

HOLLAND AMERICA AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

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The **ZAANDAM** (nearest ship) and **ROTTERDAM** at Balboa / Panama Roads

Albert Schoonderbeek

Nobody could ever have envisioned in their worst nightmare about what influence Covid-19 would have on life on land and at sea. Now, many months after the first lockdown we still do not know what the best solution is to have the full cruise fleet return to service. This is the story of two ships which had to face big challenges when the Corona attack came. Every cruise ship crew has a story to tell but the below is quite unusual among all what took place on the high seas. The author was for his work as Fleet master onboard the Flagship of the company the ROTTERDAM (VI) (9122552/61849/97) and what was observed there gives an indication what sort of challenges some of the ships faced to get their guests home after the lockdown occurred.

When the medical world realized that Covid-19 was much more dangerous than was thought in the beginning and started giving guidance to control the outbreak, Holland America reacted as fast as was possible. The ROTTERDAM was at Puerto Vallarta when on the 15th of March the order came: "stay where you are and send all the guests home". The ship had just started a 14 day Trans Canal cruise from San Diego to Fort Lauderdale. Because the Mexican province to which Puerto Vallarta belonged was still open, there was not much of a challenge to get all the guests home. Then the first disturbing reports came from the ZAANDAM (9156527/60906/00). The ship faced two major challenges, it had guests on board with flu symptoms and there were guests with pneumonia in the ship's hospital and later also a guest with heart issues. These people had to be disembarked as soon as possible but all South American ports kept their doors closed. Some of these people subsequently passed away but that nothing to do with Covid-19. The flu symptoms did get worse, to such an extent that a large number of guests had to be isolated and looked after by means of room service.

At that moment nobody on board really knew what was going on, whether this was the coronavirus or something else. The company arranged for test kits but how do you get those on board if all the ports are closed? There was also no option of a helicopter-sea drop. The Master of the ZAANDAM, Captain Ane Smit, was asking for urgent medical help but as South America was in lockdown that help had to come from our own company. With the result that on March 23rd, Captain Bas van Dreumel received the urgent order, to race out of port, collect medical supplies and medical staff from the EURODAM (9378448/86273/08) and OOSTERDAM (9221281/81769/03) and then sail at full speed in the direction of the ZAANDAM. The ROTTERDAM had been chosen for this duty as with 25 knots she was the fastest ship in the fleet. The ZAANDAM was sailing north towards Panama at full speed and a rendezvous point was decided where the two straight course lines would meet. In the open sea, but a quiet sea, so good for a tender transfer. Why the open sea? A sheltered anchorage would have been another day of sailing.



While the guests came to the ROTTERDAM large amounts of water went the other way
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In the meantime the company was holding intense conversations with the CDC and the WHO to find a solution for the guests on board the ZAANDAM. Most of them were not ill but were still in isolation to avoid further spreading. Room service for the 800+ cabins was not something the ZAANDAM crew could cope with in the long term so a quick solution had to be found.



Then permission was obtained from the Panamanian Government to anchor both ships off Balboa. It gave the safe possibility to transfer 800 healthy guests to the ROTTERDAM with their entire luggage. This was achieved in a period of three days, while lots of supplies went the other way, especially water. Those who remained on the ZAANDAM either had shown symptoms or had been exposed to those who had those symptoms but were still healthy. To comply with the requirements of the CDC also those who had tested negative had to remain in quarantine once onboard the ROTTERDAM which meant that they were stuck in isolation for about 4 weeks before they could finally fly home. The ROTTERDAM hotel staff geared up for full room service and part of this service was also free water, beer and wine. It was quite astonishing to see how much alcohol was shoved into the cabins by the ladies and gents of the bar department. Maybe this was one of the reasons why the ships, under those very difficult circumstances both for crew and guests, still received so many compliments about the handling of the crisis.

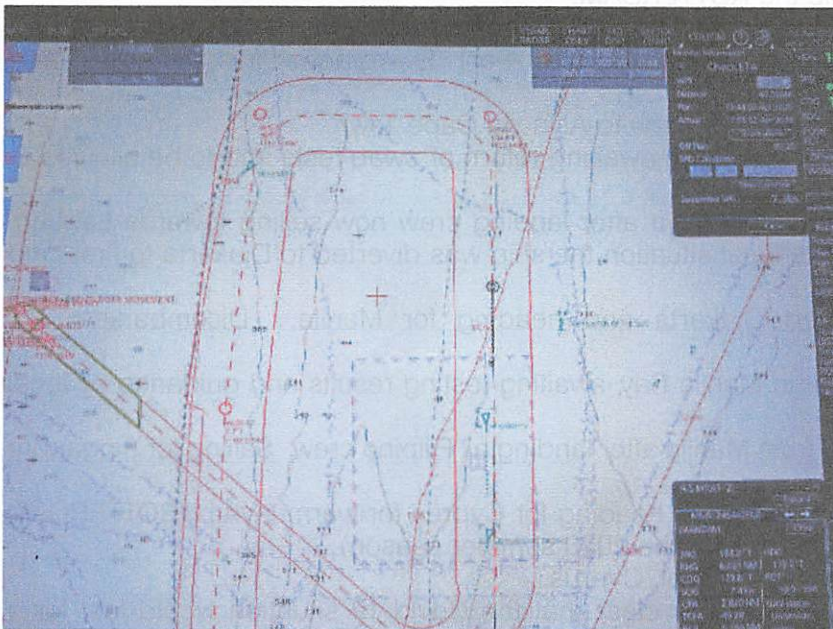


While the guests were served in the cabins, the crew exercised social distancing during meal hours and work
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Then the next challenge was how to get the 800 guests from the ROTTERDAM home and the guests of the ZAANDAM to a location where medical help could be obtained. Permission was received for both ships to sail through the Panama Canal (via the new locks) during the night and then head to Fort Lauderdale.



ROTTERDAM traversing the new Panama Canal Locks by night *unknown photographer*



Making circles off the entrance to Port Everglades while waiting for the final arrangements to be put in place for docking

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On a very high political level, negotiations were held about the when, the where and the how, but on the 1st of April permission was received from the port of Port Everglades to have both ships come alongside. In the late afternoon those who were really ill were taken to hospital and the rest remained until flights home could be organized. That took a few days as charter flights had to be arranged and quite a few guests came from faraway places, including from countries that were in full lockdown. But by April 9th all guests were off the ship.

The next challenge was what to do with the ships and especially, how to get the crews home which could now go on leave as the cruise fleet was expected to be out of service for quite some time. Now the mother company Carnival Corporation started to get very closely involved and two main policies were derived at. A: we will bring the crew home, which cannot fly home, which included all the Far Eastern crew and B: we will station the ships in or near the areas where they will be employed once the pandemic has passed. As a result a huge fleet of Florida based ships gathered near Freeport in the Bahamas and the same occurred off the Californian Peninsula for the west coast fleet. And similar for the ships in the Far East and Down Under. Initial emphasis was for the crew of the HAL group (HAL, Princess and Seabourn) to be transferred to dedicated ships belonging to the Group but very quickly crew from ships of the other brands were brought into the process as well. An extensive transfer process with ships tenders occurred and once all the nationalities were on their designated ship, those ships departed on a 'crew repat cruise' to their home



Safely in port and disembarkation ready to start

internet, source unknown

country or as close as the ship could get. The remainder of the ships went into warm lay-up which means having a skeleton crew on board to keep the ship in safe operation and the critical systems fully functioning.

As an example the ROTTERDAM:

09 April Port Everglades all guests disembarked. Proceeded to Bahamas anchorage, returns occasionally to Port Everglades for refuelling and provisioning.

29 April Assigned to carry crew to Asia via Cape Town.

19 May Arrives at Cape Town awaiting return of swab tests and to be allowed to land South African crew.

21 May Departed Cape Town after landing crew now sailing towards Labuan, Philippines. Due to local situation the ship was diverted to Djakarta to first land Indonesian crew.

08 June Departed Djakarta and heading for Manila. Disembarked 343 Indonesian crew.

14 June At anchor in Manila Bay, awaiting testing results and guidance by local authorities.

07 July Departed from Manila after landing all Filipino crew. Sailing for Singapore for bunkers.

08 July Departed Singapore heading for Cyprus for warm lay-up (ROTTERDAM was assigned to Europe for the 2020 summer season).

26 July At anchor at Limassol, Cyprus.

By this time it was very clear that the Covid-19 situation would last for a much longer time than initially expected and Carnival Corporation needed to cut costs drastically to survive into the future. It was decided to start selling or scrapping the older units in the fleets of all the brands belonging to the Carnival Corporation. This meant for Holland America that on 15th July it was announced that the ROTTERDAM ((9122552/61849/97), the AMSTERDAM (9188037/60874/00), the VEENDAM (9102992/55451/96) and the MAASDAM (8919257/55451/93) would leave the fleet in August and September after having been sold to new operators.

The AMSTERDAM and ROTTERDAM were sold to Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines to become the BOLETTE and BOREALIS and were handed over in the first week of September and went into lay-up in Rosyth, Scotland, after a brief dry dock in Rotterdam. The MAASDAM and VEENDAM were handed over in late August to the Greek ferry operator Sea Jet which renamed the ships AEGEAN MYTH and AEGEAN MAJESTY. They went into lay-up in Greek ports. Shortly after, it was announced that the latest Holland America newbuild the RYNDAM (IV), under construction in Marghera, Italy, would be renamed ROTTERDAM (VII) to continue the tradition of having a ROTTERDAM in the fleet. The other ships remained at their assigned anchorages or diverted to new ones. So on 1st October NIEUW STATENDAM and ZAANDAM were at Scheveningen just outside Rotterdam; EURODAM, NIEUW AMSTERDAM and OOSTERDAM off Curacao; NOORDAM at Katakolon, Greece; ZUIDERDAM at Brindisi, Italy; VOLENDAM and WESTERDAM off Torquay, England, and the KONINGS DAM off Punta Arenas, Costa Rica. It is

expected that some of the ships might be used again as Officer and Crew shuttles if the airports in the anchorage areas cannot be used for crew exchange. But that will all depend on how long this situation lasts. Holland America has so far suspended all operations until at least May 2021.

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CMA CGM JACQUES SAADE – THE WORLD'S FIRST LNG-POWERED ULCS

Colin Wright

Although the CMA CGM JACQUES SAADE (9839179/221251/20) might eventually be beaten for size she will always be the world's first LNG-powered ultra large container ship (ULCS).



CMA GGM JAQUES SAADE at Yantian China.

CMA CGM

CMA CGM signed the contract for the ship and her eight sisters with China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC) in September 2017, with the work being split between Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co., Ltd. (five ships) and Shanghai Jiangnan-Changxing Shipbuilding (four). The ships were designed by the Marine Design and Research Institute of China (MARIC). Delivery was scheduled to start in November 2019 but neither yard had great experience in building vessels with two-stroke LNG propulsion systems so, with added Covid, there were inevitably delays. CMA CGM JACQUES SAADE was finally delivered by Hudong-Zhonghua on 22nd September 2020, with Shanghai Jiangnan-Changxing delivering the next vessel, CMA CGM CHAMPS ELYSEES a month later. The remaining ships are being delivered in rapid succession.

With the length inevitably being 399.9m, the beam is 61.3m and the moulded depth 33.5m. She has a nominal capacity of 23,112TEU of which 13,328TEU are on deck and 9,784TEU under deck and containers of over 10 tonnes can be carried in a 10-high stack. However, at 14 tonnes per TEU, capacity falls to 14,180TEU at the scantling draught of 16m. The design deadweight is 189,260 tonnes. There are 2,200 electric points for reefer boxes. Cargo loading ability has been optimised using specially designed lashing bridges and a loose lashing system. The maximum complement is 9 officers and 20 crew. During the ship's maiden call at Singapore in October 2020, a world record 20,723 TEU "full containers" were loaded. This was achieved in approximately 4,000 crane movements.

However, the main point of interest is the use of LNG. While other container ship operators have since opted for LNG, the majority have doubts and most orders for similar sized newbuildings still favour HFO and scrubbers. CMA CGM