AN INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER RYND

By Richard H. Wagner

Captain Christopher Rynd's career has paralleled the development of the modern cruise industry. During some 37 years at sea he has commanded many of the key vessels of this period, accumulating a vast knowledge of the sea, the ships and the industry.

The Princess Years

Born in New Zealand and raised in such far-flung locales as Sri Lanka, Singapore, Samoa, and Fiji in the South Pacific, Captain Rynd began his career at sea in 1970 and after completing his cadetship joined the ORONSAY of Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company ("P&O"). P&O is a venerable British line that was built upon transporting passengers from Britain to India and Australia. Rynd's early days were spent on P&O ships doing the Australia run and the occasional cruise.

In 1974, P&O purchased Princess Cruises, a small company that had begun in 1965 operating cruises on the West Coast, primarily from Los Angles to Mexico and Alaska. Princess had a one-ship fleet at the time consisting of the ISLAND PRINCESS, which it leased from Flagship Cruises. But, the 19,000-ton ISLAND PRINCESS was a new ship, built in Germany only a few years before. P&O purchased ISLAND PRINCESS as well as her sister ship PACIFIC PRINCESS (formerly SEA VENTURE) for Princess. It also contributed another new ship, P&O's SPIRIT OF LONDON, which had originally been built for Norwegian Caribbean Line. As a result, Princess had a state-of-the-art fleet.

Captain Rynd, who would later command PACIFIC PRINCESS recalls that these ships "were the first generation of specialized cruise ships. Prior to that, [cruise ships] were liners that had been converted. This first generation, without all the hold space, without all the cargo gear, was far more efficient. They were beautiful little ships in that time. They were considered medium sized ships, holding about 660 passengers, if memory serves. The crew complement, again about half that, 330 or more."

"They were very special days in that early time of cruising. You felt like pioneers. When we were first going to Alaska, the roads were unpaved, there were one or two other ships in port on a busy day, you visited the glaciers, you stopped amongst the whales, you did so with fewer restrictions but the ships were smaller and there were far fewer of them. Alaska was glorious. We went down to Cabo San Lucus, Mexico. At the time, there were a few burros there, a single hotel, half a dozen dwellings and that was it. The old Cabo San Lucas was a delight. Having gone back there in recent times, you just see this sprawling metropolis that has grown up as a result, I suppose, of the its popularity."

In 1975, Princess was approached by a television producer about using its ships as the setting for a weekly series. Fortunately, Princess decided that it could live with the inconveniences associated with filming a series on an operational ship and agreed. The series was, of course, The Love Boat and it ran for a decade, making Princess Cruises a household name and jump-starting the cruise industry. "It introduced to people the idea that cruising was possible for ordinary people, not just for the rich and famous."

In those early days, however, some of the traditions that had been part of life on the old liners still remained. "All the officers used to dine at passenger tables. It was expected, almost an obligation, that you did so except for fairly extreme circumstances. That was all the officers, second officers, third engineers, and so on, all had a passenger table, dined with the passengers and invited the passengers to the cabin for drinks before dinner and things of that nature."

Over the years, this type of interaction between officers and passengers faded away on cruise ships. "Ships started getting a lot bigger with a lot more peo-

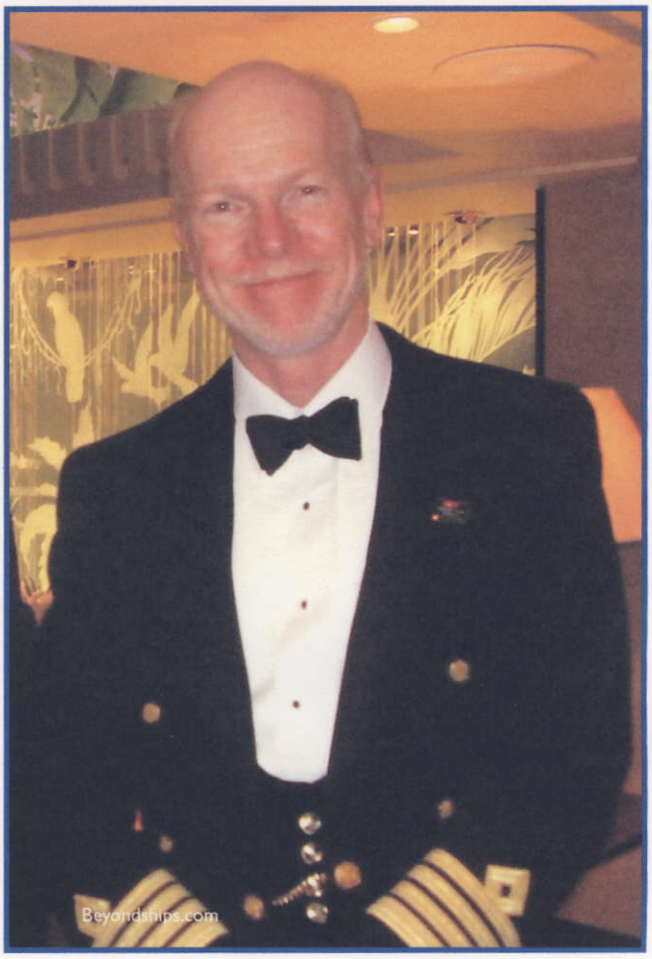
ple. The idea of greeting people at cocktail parties on the big ships is just logistically impossible. So, the hotel side and the entertainment side became more and more specialized and larger. The idea that deck and technical officers were so involved with hosting became de-emphasized at the same time. There was also more and more emphasis on their professional duties in an increasingly complex technical environment in which the officers worked. I think what really phased it out was anytime dining. Much of what enables officers to host tables depends upon the passenger being assigned to the first or second seating dinner, having an assigned table and going to that place at the assigned time whereas many modern travelers want a holiday as they might ashore, which means that they want a less structured lifestyle."

In 1988, P&O acquired Sitmar (the name was short for Societa ItalianaTransporti Maittima, S.p.A), which had also been competing in the West Coast cruise market. P&O folded the Sitmar operation into Princess Cruises. As part of this acquisition, Princess gained the FAIRSKY (46,314 gross tons), which Princess renamed SKY PRINCESS (later PACIFIC SKY). Captain Rynd's career at Princess also included commanding this vessel. "I believe she was the last steam turbine ship ever built. She was launched in 1984 and she was started nearly two years before that. French built. That was a wonderful experience in the sense that I felt part of history just being there. Steam turbine ship, very rare these days, very smooth propulsion, of course, but a whole different way of approaching maneuvers and handling her as compared to a diesel electric which is the modern idea of propulsion configuration."

With turbines, there is "far less power astern, maybe one third. They also take time to get those revolutions on - - going ahead, slow them down, stop them, go astern and so forth. So, they responded less quickly to maneuvers than the modern ships."

In addition, SKY PRINCESS "was built as older traditional ships were with a single rudder and two fixed screws. That is not a maneuverable combination. We were cruising the South Pacific islands with no pilots and no tugs. She presented some challenges which required good foresight and a keen eye on what the weather was doing to enable her safely."

"Also, you always had to be mindful of the enormous up-take of cooling water and the consequences when you got into shallow water. The steam condensers required vast quantities of water. What happened if you were coming into a remote Pacific island anchorage in a strong wind? You had to keep that ship on track, on course and this required speed to



Captain Christopher Rynd.

maintain steerage way until the ship would get to where you wanted to anchor and then needed to go astern with full power. All the shells and matter from the bottom would get sucked up into the condensers. The engineers didn't like you for that because they would have to pull all the sea life out of their condensers. So, you had to handle her gently from that sense."

Sitmar also had a series of ships on order when it was acquired by P&O. Two of these were the CROWN PRINCESS (now OCEAN VILLAGE TWO) and REGAL PRINCESS (soon to be renamed PACIFIC DAWN for P&O Australia). These two ships, completed in the early 1990s, were approximately 70,000 gross tons, 811 feet long and 103 feet wide. In addition to being larger than most cruise ships of the era, they featured a radical new silhouette that looked more like an airplane fuselage or a dolphin than a traditional ship. REGAL PRINCESS was another of Captain Rynd's commands. "REGAL PRINCESS was one of those next generation passenger ships or cruise ships. But, again, single rudder, twin screw, a little more maneuverable but not an awful lot more. A very nice ship, although not every ones' idea of design. Renzo Piano designed the outside. She is not everyone's taste but inside she is

beautiful, she is lovely."

Captain Rynd brought the new PACIFIC PRINCESS into service for Princess in 2002. This ship is 30,277 tons and was one of eight nearly identical ships built for Renaissance Cruises, which had gone out of business. "She was one of the R-boats and they were real sweeties. The interior is beautiful in the classic sense, sort of an English country house sort of décor inside and decoration like the original PACIFIC PRINCESS. Again, a small complement, 660 passengers, half that in crew."

The top-of-the-line ships in the Princess fleet are the Grand-class ships. In 1998, the lead ship in this class GRAND PRINCESS dazzled the industry with her enormous size (108,000 tons) and her radical for the time design. That design has proved so popular and successful that Princess has continued to build Grand-class ships ever since. In 2004, Captain Rynd took command of the new SAPPHIRE PRINCESS. "The GRAND PRINCESS was the first of the series and I should think that in each successive ship they have thought about how they did it and put it together and improved on that where they could. So, these two [SAPPHIRE and sister DIAMOND PRINCESS] had the benefit of their pedigree but also the benefit of their construction in a Japanese yard [Mitsubishi Heavy Industries] which would appear to be very good indeed. They were built extremely well. If you consider the way Japanese build cars, the same with ships, they were wonderfully well put together, well-tested and delivered clean, tested, functional. Very well-handled and a very beautiful ship."

The Cunard Years

Queen Elizabeth 2

Following Carnival Corporation's acquisition of P&O and Princess Cruises in 2003, Cunard Line, which is also a Carnival subsidiary, was placed under the same management umbrella as Princess and P&O. In order to broaden experience and to create more opportunities for advancement, the personnel of the three lines were mixed with Cunard officers commanding Princess and P&O ships and Princess officers serving on Cunard ships. A senior master in the Princess fleet, Captain Rynd was given the opportunity to command the legendary QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 in 2006 for part of her world cruise and for part of her European cruise season.

After having commanded some of the most modern and largest cruise ships, commanding the nearly-40 year old ocean liner was like returning to the past. "What myself and Commodore Bernard Warner have in common is that we started out on ships of the QE2 era and older, so our times as more junior officers were spent in such ships. So it wasn't, let's say, so difficult for us to go back to what we remember of those ships in the past."

On QE2, the ship's officers, especially the captain, still retain a social role, frequently interacting with passengers. "After coming from one ship where you had far less a social role, to re-engage with people was fun, good to get back to. As I say, Commodore Warner and I both began in that environment so it was a return to what we knew from the past."

QE2 also differs from the modern cruise ships in that she does not have all of the marine technology that has been developed over the last four decades to make ships more maneuverable. "She is great in a straight line. She wasn't built for intricate maneuvers. Again, you need planning and forethought and a keen eye on what the weather is doing. You must hire tugs and get assistance or use your anchor and the other seamanship methods to ensure that you can dock her."

This is not to say that QE2 is technologically obsolete. "She has had an awful lot of money put into her to bring her to quite a high level in the technical spaces - - improving, cleaning and maintaining that ship so that she not only meets but exceeds the expectations of the MCA, the British Marine and Coastguard Agency. Also, the machinery that she had put into her originally was put in during an age when they over-engineered things and built them very solid so you have gear there that has lasted, will last, for over 40 years. It is good solid gear, whether you are talking windlass machinery or main propulsion motors. It is all solid, heavy stuff - - different era technology but well-built. So, she is in good shape right now."

This includes the ship's nine diesel engines. When QE2 was converted from steam turbine propulsion to diesel electric propulsion in 1986, it was estimated that the engines would last until 2010. However, it now appears that these engines would have been able to continue beyond that date. The reason for this lies in the fact that QE2 usually did not require all of her engines to be online in order to maintain the speed needed for her itineraries. As a result, "they were almost always able to have one or two of the engines out for overhaul and maintenance. All of these modern ships use their generators most of the time. So, in order to take one out, you have to have a special program. They also negotiated a contract at the time she was re-engined with the engine manufacturers and ever since then they have had one of the engine manufacturer's representa-

tives onboard to look after the overhaul program."

Along the same lines, QE2's hull remains in sound condition. "Like QUEEN MARY 2, she was built with very solid, heavy steel plates, so that is on her side, in her favor. I'm not aware of any significant deterioration in the hull given they were so heavy and thick in the first place."

Queen Mary 2

Following his tour on QE2, Captain Rynd was asked to relieve Commodore Warner as master of Cunard's new superliner QUEEN MARY 2. QM2 is a true ocean liner, a status she shares with QE2. Also, like QE2, many of the old ocean liner traditions are maintained onboard QM2. However, QM2 is much larger and incorporates technology and amenities that were not available when QE2 was built. Consequently, the two ships have developed different personalities. "They are both Cunarders, many years apart. They both need to be taken for what they are rather than comparing one with the other."

"The single word that describes QM2 is 'magnificent'. And, I say that with all sincerity. She is a magnificent ship. She is magnificent in her stateliness, her public areas, her power. I'm very fond of her. She is exciting to handle as well as comfortable."

From a sailor's perspective, one aspect of QM2 that is particularly impressive is her maneuverability. Unlike traditional ships, QM2 has no rudder. Instead, she maneuvers by turning two of the four propeller pods that pull the ship through the water. When she is docking, these two azimuth pods (often referred to as "azipods") are used in conjunction with three powerful bow thrusters. Not only does this combination often eliminate the need for tugboat assistance but it allows the ship to perform intricate maneuvers and thus dock in ports that other less maneuverable ships cannot.

For example, in Stavanger, Norway the ship had to dock bow-on, close to the center of the city, in an area surrounded by shallow water. In order to exit the port, QM2 had to pull away from the pier, back-up until clear of the pier and then turn 180 degrees essentially in her own length. "That was a four point turn there done with a precision that would be very difficult to replicate by other means. You have got the assurance of this tremendous power that you can get from these azimuth pods. We were operating with such tight parameters

Captain Rynd begins to turn QM2 180 degress in a four point turn in a confined space in Stavanger, Norway.

that we had a tug as insurance if something didn't work quite as we wanted it. Nobody will ever say 'thank you' for not taking a tug if things go wrong, so you take it."

QM2's ability to travel much faster than cruise ships combined with the stability of her design also results in a more comfortable ride for passengers. Captain Rynd illustrated this by describing how he dealt with one Atlantic storm the ship encountered. "We made quite a bold alteration of course in advance of that low pressure. We knew there was a developing low but it was only 12 or 16 hours beforehand that it was upgraded to a storm and that is when we put in the avoidance strategy. If we had known when leaving England, we would have taken a different course from the very beginning, of course. So, that added about 106 extra miles to our passage, quite a lot, but I'm sure worthwhile for several reasons. One is passengers pay for a more comfortable ride. [Two,] if you back strike right through it, you are using extra fuel just to maintain your speed. So, by avoiding it, you maintain your speed, use less fuel, and you keep your passengers happier. [Three,] you keep spas and salons and other revenue sources open as well."

"We went up to the north, the idea being that we would take that wind on the beam rather than right ahead. For passenger liners, that is often the most comfortable way to take heavy weather. Pitching is the motion that gives the most discomfort to passengers and slows the ship down the most. Taking it on the beam,

the force of the wind steadies the ship, the accommodations are like a stay sail and you have your stabilizers and you minimize the rolling effect."

North Atlantic storms frequently cover vast areas and it was not possible to completely avoid the storm in question. It was a force nine gale with gusts up to force 10. (The scale only goes up to force 12). Furthermore, in theory, such high winds should have more of an effect on a ship as tall as QM2 than on a ship with a lower silhouette. "Meteorological theory is that you measure wind speed at ten meters above the water. Well, that is below Deck Seven. [QM2 has 13 decks]. The higher the wind gets above the sea surface, it loses friction and the wind increases so where our anemometer is up on top of the mast, the wind will be five or ten knots higher than it is forecast to be or reported to be at its theoretic level. [Each balcony] is a little sail in itself. So, rather than the flat hull alone taking the force of the wind, the balconies actually capture the wind."

Nonetheless, the storm had little effect on the passengers. Captain Rynd noted how large groups of passengers sat by the viewing windows on the promenades on Decks Two and Three "watching that roaring sea going by the windows. We were doing 25 knots at the time and it was just mesmerizing to watch that rough sea going by as we moved along."

In addition, despite the storm and the alteration of course, the ship arrived in New York on schedule. "When [naval architect] Stephen Payne and the others were at the design stage, they did all that tank testing in the Netherlands and computer simulations during which they ran the design for QM2 through the worst storms of the previous five years and saw what that would do to her speed. She was always able to catch up afterwards with the propulsion plant that they put on this ship. So, if you encounter one bad storm system, we will always get there on time was what they were saying."

"One of the wonderful things about this propulsion plant is that you have got both diesel engines and gas turbines. You can make a very acceptable speed just on the diesels. Then, you add the turbines for the extra speed or when you need to take diesels out for overhaul and maintenance."

These qualities also serve to give QM2 a competitive advantage not just on transatlantic crossings but when she is competing head-to-head with modern cruise ships. "Our program out of New York this winter will be two days down to the Caribbean from wintry New York. Two days later in the tropics. So, her speed and size are being used to advantage to make her distinctively different from other ships competing in the same market. Her speed and her sea worthiness, I should say, because there we are doing cruising out of New York in the winter, past [stormy Cape] Hatteras, and south and yet, this has got to be the most comfortable ship carrying passengers in the world today in any sort of weather. So, that difference is being used to advantage."

Queen Victoria

Captain Rynd's next assignment will be to play a key role in the formative stages of Cunard's new ship QUEEN VICTORIA, scheduled to go into service in December 2007. "Paul Wright, of course, is the nominated captain there and I will be relieving him. I've closely followed her construction, she will be the very essence of a Cunard ship. There has been a lot of thought and design into creating the great ocean liner concept onboard. She also comes with a lot of what is learned from the cruise ship industry, in terms of amenities, layout, what works well in providing people with that type of holiday. She provides a liner experience - - she is not built for the transatlantic but she will be providing very much a Cunard product for people who love what Cunard is."

QUEEN VICTORIA was not designed as a running mate for QM2 in the sense that the QUEEN MARY and the QUEEN ELIZABETH operated a transatlantic shuttle service in the 1950s and 1960s. "She will be more destination orientated. She is doing Baltic, Mediterranean, Atlantic Islands, and round the world voyages. She will be able to go to St. Petersberg and other interesting ports that a ship of QM2's size and draft cannot easily go. They will be complementary ships, I should think."

"The new QUEEN VICTORIA is being built by Fincantieri and you may have heard the comment that this will be better than any other ship that they built in that yard in the last ten years, in their words. The quality of the interior will all be of a very high level."

Captain Rynd was present when the new ship first went to sea in the late summer for her sea trials. "She performed very well on trials meeting or exceeding the requirements for maneuvering, speed, vibration levels and all the technical equipment and system tests that can only be carried out at sea with everything operating."

"Although built on a Vista hull pattern she is longer, stronger, has an extra deck to accommodate the 'Grills' area and has been completely redesigned on the inside so you could not call her a sistership of the Holland America ships of that class. She will be a Cunarder true to her legacy with all the signature rooms and facilities"