased and the swell rose. The vessel hove to with engine speed reduced and the course altered to maintain steerage, the wind and sea about two points on the port bow. By 1400 the wind was S x W force 9/10 and the swell S x W 15/18 feet. The barometer read 982.0 mbs. Heavy spray foam on the sea surface reduced the visibility. An attempt was made to turn and run with the wind but the vessel had great difficulty moving from its 'broached' position, even with engines at full power. No sooner did she manage to turn completely, the vessel began to lose steerage and engine power. The strength of the wind can be demonstrated by the fact the turbo-chargers lost suction and cylinder temperatures shot up immediately. The maximum possible temperatures were overridden under direct orders of the Master and the engines changed over to diesel fuel.

With no steerage and without engine power the vessel would certainly have been lost. So, with great difficulty, she was again put about and she remained hove to in that position with just sufficient power to maintain steerage.

At 1600 the wind had shifted to W x S force 11. The swell was confused but mainly W x S at a height of 30/35 feet. Visibility had deteriorated and the barometer read 982.5 mbs.

The vessel was steered for every individual wave to keep the wind and waves just about 2 points on the port bow. She was pitching heavily and riding the waves gallantly with a slight roll. Spray from the fo'c'sle lashed against the bridge front with blinding force. The Master's previous experience on a similar vessel told him that the ship was built with exceptional strength and was sound.

At 1620 hours a mountainous wave, at least 40/50 feet high, was sighted approaching the vessel from the southwest (four points on the port bow) about a half-mile distant.