

MY FIRST TRIP AT SEA



A Diary: 1 April - 17 May 1926

By

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Introduction

This diary is a record of my great grandfather's journey to South America and back on board the HMSP Almanzora.

Andre worked as a steward and the diary contains detailed accounts of what he saw on that trip.

I have not corrected all the spelling mistakes in the diary - I have left those where Andre used the French spellings. However, I have recently discovered that the ship he sailed on was the Almanzora and not 'Almonzora' as he originally spelled it.



The photo is taken from Andre's French passport, issued in 1929.

RMSP Almanzora

The Royal Mail Steam Packet, Almanzora, (pictured on the cover) was built in Belfast by Harland & Wolff. She weighed 16,034 tons and had a top speed of 17 knots. She was designed to carry 400 First Class, 230 Second Class, 760 Third Class passengers and she was launched on 19th November 1914 although she was not completed until September 1915.

The Almanzora saw war service in the 10th Cruiser Squadron and at war's end arrived in Belfast for refurbishment which was completed in the January of 1920. She entered service on the Southampton - River Plate route and remained thus until the outbreak of the Second World War. For the whole of the war she was used as a Troopship in many theatres of the war and managed to complete her duties without incident. At war's end she continued in Government Service but this time as an emigrant ship until being laid up off Cowes in 1947. A year later she was sold for breaking at Blyth and the work was carried out by the British Iron and Steel Corporation.

Her journey took in the ports of Cherbourg, Vigo, Lisbon, Madeira, Bahia (Salvador), Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo and Buenos Aires. The whole journey took six weeks. I have included a map on the last page.

(Source: <http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/rm2.html>)

Sharon D'Aucourt
December 2001

Although it had been my wish to travel it never occurred to me that I should so soon have the opportunity of going to sea, but of course not for my pleasure, oh no. Yet, when I look around, while on deck, I wonder if these passengers do really enjoy a long voyage as we workers do? I must say they have their comfort and we have not. By comfort, I mean everything that can make a journey pleasant and without worries. I happen to be in the First Class Saloon so I am continually in touch with good society. These people pay a high fee for their passage therefore they can expect first class service, as they would expect at some large hotels in London. But, alas, it is only an idle life that these people live and their only enjoyment on board is walking round the upper decks, occasionally a game of quoits, or perhaps dancing during the evenings. But I feel sure that they do not feel sufficiently tired to enjoy a good night's rest.

Since it has been my desire to write down my impressions of this first journey I will begin from the day I knew I was going at sea.

April 1st 1926

Thursday, in London. No work in sight, no prospective of getting any. Well, I must take whatever comes along and leave the rest to chance.

10am. I am passing an agency and notice that stewards are required for a liner. I stop and enquire and find the boat sails the next day. I eventually get engaged but have to pack a few articles I will require for a 7 weeks' journey and only two hours before I catch the boat train at Waterloo, but I am too eager to go and work rather than remain in London in the uncertainty of getting a berth, at least, not so quickly. I feel sure that the wife will not mind me going, as she would feel that at least for several weeks I am assured of food and lodgings, apart from a standing wage, and of course, the wise course I took: to send a month's wages in advance to my wife in accordance with the company's regulations.

In two hours run I am at Southampton, too late of course to go aboard, so I have to sleep and restore myself at some place indicated to me by my guide. So, after a short night's rest, I prepare myself to go aboard.

April 2nd

Good Friday. I have to be at the boat at 8am so I am told, so I have no time to lose. Although I am there early I have to wait before I am taken into the Company Superintendent's office where I am asked several questions as to what languages I speak, whether I have previously been at sea etc. Then I am given a slip of paper which permits me to present myself to the doctor in view of ascertaining my physical fitness before undertaking a sea trip. I am now being measured for a steward's uniform with tropical jacket and steward's cap. Really, I did not expect that as it makes a great hole in my budget. I can only console myself with the thought that I may pick up a little extra money on the journey to pay for my incidentals.

11am. After a long period of waiting somewhere on the ship I am taken to the ship's doctor and certified fit for the journey. Then I go next to the Purser's office to be 'signed

on'. It is then that I feel sure of the journey and I also receive an advance note to send money to the wife.

11.30am. The RMS *Almanzora* leaves the dock for her destination. To those who have never been on a good size ship a first day on board is very interesting, As for me, I felt not only interested, but rather lost as to where I was to sleep, and how I was to take my meals, and at what job I should be appointed. The organisation of a crew is similar to the organisation of staff in a restaurant or hotel, with the difference that discipline is more strict aboard and orders must be obeyed, or severe penalties are consequently imposed; and let it be said that a man with a stubborn character will never make good on a ship.

Luncheon is served in the First Class Dining Room at 12.30 and patrons are apprised of the fact by the sounding of the bugle.

The ship is now under way, en route for Cherbourg in France, this being our first call. How smooth is the water, how soft does the boat seem as it travels, but wait... Well, I am given a table and a few people to wait upon, but these people were not passengers, they were 'Board of Trade' people going to Cherbourg. I only waited on them for lunch as we reached France at 6pm. I find we are about 40 waiters, and, there not being sufficient customers to occupy every table, about 12 waiters have to 'stand by' for want of passengers. Amongst the waiters there are a good many who have travelled with the boat on several trips in succession and, therefore, are given preferences as regards to waiter's stations. And us first trippers, we will get what is given us by the benevolence of our 'Chief Saloon Steward'. But if a man is not used to manual work he soon gets the habit and different jobs are allocated to us, whether we have a station or not. Cleaning is undertaken by waiters and everybody is doing something.

April 3rd

5.10am. We have to get up and be on deck at 5.30 sharp, report to the 2nd Steward, and begin whatever duty is allotted to us. Some have to scrub shelves or floors, some clean silver, others do the general work of an restaurant. Well, in short, there is plenty of exercise for everybody.

7am. Cleaning must be done by this time so we have an hour to shave, wash etc.

8am sharp. All stewards have to be at their stations and get these ready for the 8.30 breakfast. Tea is served at 4pm and dinner at 6.30pm so that by 8.30 or 9pm stewards can retire for their night's rest, apart from several special duties requiring somebody to remain on deck until later.

I felt quite pleased with my first day on the water, but when I went to begin work early in the morning, I felt a very unusual feeling and discovered that I was going to be seasick. My sickness only lasted a day, but it lasted long enough to leave me like a wreck. Thanks to the modern ship discipline I was allowed to remain on my 'bunk' most of the day. After a fair night I began to recover appetite and strength and also my seaman's legs.

April 4th Easter Sunday

We have left Cherbourg after only 2 hours stop and are now heading for Vigo in Spain, which place we reach during the afternoon. Some passengers alight there, some come on board and the first mail can be sent home from here. Also, it is a relief to find ourselves the other side of the Bay of Biscay. So far this journey is enjoyable and the sea is not rough, nor is the boat rolling extensively, or perhaps it is that we do not feel the effect of the sea any more. It is sometimes difficult to walk straight along the deck or in the Dining Room when the ship is heaving or listing, and for this reason, the tables are secured to the floor and also anything likely to get damaged. But, when we are in our bunks 'no feather beds, you know', we go to sleep much in the same way as on the shore. We would forget that we were at sea if it was not for the noise of the 'Triple Screw' turbine which is in action day and night while travelling.

Vigo was reached in the afternoon and after a 4 hours stop, we left again for Lisbon in Portugal. There is nothing peculiar to note on Vigo but for the fact that a new place is, of course, interesting to anyone travelling round the world. But, so far it has been impossible for me, or anyone else, to go ashore and visit these places. Also, the ship does not stop long enough to allow passengers or crew to land and we must wait until we get to our destination.

April 5th

We arrived this morning early at Lisbon in Portugal. Lisbon is the capital of Portugal and the view from the ship is splendid, but there is no chance of getting near the quay so passengers have to be conveyed ashore by means of rowing boats manned by the ship's crew. Our stay here lasted until 5pm as the customs officers have to come on board and inspect the ship for anything liable to pay duty. But, after one or two good meals, at the expense of the company, these gentlemen overlook many items and we are permitted to proceed on our journey without interference.

At Lisbon we usually pick up a few Spanish or Portuguese¹ passengers going mostly to Buenos Aires, and, according to the Portuguese and Spanish Emigration regulations, a doctor from each of these two countries has to travel with the ship as far as Buenos Aires and come back to Lisbon with the same ship.

It must be noted in passing that languages are a great help to a steward as so many nations are represented among the passengers. But, the chief languages used in this particular run are English and French, but I find that Spanish is also required, so I am doing my best to learn it before I get to Buenos Aires. And, to this effect, I have acquired the Hugo's English-Spanish books and hope to be able to converse and understand a fair amount of Spanish by the end of the journey.

I am not sufficiently acquainted with the Southern Countries to describe as yet the mode of life of the people of different nationalities, but I hope, as I proceed with my trip, to

¹ Andre consistently uses the French spelling for 'Portuguese'

retain few impressions of these people's habits, which I will undertake to explain here to the best of my abilities.

April 6th

My wife's birthday; I am afraid it is impossible to convey my greetings on the day, but if I am far from her in body, I am near in spirit so I hope she will forgive me if I am absent¹.

Lisbon was the last call in Europe, so from now we are on the high seas until we reach the Isle of Madeira; this island is said to be very healthy and, from what I saw of it, I should think it is ideal as a holiday resort².

I am, by now, beginning to get used to life aboard a ship and am no more affected with seasickness, so I do hope I can be called a seaman now. I have not yet experienced real bad weather as we are now at the best time of the year to cross the tropics.

April 7th Wednesday

We reached the Island of Madeira in the early hours of the morning. Passengers are allowed to go ashore for a short excursion as we only stop at this place for about 4 hours. But, us poor stewards, we have to hurry and do our cleaning and be ready to serve breakfast from 7 o'clock. From time to time we get a glimpse of the town, and, really to see these primitive looking houses built sparsely on the flank of the mountains, spread with healthy pines, it is no wonder that many visitors come to this place for their holidays. Some of the natives come round our ship in their small boats and trade their wares, such as, baskets, birds or hand made shawls. They speak Portuguese, the island being under the protectorate of Portugal, and have a dialect quite out of our comprehension. These natives have a brick colour complexion, probably on account of the heat in these parts, and seem rather skinny. I was told they are a lazy lot, yet I suppose they are happy and can do without the dole, but we Englishmen³: we cannot. I suppose we are a greedy people.

April 9th Friday

We have left Madeira after a few hours stay and from this day to the 15th instead, we shall travel on the high seas. Water, nothing but water, how wonderful, yet strange for those who, for the best part of their life have never been on the water, to find themselves carried away by the waves to some continent unknown to them. Yet, there is a certain attraction on the seas, the air one breathes is absolutely pure, therefore it contributes largely to the health. How interesting to find that hour to hour we go further from England, further away from Europe, then Africa, then, ..well, we will soon be crossing the equator, and this part of the world is said to be the hottest. How interesting would it be to

¹ We don't know whether Andre had permanently moved from Margate at this time or not.

² As predicted, Madeira is now a popular resort.

³ As far as we know, Andre never gained British citizenship and remained a French national until his death. He had only been in England for just over 15 years at this point and almost certainly had a French accent.

be able to ascertain the depths of the different parts of the Ocean on which we are sailing, and also, the kind of fishes inhabiting these parts¹.

It is a week ago today that we left Southampton. Time flies quick and yet, I feel quite at home on the ship. Of course, there is a seat deal of work for us to do. But, although we get up at 5am we have ample time for our toilet and have a rest between each meal. Food is, on the whole, quite passable but we have to eat standing and, anywhere in the pantry, and really a few fans would help us a great deal to keep cool, so we hurry and go on deck for fresh air. As we near the 'line' the sun gets warmer so we are told to wear a special jacket for tropical heat.

This evening we had a concert in our recreation hall given by some of the crew and organised by a club under the protection of the Company. Officers form a committee and anyone joining this club can enter for any sports competition, or sweepstakes. Also, a 'jazz band' is playing every evening for an hour or so, and everyone forgets all worries for a short while and goes to bed happy and contented.

Saturday 10th of April

The water seems quite smooth now and the heat begins to tell - 80°F already this morning at 10. I wonder if they wear overcoats in London just now. We don't get our newspapers every morning on a ship, but there are the wireless news and really important items are received at our stations. We can also send messages by air waves but these are expensive, but this latest invention is really a God send in case of danger². For the last three days we have not sighted a ship so I wonder how we would get help if we were to sink?

I was this evening, witness to a very unusual occurrence, it was to see a burial at sea. This time it was a young child, and after bringing the body, wrapped in sacks and some lead weights to make the corpse sink deep in the sea, the body was brought 'astern' and the Captain, officiating for a priest after delivering a short mass, commits the body to the water while the boat slows down and the flag flies at half mast. It is the custom to bury a corpse six hours after death, while at sea, probably to prevent infection and epidemics.

A Whist drive was held in our recreation hall, these drives are run in a similar manner to in England with the difference that the boys are more noisy and make more fun of the thing.

Sunday April the 11th

Today, being Sunday, our routine is the same, we get up at the same time and the same amount of cleaning is done. I do miss my rest on Sunday morning at London but, here at sea we are living another life altogether and besides, it would not do to refuse to do anything as we would get punished severely.

¹ The deepest parts that the Almonzora travelled over were probably in excess of 6000m. The Atlantic Ocean was surveyed over 150 years using lead lines ago prior to the laying of the first transatlantic cable in 1858. In 1923 the Atlantic was surveyed using Sonar.

² The 'wireless' was first used aboard ships in 1900 to warn of approaching bad weather.

This morning mass is officiated in the First Class Social Hall by the Captain. There being no organ, the band plays the usual hymns. This evening while we were serving dinner, the King Neptune and his Imps came in the dining room and after making a fearful row, demanded of the Captain, the names of those to receive the Baptism of the Seas, and after these being given they retired, promising to hold their court and 10.30 the next morning.

Monday April 12th

We are at that part of the world called the Equator, or as the sailors say, we are crossing 'the line'. This is an event not to be forgotten and those who are prepared to make fun of the occasion are assured of a happy half hour. Today the people from first and second class, and a few of the crew were present when the King Neptune came aboard, and to the court proceeded with the ceremony, consisting of fixing a mark on the arm, then being seated in the Barber's chair, of being lathered with a white substance and being shaven with a huge wooden razor, then, without warning the person is 'tipped up' from his seat and falls backwards into a tank of water where the Sea Imps receive the new 'Sea Babies' and duck them under. After a good half hour of this game, the King Neptune and his court return to the 'deeps'.

The heat today is oppressing and thanks to the moving of the ship, otherwise there would not be a breath of air. The water is as smooth as oil so we are travelling quite comfortably¹.

Tuesday April the 13th

I shall be glad to be far away from the Equator, really it is too hot for us to work, and even the several incursions to the wash house do not cool us at all, so we gather on the deck with as few clothes as we can and cool ourselves by the breeze. For my part I caught a headache and a toothache but I am not quite a good sailor yet.

It is getting warmer every day and very uncomfortable either to work or to sleep, but we must not complain, we have to stick to our job until the end of the trip. Our only pleasure is to sail in sight of land but we are not there yet.

This evening the passengers had a fancy dress ball on deck so life is not too dull for them on a ship and we can always watch them when we are off duty, but I think our rest is more precious, we sleep so little.

Wednesday April the 14th

We see land today, but only for a short while as this land is only a small rocky Island, used in the old times as a convict penitentiary². I wonder how long these men could ever live

¹ This parts of the ocean is known as the Doldrums. The winds are driven by the spinning of the planet and the 'Coriolis Force' means that the winds blow away from the Equator, leaving an area with high pressure and little wind.

² Fernando de Noronha is situated about 200 miles off the east coast of Brazil (www.noronha.com.br) and still had a prison in 1926.

through the heat in these parts, but the Brazilian is more human now so this island is used mostly for wireless experiments, so this is progress.

Thursday April the 15th

We have at last reached America, and this morning we stopped at Bahia¹, coastal town of Brazil. Here we land a few passengers and a few get aboard for Rio or Santos. It is very hot still, especially when the vessel is at standstill, the breeze is then very weak.

Bahia stands in a huge Bay and the Town is very pretty and picturesque. Here we are able to buy Bahia Oranges or Pine apples. These fruits grow in the neighbourhood, also, bananas.

We stop for about 5 hours but we remain in the bay so it is impossible to go ashore. We leave Bahia during the afternoon and proceed towards the south and practically in sight of the coast.

Among our passengers are a good many Brazilians, mostly planters, going on business in the Argentines. Our journey is still delightful, the sea is simply smooth, and the nights are cool and the stars seem very bright in these parts. I note that we can see the Southern Cross in the heavens. It is only in the southern Hemisphere that this cross can be seen and it derives its name by its shape; a huge cross leaning slightly towards the east.

Friday, 16th of April²

It is getting slightly cooler now and it is really more comfortable to work. As we get into port tomorrow we have this afternoon 'muster' for the fire and boat stations drill. These drills are necessary and in case of danger, each man knows his duty and will report to his particular post at the sound of the siren. We have to do this once a week and the first time the first trippers do get in line with the old crew, it is a scramble and a perfect brouhaha, but we are gradually taught the mysteries of the Navy and no man will begrudge doing his bit when it comes a case of emergency.

Saturday April the 17th

We reached Rio de Janeiro at 9am but we got 'along side' about 12 noon. The passengers are allowed to go ashore for 4 hours at least and it is worthwhile doing so. I was pleased to be able to visit the Town and spent the best part of two hours scouting through the main streets. The 'Avenidas'³ are full of shops stocked with all necessities. This town is fairly busy and trades in fruits, coffee, rice etc. with Buenos Aires. Some parts of the town are very quaint and one is able to meet with several races: Portugaise, Español, Brazilian and a great number of black people. It often rains here, but only for short periods. The docks are capable of loading and unloading 30 ships at one time, but everything is done as by clockwork.

¹ Bahia is a 'state' of Brazil, whose capital is Salvador da Bahia - known as Bahia to the Brazilians, but also commonly called Salvador

² Veronica Steers (my grandmother) was born on this day - she later married Andre's son Alfred.

³ Probably Spanish for 'Avenues'

From here it is possible to send letters to England and home mail is also received here, as well as at Bahia. How eager we are for home news, and how anxious our beloveds must be to know if we are safe. Yet I feel as safe on board as I do, say, at Piccadilly Circus. I mean, by this, that accidents can happen anywhere, so why worry.

We leave Rio at 7pm and we hope to see it again on our way back.

Sunday April 18th

Today we are at Santos; how lovely this place is. It stands a few miles up a river¹ and, as we glide slowly upstream, we can see the coffee and Banana Plantations on each side of the river. It must be very pleasant and cheap to live here, but the climate is, I believe, unhealthy and Europeans are subject to get malaria fever, but we won't get affected as we don't stop. We are not allowed to go ashore as the town is too far away from the docks. A great many ships can be anchored here and ships of all nations gather at this port. Santos produces the best coffee in the world. Bananas are very cheap, also oranges, so we avail ourselves of this opportunity to eat native fruits. Bananas are shipped from here to Buenos Aires in great quantity and I understand, are used to make soap, some people say they make bread with them, well I will try to find out. Passengers get a variety of native dishes in these parts, and fruits totally unknown to us appear on the tables and we are somewhat puzzled as to how to serve them. How small is our knowledge, we learn anew every day.

Monday April the 19th

We are still speeding towards south. The weather is much cooler, it rains occasionally. We only stopped a few hours at Santos, just enough to load some cargo going south. We receive Portuguese and Spanish newspapers for the benefit of passengers, but no english ones, apart from wireless communications posted every day.

Tuesday April 20th

We are gradually nearing our goal and, although we are again on the high seas, we know that land is not far and, occasionally, we get a glimpse of some huge rocks, or maybe some advanced lighthouses.

The weather is getting much cooler now and our blankets are hardly sufficient to keep us warm during the night².

Wednesday April 21st

We reached Montevideo during the early hours, but owing to having to pick up a pilot we did not get 'along side' much before 8am. This town is situated at the mouth of the river called the Rio de la Plata³. This river is said to be about 50 miles wide and the water is

¹ Santos is the port for São Paolo

² The ship has crossed the Tropic of Capricorn at 24.5° south.

³ River Plate

quite yellow, owing to the river being shallow¹, but it is just deep enough for steamers of medium bulk to sail. Although this river is very much used, ships seem lost on it and it is only at some particular spots that we are able to get a near view of other ships going in the opposite direction.

Montevideo is the capital of Uruguay, quite a small state, but doing a big trade with coastal towns of South America. Many people come here to meet friends going to Buenos Aires and travel with them aboard the ship. We do not stop long enough at Montevideo to get a view of the town, but it really looks very pretty from the entrance of the harbour. But, as it rains, the town is enveloped in a slight mist which renders sight impossible.

Same day, evening. At last we are at Buenos Aires. We have been told so much of the town during the voyage that we are eager to get there and see for ourselves.

Here all the passengers alight, so, by 9pm the boat is deserted, but for us poor members of the crew, we will have to remain. Only we are allowed to go ashore when our work is finished. So, by 9.30pm I go down the 'gang way' and step ashore.

Buenos Aires - indeed, how I often wondered what sort of a town this could be. Yet, when very young I came here and remained for 5 years with my parents², but I was too young to remember any details and, when I went back to Europe and had to learn French at the school I was sent to, I soon forgot everything of the Spanish language.

Thursday 22nd April

First day in port. We get up a little later, but we have to do a thorough cleaning while there are no passengers; every corner of the ship must be spotless for the return journey and every man has something to do. For my part I am given a good deal of scrubbing and, oh my knees, when I think of it how sore they were, I am not used to this work. Still, it is my job and there is no-one else to do it, so never mind how hard it is, it is only for a short while.

We get breakfast very early and dinner at 12.30. We are fed in the 3rd class saloon, but what a food. I have said that it was passable a few days ago, but in port it is indeed bad, as there is no choice we eat because we are hungry and think of all the delicacies we have when at home.

We work until 5pm when 'high tea' is served and then we are free to go ashore, but have to report every day at 8am and 1.30pm. Buenos Aires is indeed a beautiful town and reminds one of the Continent. Paris is, I think, the nearest too it for its beauty. As I walk along the first street I get to I am struck by the sight of these fine buildings, all mostly new, the streets are very narrow and trams are running in almost every quarter of the town. The avenues are indeed an attraction to the stranger and all the cafés spread their tables and chairs on the pavement in the French way. Spanish is the main language here

¹ The colour is also due to the large silt content as the river drains a vast area of central South America - the Rio de la Plata-Parana is, at 3030 miles, the 8th longest river in the world and the second longest in South America.

² In 1895 in Buenos Aires, 72 out of every 100 inhabitants were foreigners. They were bankers, office workers, engineers, and financial experts. They designed the railway network and the docks in the port. Andre's father, Louis, was an engineer so it may be that he helped build the railways there.

but persons born in the latin countries can soon understand sufficient to find their way about and to do any shopping. Buenos Aires has a population of very nearly 2 million inhabitants¹ including several hundred thousand foreigners; French, English, Germans, Italians etc., also coloured people. An enormous trade is transacted between the Argentines and the outer world. The docks occupy several miles of the river and ships of all nations are coming and going every day. No wonder this port is so cosmopolitan. What a way to study the ways and customs of these people, a psychologist would acquire a great knowledge in studying the mind of such a mixed crowd and socially might benefit by his results.

Friday 23rd April

The weather is splendid; not too warm, not too cold. It is autumn, winter is near and, while England is basking in the sunshine, and holiday makers bathe at English seaside resorts, the people of Argentina experience a severe winter². I might add that while sailing towards America, we had to put the clocks back 5 hours³, doing so a few minutes at a time, but we still have to regain those lost hours in our way back and, consequently, lose sleep. I have been wandering through the town during the best part of the afternoon and I must make the best of my sejour⁴ here, to explore this new country. The neighbourhood of the docks are crowded with bars and booths, most of them have an orchestra to attract the public. Also there is a multitude of cheap goods shops, articles that any number of the crew may want and get without going further into the town. Being a relatively new city, Buenos Aires was planned similarly to New York. The main streets are situated in the centre of the town, beginning from the docks, other streets, or avenues, run, some parallel, others crossways to these main streets at regular distances of 100 metres, and when one wants to find a particular street or road, one is told so many blocks on the right or on the left etc. To appreciate the beauty of this city, it is advisable to get in the central part where all the Theatres and Hotels, Cafés etc. are situated. Firms of all nations are represented, but I have noted that, generally, the prices for all goods are the same as in England although the £ sterling has a certain advantage by the exchange. I found that food is cheap and, not being satisfied with the fare provided us on board, I therefore took the opportunity to sample the Argentine menu. Beers, wine and coffee can be obtained at reasonable prices, but these are more expensive when served at high class houses.

'Bs,As' is a gay city and everybody seems happy, there seems to be hardly any poverty here and everyone is doing something, transacting business in every form or the like. There is plenty of scope for business in the Argentine Republic, and the population is relatively small in comparison of the superfcy of this state.

Saturday 24th April

It is pleasant to awake in the morning and find we are near a busy town. Since our ship dropped anchor the workmen and porters have continually been loading and unloading,

¹ Buenos Aires' population today stands at over 12 million and a large number are descended from immigrants.

² The average winter temperature in Buenos Aires is 10°C - London is 6-7°C

³ Buenos Aires is only 3 hours behind GMT (summertimes?)

⁴ French spelling of 'sojourn'

although it was a relief not to hear the everlasting noise made by the propeller. I must here mention that my sleeping quarters are situated very near the tail or 'stern' of the boat and at water line; the shouting and knocking by these Argentine men; the expression of their arguments; and in a language quite different to ours, if it was a novelty the first day of our arrival, begins now to be a perfect nuisance and I shall be pleased to see the back of them. Tons and tons of cargo is brought aboard by huge cranes. Argentine chilled meat is shipped from here, so we get a decent load of it, also butter. I wonder if some of the butter I eat at home comes from here. How ignorant we all are, we are not interested to know from what part of the world the different foods we eat come from. I am sure many teachers have no knowledge of this and consequently our children grow up without bothering about these essential points of health.

Today we finish our work a little earlier. We keep the Shop Act laws of England, so at 1pm we are free until 8am Sunday, but after working so hard and getting so dirty and untidy, we don't feel like rushing ashore yet, so it is about 7pm before I go down the gangway. By now we can find our way about without continual help, so we stroll along these fine avenues and look at these beautifully stocked shop fronts. How nice to have money and to be able to satisfy one's whim, what wonders this earth contains and how proud must be those who can afford everything they want. Unfortunately I do not belong to these people and I have to content myself with satisfying my curiosity.

Sunday April 25th

If I was at home I should today remain in bed for the best part of the morning, but we are not allowed such business aboard the Almanzora, we have to get up as usual and work from 8 to 10am, after which we are free all day.

As it is like summer, there are a great many people abroad and all the parks are the favourite resorts of the city. For my part I had meant to find the whereabouts of some people bearing the same name as me. I wanted to know if it had been a possibility for me to have relations in this part of the globe. But, fate was not so kind after all. After walking for some 9 miles, I came to a house inhabited by these people but was disappointed to find they had no connections whatever with my family¹.

Monday 26th April

Our sejour at 'Bs As' is getting short and spring cleaning aboard is being done with precision, no shirking amongst the stewards or else we are liable to get 'logged' or 'fined' etc.

What a life aboard a ship! Who would be chained to this life? Our only consolation is that our voyage is half way through and let us hope that we will reach port at the scheduled date. But not every member of the crew is being logged or fined, life on the sea is similar, as far as discipline is concerned, to life in barracks. We have to obey and execute orders given us by anyone holding an official 'rating', and however repulsive or unusual the task,

¹ According to the Argentine telephone directory there are Daucourts living in Buenos Aires today. Given that the surname seems relatively uncommon in France today there is still a chance that the Daucourts Andre met were, albeit very distantly, related to him.

the command must and is executed or punishment of certain grade is given. Amongst the 'boys' with whom I have to travel I met with some I took a certain dislike and others with whom I felt that I could be and make friends. It is said that some of the best 'pals' are found 'on the sea, I have no doubt that it is so but I have not had sufficient experience of seafaring to speak in the affirmative, for instance, the crew aboard a passenger liner is changing more or less at each voyage. The sea does not suit everyone and everyone is not suited to the sea. However we make acquaintances that might turn into real 'camaraderie'. Also, we learn a great deal of life by studying our fellow workers, as it is the case aboard the Almanzora. A good few are foreigners, but the officers and sailors are British.

I have now seen nearly as much of Buenos Aires as I could, and I just go out into the Town during the evening for a last glimpse of civilised life before we return to the ocean.

Tuesday 27th April

Our last day ashore but still spring cleaning. We have to work hard for our living at times, and we are already getting dissatisfied with the monotony.

Today we are free at 1pm, but we are not told about it until just at the time. So, not expecting such a favour of our superiors, we are consequently unprepared, but we soon make ourselves smart and off we go for our last visit to the city. This evening we went to the Seamen's Mission, it is like a spot of England in America. One is struck by the number of English people gathering in this place; and the Reverend in charge could tell of many different crews of English ships coming and going. Being a very genial gentleman, he has a host of friends and his mission is crowded nearly every evening, more so on the eve of a sailing when, for this occasion dancing is part of the entertainment programme, and many a sailor goes out to sea and can recollect at leisure of pleasant moments there.

Wednesday 28th April

We have left Buenos Aires and crowds of people witnessed our departure from the quay. We sail with nearly a full compliment of passengers, mostly 1st and 2nd class, a few of these go up the American coast only, but we expect a 'full house' all the way, so we are now busy and I am afraid the trip will be twice as hard as outward bound. We left 'Bs As' at 3pm and will reach Montevideo, our first stop, during the early hours of tomorrow.

Thursday 29th April

Montevideo and pouring with rain, also, it is very cold; we have winter one week and summer the next. Here we pick up a few more passengers and some more cargo. We are not allowed to go ashore, but we don't mind that our 'holidays' are too near gone by, and to make up for our well earned rest a good number of stewards are requisitioned to carry luggage for the new passengers. What a brouhaha with these Spanish and Portuguese passengers, their ways and customs are different in many ways, more noisy and hot tempered than us but, generally, good people to associate with. They seem all well to do and, judging by the number of families and the number of servants attached to each, one

can deduct that they are somewhat fastidious, but people who travel can afford to be exacting.

Friday 30th of April

We are now sailing away on the high seas, as our next stop is Rio de Janeiro, we will see no land until then. But, we adapt ourselves to the sea routine again anyhow, we are going back home. This is enough to give us fortitude. It is now that we are able to put our knowledge of languages into practice, but although I had done my best to learn Spanish I can just grasp the meaning of sentences and I am glad to find that my French is a great help. Our ship is doing splendidly and but for the fact that we have the wind in our favour we would feel the strength of the waves.

Saturday 1st of May

The weather is still cold, yet when we passed these parts 10 days ago the sun was still hot, but we'll have to go through the 'line' yet. We now begin to put the clocks forward, and as we get up at 5am we feel very tired when the day is over. Saturday brings back our weekly fire and life boat drill. This only lasts for about half an hour but those participating in the mock launching of a life boat have a strenuous time of it.

Sunday 2nd of May

We got into the bay of Rio de Janeiro before sunrise and though it was raining, the illuminated Ferry boats and the harbour itself presented a splendid panorama. We pick up a good few passengers here and 'land' some. The new passengers are mostly Spanish and Portuguese and a few people from the north of Europe going back to their respective country. Now begins work in earnest for us poor stewards. Every table in the Dining Saloon is taken so from now there will be no respite from the time we get up to bed time.

We remain alongside for about 3 hours but no stewards allowed ashore. I suppose they are afraid we had run away. Well, to be candid I wish I had the means, and I would, but I am already homesick, apart from being dissatisfied with ship life so I will have to stick it yet.

Soon after we left Rio the boat began to roll and a great many of passengers were sick. I am glad that I cannot be sea sick any more, so, of course, I smile at other people's discomfort, also our boat is sailing well and these big waves are only toys for her. Our friends in England would laugh if they could see us carrying food from the kitchen to the table with one hand and holding ourselves along the walls, or anything else secured, with the other. An actor could not reproduce the scene better, yet we are used to it by now, and there are hardly any breakages.

Monday the 3rd of May

The sea is still big and I believe we sail a slight slower but it will not last because we are getting nearer the 'line' and we begin to feel much warmer already. Work for us seems

harder now and we sleep less. Wireless news from England prophecy troubles and perhaps strike.

Tuesday the 4th of May

I feel so tired I have hardly enough strength to keep my eyes open and write these few lines. The heat begins to tell on us, we perspire from morning till night and we can't sleep in comfort. Our 'pig holes' are not sufficiently cooled, but what does it matter, we are here like in a correction camp, but not quite so cruel, only from 5am when we begin our 'scrub up' to 9 or 11pm when we are free for the night, we must always be on the move. Young and old alike, everyone must accomplish his task, for those who are strong enough and used to the life, well and good, but for those who have never experienced this mode of work it is indeed a struggle.

Wednesday 5th of May

We are crossing the Equator, the heat is oppressing and we are like in a furnace. When we have finished to serve our passengers we rush in our pig holes and discard all our clothes as they are wringing wet, otherwise we catch a nasty cold.

News from England is bad, the general strike has begun and disturbances are occurring at different parts of the country. I am wondering if this strike will affect us and in what way. Perhaps we are better off at being here because we are working, whereas there must be a good deal of unemployment in London. Still, we hope for the best because we should not relish at being held up in the channel. What a life, there is always some unrest amongst the working classes. Commodities of life are still over 70% above the pre-war level therefore it is very hard to live, and the small wages of nowadays.

Thursday 6th of May

We are now in Mid Atlantic and not likely to see land before we get to Madeira. Water, water, only water, but this 2nd part of this trip seems to 'go by' much quicker than the first, but not quick enough for my liking. Yet we do not notice how time flies because we are continually doing something and it is not very often now that I can sit up on deck and enjoy the breeze. The sea is lovely in this part, very blue and as smooth as oil. Our ship is sailing at the speed of about 375 to 400 knots in the 24 hours¹ but it seems that we are not moving at times, only when the wind is fairly strong do we feel the ship diving and rising gently, 'for fear of not upsetting the passengers I suppose'. The passengers are having sports on deck, so it keeps us busy.

Friday 7th May

There are no improvements in England in the situation and no prospective of seeing the end of the strike yet. We receive messages from the Seamen's Union asking us not to go on strike. This is meant really for stokers, engineers etc. and no wonder, there is a great responsibility when an approximate number of 1000 passengers are aboard but I loathe

¹ 18-19 miles per hour

strikes myself and do not really see the good that comes from them. It is only a money-making game of the big financiers and the working classes are to suffer every time.

Saturday 8th of May

Still stifling and not much sleep. The clocks go forward nearly every night and we seem half asleep all the day long. Field day today again and also the last so we muster on deck as usual for fire and boat drill. Also, the Captain and his staff passed the inspection of this ship and mind those who have not cleaned their department to the satisfaction of the Captain. Then, those responsible are bound to get into trouble, if not the sack. We have to be vigilant at all times, whether tired or not. The order of the day is work, and don't grumble.

Sunday 9th of May

We begin to feel cooler now we are getting beyond the Equator, but we are unable to feel any benefit only that we don't perspire so much. Today church service, this is witnessed by the majority of the passengers. One may be Roman catholic or Presbyterian or Wesleyan but this not handicap one's religion because this service is particular to the ships all over the world.

Monday 10th of May

We are still speeding towards home, but how lovely is the sea. I wish I was a passenger for a while, and I feel sure I would avail myself of all privileges granted to them, I would at least take a good rest and a square meal. This evening a fancy dress ball was held on board for the passengers. It is real fun to see some people dressed in ridiculous garb and pretend they represent so and so. Also, it helps the spectator to discover the mentality of these persons, how interesting for psychology. We, the stewards have no fancy dress ball, but as often as the time permits and the day's work has not been too hard, we assemble 'on deck' where a concert is given by our band.

Tuesday 11th of May

No land in sight yet but the weather gets cooler. The strike continues in England, but it seems the workers are gradually going back to their respective work so everything may be normal when we get to port.

Wednesday 12th of May

We reached Madeira this morning with splendid weather. Lots of people went ashore for an excursion, and in the meantime, we the stewards remained on board and watched the antics of these young natives. These youngsters are expert divers and one had only to throw a coin into the sea, then in they plunge and soon reach the copper and shout for another. People from the island bring their goods on board, mostly lace works, cheap trinkets and cane chairs, and reap a rich harvest by taking advantage of the rate of exchange or the benevolence of the passengers.

Thursday 13th May

We did not stop more than 4 hours at Madeira and we are now on our way to Lisbonne. We are therefore getting back our European ways. I mean by this, that we have for the last six weeks, lived in a very different atmosphere, us stewards, but I am afraid to write down the different expressions employed by members of the crew for fear of shocking those who might read these lines.¹

Friday 14th May

Today we are at Lisbonne, Portugal. I thought I might have got some letters here but not being in luck, I am disappointed. Many of our passengers alight here, and also a few get on board for Southampton. As we remain here for 8 hours many people go ashore for a visit to the town and come back with flowers or different souvenirs.

A rather peculiar incident happened while at port; one of the stewards, while doing store portage, fell in the water and was only saved by the timely assistance of some other stewards pulling him up on board. I could tell a lot at this point. I wonder what the Board of Trade would say, should they know the different treatments we are subjected to during this trip, this man, being a steward, ought not have been commanded to this work or any other dock hand's jobs as we have had to do and I feel sure they do not consider the health and physical fitness of all the men. I understand now one of the reasons for our being examined so thoroughly, was for the possibility of being given this hard work. But what can you expect of a man who, getting up in the early hours, has through the day to work hard continually and having for sustenance, a food sometimes, much inferior to the one eaten by dogs in England. But, one has no right to complain on the ship, so one has to keep these complaints to oneself.

Saturday 15th of May

At 3pm yesterday we left Lisbonne so we reached Vigo today rather earlier than we anticipated. Vigo is in Spain. We are lying too far from the town to notice anything interesting and no one is allowed ashore apart from landing passengers. Also, as we already passed this port on our way out, we do not care about it only for the fact that we are nearer home and that everyone will be allowed to reach Southampton and London without trouble. No field day today, so no extra work for inspections, besides there will be a real spring cleaning at the docks by more experienced hands and, the excitement of nearing England and the last duties of the voyage are sufficient to keep our officers clear of our vicinity, so, so much to the good.

We left Vigo after only 2 hours stay and we are now on our way to the bay of Biscay (bay that brings back my memory to that nasty feeling I had when I first crossed it). Our work seems harder just now, I suppose it is because we anticipate our 'due' rest, but 48 hours more will see us right.

¹ Since Andre meant this diary to be read, I wonder who it may have been written for?

Sunday 16th May

We are still in the bay, but the sea is not so rough as last night; when the ship was rolling enough to make many of us feel queer. By this evening we had reached the extreme point of France North West of Brest and were near enough the coast to notice the different lighthouses placed there for the safety of the ships at large. From the 'north course' we turned eastward and headed for Cherbourg, where we will be during the night.

Monday 17th of May

"4am and a lovely morning to get up, me lads", this was how our caller came to our pig and 'made' us get up. Oh dear, how tired we feel after having packed all our clothes last night and did not turn in until about midnight, so 4 hours sleep is not much for a man but it is our last stage of the trip. We are already at Cherbourg then and as some passengers had to land at 6am we had to get them breakfast. At 7am we leave Cherbourg off to merry England. What a confusion now aboard amongst the crew, it reminds me of the war days when we were anxiously counting the last hours and even minutes. Lunch to be served at 12 noon. At this time we are already in dock, 1 and ½ hours ahead of the scheduled time. Every passenger rushes to the Dining Room for their last meal aboard and we run rather than walk to see their wants as we expect a consideration for our services during the voyage.

1.30pm, nearly all the passengers are gone but our 'strap up' is not over, and before we get our 'pass' we must take stock and experience a few more nasty commands. But we patiently bid our time and after a couple of hours swearing and cursing, we divest ourselves of our 'uniform' to slip on our Sunday clothes and off we go, and leave the ship where we have spent over 6 weeks of our life and take the next train to Home, sweet Home.

