

“I’ve seen the end of conventional shipping and all its strange characters have gone”

By ARCHIE BAYVEL

He may have retired but Bill Guest is still as lively as ever. And Patricia, the woman he always refers to as “My Beautiful Wife”, is also doing just fine.

Today the man who thought he was too dumb to be a doctor like his father, thrives in a beautiful Queensland-style house in the leafy Brisbane outpost of Fig Tree Pocket.

His deep green home office is beyond comfortable, with a big desk, screens flickering all around and the walls festooned with pictures and memorabilia

from a lifetime as a shipping man.

Patricia, a former Qantas air hostess, brings in cheerful morning tea in decent china. In the garage nestles Bill's Mercedes and whatever lesser vehicle MBF drives.

For young Bill Guest, born and brought up in Melbourne, life in his 80s could be a

lot worse.

“My early days in the industry saw the end of conventional shipping,” he says. “When I first joined Shaw Saville, there were many characters – people who did all sorts of strange things and got away with them.

“There's none of that today.

“Shipping now is about as advanced as it can be and is heavily focused on reducing costs and consolidating economies of scale. So much depends on marketing expertise and that has created an inbuilt sense of insecurity in many companies.

“That amazes me but life goes on, albeit in a contracted sense ... It's a little harder to know what the bottom line is.”

Bill joined Shaw Saville in Melbourne on February 25 1954, as a loading operator. His job was to get cargo from the shed on to the ship, liaising with the wharf gangs and the chief officer on the ship.

“It gave me a real sense of satisfaction,” he says, “to see a massive, empty cargo shed after it had been crammed with everything from cases of canned fruit to bales of wool.

“The work atmosphere was vibrant against a background of all sorts of activity by the dockers, including some of them getting shot.



"Shaw Saville used to send its up-and-coming young men to work overseas, and in 1958, I was sent to London for six months. It was a five-week voyage aboard the *Southern Cross*, which was the first ship to be built with everything aft instead of as an island amidships.

"I worked at Shaw Saville's Leadenhall Street office. My brother was working as a dentist in London at that time and he had a car, so I took some leave and we flew it across The Channel then drove all through Germany, France, and Italy.

"Then it was back to Australia again, as a loading operator in Melbourne and Sydney.

"Containers came to Sydney in 1966 but few feasibility studies had been done on their impact. So I became one of five people working – without computers – with mountains of manifests.

"Statistics needed to be developed e.g., How much could be packed into one container? Very primitive calculations were needed. Then we had to find a suitable depot to centralise all that. They settled on Chullora.

"By the time the first container ship arrived – the *Encounter Bay*, in April 1969 – everything worked out just fine.

"I was working with Overseas Containers then on secondment from Shaw Saville and finalised the move to OC as container movements officer, from 1969 – 71.

"Then I became operations manager on

the European trade until 1975, and back to really hands-on stuff as European export manager in Sydney, until 1977, when I moved back to Victoria in OCAL's head office, until 1981. Then I was sent to Brisbane and became Queensland manager three years later.

"I first retired in 1997 aged 62, when P&O was working with Nedlloyd.

"It was wonderful because I got 18 months' salary and Patricia and I travelled the world.

"Then Llew Russell, who was then head of the Chamber of Shipping, a precursor to today's SAL, asked if I would consult to them. When the change to SAL happened, I was offered the job of its Queensland secretary. I accepted on condition that I could work at home.

"And that's where I've worked for the past 18 years, before retiring and being succeeded by Geoff Dalgleish. Working for so long has kept my brain lurching along."

He and Patricia have two sons and a daughter, plus six grandchildren. They met when he was best man at a wedding where she was a bridesmaid. They have been married now for 52 years.

Patricia looks in even better nick than Bill and is president of the Queensland branch of the Qantas Flight Hostesses' Club, as well as Queensland coordinator of Fear of Flying.

"I only flew once during six months'



Supported by Patricia, Bill waxes lyrical at this retirement function

national service with the RAAF," Bill offers. "As a passenger in a Wirraway training aircraft. My role was in airfield defence but the only time I had to shout 'Who goes there?' was when I heard a tremendous banging and crashing. It was the garbage man."

Now that he has properly retired at last, Bill mows the lawn, trims the hedges, helps with his grandkids, helps his daughter clear weeds on an acreage she owns, supports Patricia (aka MBW) with her Fearless Flying activities, and keeps fit in his home gym.

Apart from that he does nothing. ▲



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