MV CAPTAYANNIS



55^0 58′ 34″N 004^0 44′ 31″W

BEFORE

On the 27th January 1974 the MV Captayannis arrived in the Clyde Estuary. She carried a cargo of sugar cane from Lourenco Marques, Portuguese East Africa.

She intended to discharge at the sugar terminal in the James Watt Dock at Greenock. This dock was entered through a sea lock and passage could be gained only at or around high tide. On her arrival the tides was such that she could not enter immediately and after having travelled some seven and a half thousand miles in around three weeks, she was forced to wait until the next days' high tide before entry.

Her Captain, Captain Theodorakis Ionnis, was probably tired and tense with both the delay and the weather forecast. A deep depression was centred just off the NW coast of Ireland and it was bringing storm force winds. These had been increasing all day and into the evening and reports were coming in of huge damage on the western Irish coast. Gale warnings had been issued and the Captayannis was snatching sharp at her anchor chain as the winds reached over 60 knots in this normally sheltered anchorage.

As the gusts increased, Captain Ionnis felt his ship strain against her chain, heaving up and down in the swell and snatching against the anchor as the big gusts passed through.

He knew that downwind was a larger ship, the 36,754 ton BP Tanker, the *British Light* which was also sheltering at anchor south of the Tail O' the Bank.

DURING

He must have felt her move and then slacken softly against the wind. No snatch against the chain made him realise her anchor had lifted or was dragging. He would be unsure which. Either way the Captayannis was now free of the seabed and being swept downwind.

At anchor, the Captayannis would have had her main engines shut down and electricity and heat would be provided by her "donkey engines" only. Therefore Captain Ionnis ordered immediately that the main engines be started for power and steerage, and he determined to pilot the Captayannis around Rosneath and Castle points and into the relative shelter of the Gareloch.

As he waited for the engines, you can imagine the Captain holding the rail as he stood on the portside flying bridge, looking out through the rain, as the wind pushed his ship down toward the *British Light*. He would be doing mental calculations of time and distance as he watched his sea-room decrease and as he waited in anguish for the engine room telegraphs to ring and signal the engines readiness.

At some point it may have seemed probable they would clear the *British Light*, but her taught anchor chain holding and securing the *British Light* from a similar fate impeded the Captayannis. It held fast and it tore a long, gaping gash down the port side of the Captayannis as she passed by. Below deck her engineers would have heard the ripping of her plates. It is unnecessary to know the detailed sequence of events thereafter but the engine was now powering her forward, the water tight doors unlikely to have been automatic would if possible be closed and her pumps started.

Within a short time it was apparent those pumps could not cope with the incoming deluge and this weight of water began pulling her over on her port side. Captain Ionnis abandoned the idea of the Gareloch and determined to beach his ship on the Tail o' the Bank. Beaching her there might save his ship leaving her damaged but salvageable. As she reached the sandbank, the tug *Labrador* and Clyde Marine Motoring's small passenger vessel *Rover also* arrived at the scene. It is possible there were others also.

The Captayannis grounded - but as she was already listing to port when she hit, her rounded hull form meant she was not stable and she continued to heel over. Captain Ionnis was forced to give a last order - Abandon!

It is recounted that the MV Rover ran in so close alongside that the majority of the crew could jump down to her deck. The Captain and four of her crew remained aboard, but as the sea reached her engines and all power was lost they also were forced to abandon. They boarded the *Labrador* which had been lying alongside also.

Thankfully, no loss of life or serious injury is known to have occurred. However the MV Captayannis was now aground on the Tail o' the Bank and the next morning the ship finally rolled over onto her port side and she remains there now as the "Sugar Boat".

AFTER

Following her grounding there was obfuscation as to her owners and her insurers and no resolution was ever determined as to who was liable for her salvage or removal. She lies there today, abandoned in the Clyde.

She looks like a small island from some viewpoints or occasionally in poor light, like one of the submarines that transit the area. Talk of having her removed has ceased. All valuable fittings and material have long since been removed by "wreckers" and she is now a home to seabirds and wildlife. When downwind in a small boat you can smell the guano. She is now dark and ugly looking but forty years ago one can imagine seeing a solid seaworthy vessel plying her trade over the worlds' oceans.

The tale of the sugar boat

T’was on a stormy night late January,
back in nineteen seventy four.
When the captain o' a sugar boat
had fate come knock his cabin door.
The rain; it lashed! The wind; it howled!
Waves crashed upon the deck.
But little could the captain know
by dawn his ship would be a wreck.
Moored along the Tail O’ the Bank,
The Captayannis’ anchor slipped.
The master called to fire the engines up,
before the storm could take a grip.
But for a vessel built back in ‘46
this was a task that took some time.
And soon her twenty-six hundred tons
were fast adrift on the churning brine.
If the crew could get her under power
they could seek shelter in Gare Loch.
There they could ride out this hellish night
and in the morn’ make James Watt dock.
But close by a massive tanker,
by the name of British Light,
Was weathering the storm herself
with her anchor chains pulled tight.
Those iron chains cut like a saw,
as the Captayannis swept on past.
Holed beneath the water line,
this savage night would be her last
For captain Ionnis and his command
the sands of time ran short.
His actions now could save his crew,
but ne’er again would his ship make port.
As the water poured in through the hull
and the ship began to list.
Whatever decision the captain made,
he had to make it fast.
With the engines fired for their last gasp,
the captain called for them to roar!

To charge with every ounce of power
toward the shallow mid-firth sandbar.
The Captayannis rammed into the silt,
That lay beneath the raging Clyde.
This last ditch move had saved the crew,
while she lay heavy to one side.
So the sugar boat escaped the fate
of sinking deep beneath the waves.
And her crew were swiftly rescued by
a clutch of boats that came to aid.
Waiting aboard the tugboat Labrador,
The captain hoped all was not lost.
That when the wicked squall subsided,
the crew could return and take their posts.
But the waves battered on relentless,
rolling the Captayannis on her side,
her cargo of sweet sugar lost
to the saltwater of The Clyde.
As the days that followed became weeks,
then the months and years flew by.
No salvage would save her dignity
and scavengers picked her dry.
So amid the Clyde she lies to this day,
where seagulls rest upon her hull.
A reminder to all who sail on by
that fate at sea can be so cruel.

Robert Foxx, January/February 2015
Reference:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV_Captayannis
http://www.clydesite.co.uk/articles/captayannis.asp