



Manitou Islands Archives Newsletter

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Newsletter

Winter 2008



The Last Shipwreck

November 24, 1960 was the fourth Thursday of November; Thanksgiving Day. It was a better-than-average Thanksgiving Day in Chicago; clear skies, a little warmer than usual, and with southerly breezes bringing even warmer weather. That was probably encouraging to Eduardo Trivizas, the young Captain of the little Liberian tramp freighter Francisco Morazan.

Things hadn't been working out so well for Captain Trivizas. He should have been underway by now, and would have been had it not been for New York insisting he take on a last minute consignment "as a favor to a good friend in Rotterdam." Unfortunately, that cargo had hit the dock late, and the forwarder hadn't shown up with paperwork in time to beat the long Thanksgiving Day weekend. The dock workers wouldn't be back until Monday, so he was stuck in Chicago for the next four days, and maybe for the winter with the Seaway scheduled to close on the 31st.

But New York assured him things would still be okay. The Lambert Lock at Montreal had closed on the 3rd of December last year, because of delays and a last minute rush. That was the St. Lawrence Seaway's first year, and things would probably work out that way again this year. Problems with the Eisenhower lock were causing delays which had ships backed up, and New York expected that would probably delay the closing even beyond the 3rd. That sounded like wishful thinking, but New York was a lot closer to inside information than he was, so if they thought he would be able to make it through to the Gulf of St Lawrence before the canal system closed for the season, how could he argue with them. Yet he knew if he didn't, there would be hell to pay. The ship would wind up laying to somewhere on this side of the locks until next April, and he suspected that losing five months of revenue while having to pay five months of dockage fees was not going to make the company or the charter agent happy. If

that happened, he could bet the Morazan would have new owners and be sailing with a new Master in the Spring.

Yet, with very favorable conditions he might still be able to make it by the 3rd. The thirty-eight year old Morazan was slow. Covering those 1300-miles averaging ten knots would take her about 5-1/2 days sailing time. Adding lockage time to that, probably about seventeen more hours, he figured he'd need about six good days to get to and through the canal system. If he could get into the system, they would probably keep Montreal open long enough for the last boat to exit. That meant he'd have to get underway no later than the 28th; Monday. That was probably possible. After all, the cargo was on the dock, ready to take aboard, and the paperwork had already been cleared. If he could get a priority with the stevedores first thing Monday morning, maybe he could get underway soon enough to slip through just in time. Meanwhile, he'd take advantage of a fine long weekend, spending it on the town with his steward and constant companion, Anastasia. He married her five years before, when he was just nineteen and her twenty-four. They had been sailing together ever since.

The next few days would have made fine Great Lakes sailing weather. The southerly winds brought unseasonably warm temperatures; into the 60's, with clear skies and light breezes. Chicagoans were going around in shorts and tee shirts at the end of November. What a beautiful holiday weekend! That lasted until early Sunday afternoon, when the winds suddenly shifted from South to North. As the temperature fell and the winds died, the fog came. But it really didn't look that bad, in spite of a rather ominous forecast. The lake had settled down some, and the visibility was good enough to permit a safe departure from the Calumet harbor.

Monday morning brought the stevedores back on the dock promptly at six. Living up to its "Windy City" reputation, Chicago's weather changed rapidly again during the day. The wind switched back into the South, and blowing more briskly



now, quickly brought the temperatures back up into the sixties, but now with fog and rain. By mid-morning, the last of the cargo was onboard and the hatches were sealed. Just before five bells, they let go the lines and finally got underway. An hour or so later they were exiting the Calumet River into the harbor channel, heading for the breakwater's south end light. The rain had stopped, the skies were clearing, and Captain Trivizas breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that perhaps his luck was changing for the better. Beyond the breakwater the big lake was dressed in its November finest, its sky-blue waters dancing aquamarine in the sun; its restless rolling waves capped with a brilliant white froth. It looked like the forecasters were wrong again.

But at noon, another front move down from the northwest, and the temperature began a precipitous fall. Just before five bells that afternoon, the temperature was below freezing, with brisk 23-knot westerly winds making it feel like frigid 10-degrees out on deck. That evening, the wind brought light snow showers out of the darkness. Running with following seas the boat rolled gently in the waves and swells, the occasional queen lifting a spray over her bow. As wind-driven spray hit wind-chilled steel, she began to ice up, making conditions on deck not only uncomfortable, but also dangerously slippery. It was a good night to stay below and, except for the Captain and an AB, those who were on duty lingered in the mess or the warmth of the engine room.

By daybreak the following morning – Thursday, the 29th – the Francisco Morazan had gotten ahead of the weather a little, and with slightly warmer temperatures the snow showers changed to freezing rain. The boat and her crew were alone on the lake, having seen nothing or heard anything from anyone else during the night. By that time their steady northward progress on the northbound 015 course had brought them just south of Muskegon, about 38-miles offshore on the Michigan side of the Lake. Maritime weather radio KIG-65 at Green Bay advised more of the same for the next 24-hours. That was not good news. The old German ship was easily able to tolerate bad weather and the lake's 9-foot seas, but she was only making about 10-knots. Trivizas had charted twelve out here in the open water, and had been running at full speed since clearing Calumet Harbor.

Around 07:30 the Engineer whistled up on the bitchbox, advising that there was a problem. Going below, he found him attending to the feed pump in the boiler room. The pump was making a hell of a racket.

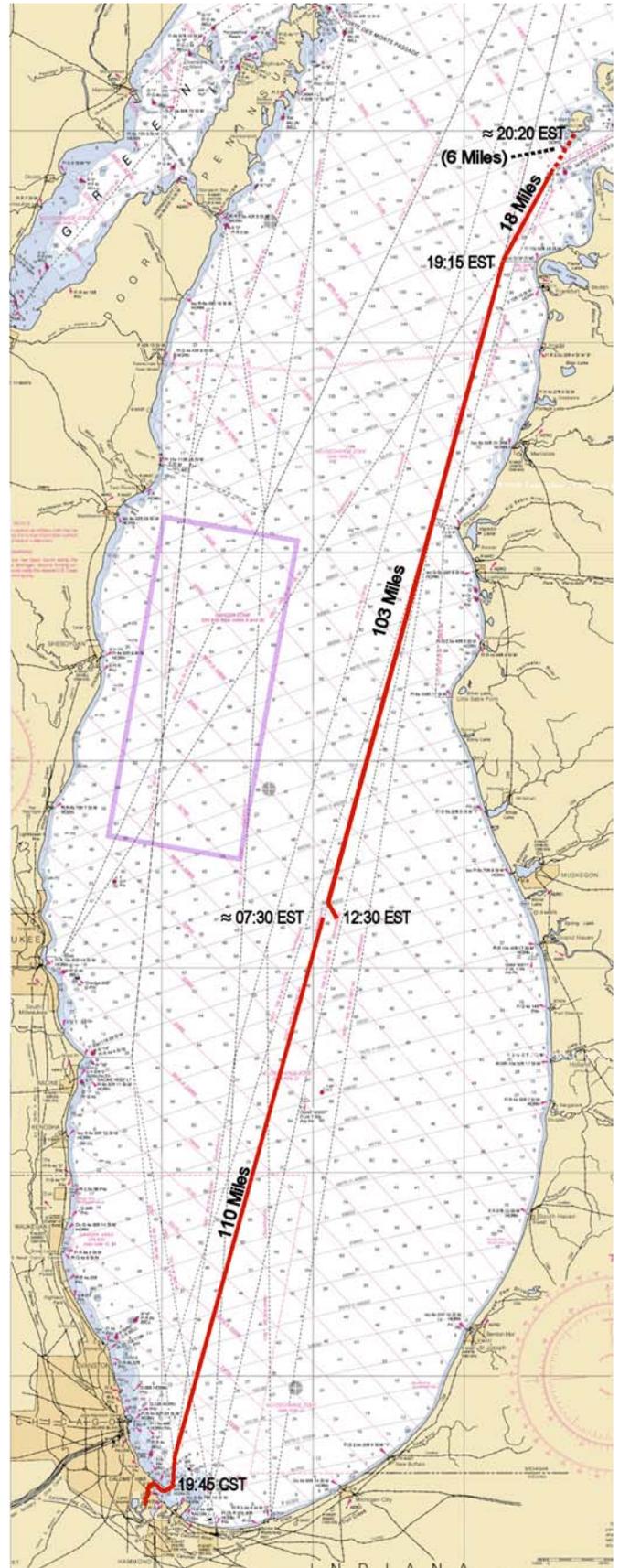
“How long has that been going on?”

“Just started a while ago.”

“Can you fix it?”

“Negative, Sir. I will have to replace it.”

“We're about four hours out from Milwaukee, or three from Muskegon. What do you think; can she make it?”





“Umm, (shrugging uncertainly) maybe. ... Or we can shut ‘er down and let her roll out here for a while ... break out the rebuilt and replace this one before it gets even worse. It’s running way too hot ...can’t even touch it now; should have tripped the over-temperature safety already. With a little help, I can probably get her underway again by noon or so.”

“I would hate to be stuck out here dead in the water in these seas. Are you sure about your spare.”

“It’s been totally rebuilt, Sir. Should be okay.”

“Very good.” Then (rolling up his sleeves) “Let’s do it. Tell the AB we’re shutting her down and I’ll get some hands down here.”

Returning to the bridge, Trivizas cranked up the marine operator at WAY in Chicago, to put in an urgent call to New York. No luck, but he didn’t have to wait long for the return call:

“Freighter Morazan, this is WAY-Chicago, on channel one-six. Over.”

“Morazan. One, six. Over.”

“Freighter Morazan, WAY-Chicago switching to seven-one. Come back on seven, one. Out on one-six.”

“WAY-Chicago, this is Morazan on seven-one. Over.”

“Morazan, your party in New York is on the line. I am now patching you to the long distance operator. Operator, the receiving party in on the line. Go ahead with your call.”

“Your party is on the line Sir. Please flash me when your call is finished.”

It wasn’t the old man on the other end, it was Edwardo’s brother Nicholas Trivizas. To keep the conversation confidential, they conversed in Greek. Eddie explained his situation to Nick ... that they had been delayed by the Presbuteros’ unscheduled deal, asking him to take on special cargo at the last minute ... the bad weather slowing them down ... the feed pump problem ... that it didn’t look like they would be able to make the Seaway in time ... and so on.

Nick gave him the bad news ... the Seaway had granted a one-day extension, but was definitely closing at midnight, Thursday. They were not letting any boat enter the system that would not be able to get through it by then. So Eddie ventured that in that case they should plan on proceeding on to Toledo, and lay to there for the winter? They could take the train to New York from there and the crewmembers would be able to catch a boat home to Greece, Spain or Cuba, as the case might be. At that point the old man came on the line.

“Edwardo. How are you and Anna? Things are rough right now, eh? Eddie; what happened in Chicago? They assured me they were all ready to put their stuff aboard immediately. You should have just sailed, and left it on the dock. I cannot come

Toledo we will have to bring them to New York by rail and arrange to have them carried across from here. That’s in their contract. We do not want that ... or the other expense. You and Nicky fix this, eh?

With Nick back on the line Eddie wondered “What the hell was that? Now this is all my fault? If he hadn’t interfered, I would be at sea by now. And what’s to fix. If they close the locks ...”

Nick interrupted. “Well, maybe they won’t. Otherwise, you’ll figure out what to do. It’s your decision. You’re the Captain.”

“This is not good, Nicky. Hell, it’s my first boat. If I get canned because of this foul-up, I will probably never get another ship.”

“Look, Eddie; you take care of the old man, and he’ll take care of you. You’re family. He has lots of friends, you know.”

There were several seconds of silence. Then Nick ended the call saying, “Look, enough talk, my brother. It’s a bad situation, but you’ll do the right thing; I know you’ll do what needs to be done. And we’ll see you back here in a few days.”

Eddie clicked the tit a few times, switched the radio back to channel 16, and got himself back down to the boiler room.

It took all morning to secure the system, remove and replace the main feed pump, and get the steam back up. They got underway again just after noon. With the temperatures hovering around the freezing point, but the winds having diminished and become variably westerly, the intermittent snow showers melted again into a steady light drizzle. Captain Trivizas ordered the helmsman to come back to course 015 and they made Ludington about 14:45. The winds had subsided to a light breeze, and with the seas running only about six feet, life aboard the more gently rolling ship became a little more tolerable for a while. But as the western horizon sole away the daylight, it gave back the winds in exchange. By dusk the winds had picked up again, shifting into the West-Northwest, and blowing almost as briskly as before.

Not much of the ice on the ship had thawed, and with the drizzle driven under decreasing temperatures and increasing winds, it began to accumulate more heavily now. Looking out the bridge’s partially iced up windows, it occurred to Edwardo that the ice improved the appearance of the ship in a magical sort of way, covering up all her blemishes. For a while, he imagined himself at her helm when she was still new and proudly seaworthy, and he felt a rush of pride at being the young Greek Captain of such a fine ship.

But reality returned. It was a growing dark out on the lake, and this late in the season, the Francisco Morazan had little company. In fact, she was the only foreign registry vessel left on the wrong side of the Seaway. In fact, she was an aging, too long neglected, and too crudely patched up rust bucket. In fact,



her Captain was a stupid schoolboy, an idiot, whose screw up in Chicago had probably sealed her fate, and his.

Under favorable conditions, it would have taken the Morazan about 17-hours to run the 225 miles from Chicago's Calumet Harbor to the Manitou Passage. But at 19:00 – over 24-hours out – she was only approaching Point Betsie. When due West of the light about fifteen minutes later, he assumed the next leg of the course. Speaking in Spanish now to the Honduran AB ...

“Right ten degrees rudder. Steady course 029.”

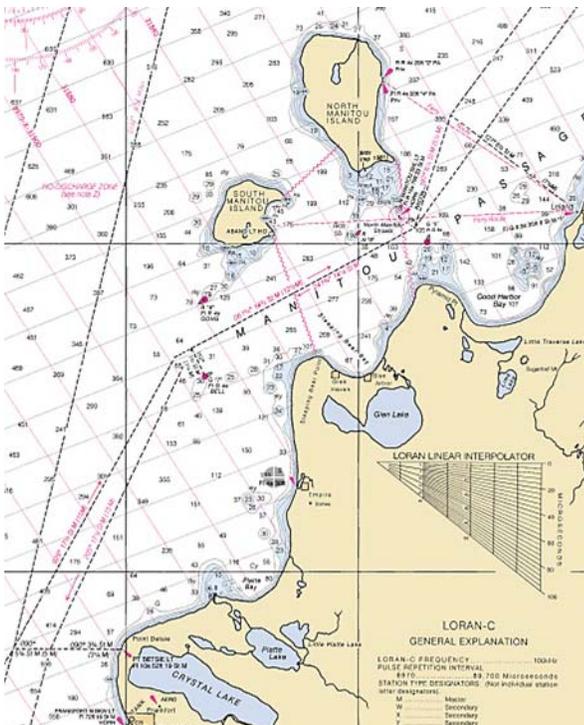
“Right ten degrees rudder. Steady course 029. Aye Sir.” ...
“Rudder is right ten degrees. Coming to course 029.”

“Very well.”

“Steady on course 029. Checking course Sir.”

“Very Well”

With the new heading he would be sailing directly towards South Manitou Island. In another hour and three quarters he would be at the bell buoy off Sleeping Bear Point. There, he would turn again to starboard, coming to course 062 to enter the Manitou Passage. This was a treacherous area, with lots of places to wreck a boat, and there were many on the bottom to prove it. He would take her though here himself. Studying his charts up in the chart house, he could see the treacherous South Manitou and the North Manitou shoals on the south ends of those islands. Also the shoals off Pyramid Point, and the several miles of dangerous shoals running south from South Fox Island.



When the helmsman's relief didn't show up for the last dog watch, since the marginal visibility would require that he remain on the bridge to pilot the Passage on LORAN, and because he was nearly exhausted and feeling seriously ambivalent, he did not call down to find out why. He simply ordered ...

"I will take the conn now. You go below and roust out whoever was supposed to relieve you."

"You have the conn, Sir."

"I have the conn."

Then he slumped back into his Captain's chair. He had been on the bridge for most of the time since their Chicago departure. It had been a bad watch. Too many hours on his feet. Too much stress. He closed his eyes and for a moment let his thoughts drift back to happier times ... the day he'd assumed command of this proud, but weary vessel. It was his first command. She was a rust-bucket, but she was his rust-bucket, and in his mind he had seen her as she had been in better days.

He understood the financial realities. He knew the old man was unhappy with him. He had not said it, but he could hear it in the tone of his voice, and in the way Nick had been choosing his words. He also knew his ship. She was at the end of her life, that day having been hastened by too many idle years and too little maintenance.

It was easy for the old Greek. He'd never even seen his ship. For him, it was just about money; she was just an investment. The old man was skilled in the Greek way of doing business. One way or another, he intended to come out on every deal. He had been around for a long time. He knew all the angles. What did he mean; "fix this?"

Yeah, she really wasn't seaworthy. She might not even survive an Atlantic crossing were she to encounter serious weather. But better she go to the bottom in the mid-Atlantic than wind up being cut up for scrap in a salvage yard. Yet, it's a big ocean. If the ship broke up in heavy seas, their rescue might be iffy. That would not be good; maybe they would all wind up at the bottom, next to the ship ... him and Anna ... and their unborn child. Then Mama would have to raise Sophia by herself. No, that would not be good. That would not be good at all. Better to lay to in Toledo and wait until Spring. Better sailing weather then. Meanwhile, maybe the old man would give him another ship. Maybe he'd fire him. Either way ... better to be relieved of command than ending it in disgrace.

He was not really asleep. He was too tired to sleep. It was more like a daydream; that space where the brain has begun to shut down consciousness, but not thought. He faintly heard the gonging as the ship brushed past the buoy at the southern end of the South Manitou shoal, but it didn't register. She was in dangerous waters now, but could have been saved with a hard to starboard maneuver. But with her Captain lost in his thoughts while still slumped in his chair, she sailed on, all ahead full and steady on course.



He was finally shaken out of his depths of thought by muffled scraping and crumbling noises as the ship passed over something in the depths below. Then all was quiet again. But now with his feet back on the steel floor, he could feel a new unfamiliar component in her vibration. Something had happened, he figured her screw had been damaged and knocked out of balance. He thought “What next?” Hadn’t this voyage gone badly enough already?

Then peering into the darkness ahead, he got his answer. She was headed directly into an increasingly light something looming ominously ahead in the darkness; and stretching as far either side, from port to starboard, as he could see. His first impulse was to stop, to ring down full astern. But what about that previous hit. Was she already on a shoal? He wasn’t sure how far back that was. That might be risky. Maybe best to just stop and lay at anchor until daylight to see exactly what the situation was.

Then the chart flashed though his mind ... the South Manitou shoal ... the gong buoy ... the course correction ... the island with its bluffs. And suddenly he knew where he was, and where she was going. It was still quiet. She was still vibrating more than usual, but otherwise sailing ahead at her top speed. Those moments of indecision proved fatal. Ship and shoal suddenly took over for themselves.

It came with the screeching of steel against stone, and the clanging of her screw tossing heavy rocks around under the water as she continued on, seemingly refusing to be slowed. Then a deafening bang as her stem crashed head on into a huge underwater bolder and she stopped suddenly, throwing his gut hard against the wheel. Almost as if being bounced back, she seemed to retreat, then heaved to starboard as her stern swung hard to port, throwing him to the floor. Turned almost parallel to the land mass, she lurched ahead again. Straining forward, but staunchly resisted now by underwater obstructions, she struggled mightily, but her prop was now just angrily blowing sand and stone astern. She had been captured by the shoal.

He got up, and pulled the engine order telegraph up to the stop position. It was over. It was now quiet again, except for the sound of the wind and the waves, and the muffled sounds of the ship’s hull pounding on the rocks below when dropped in the troughs between the waves. That banging sound seemed eerily rhythmic and peaceful. He lifted his chin and stretched his neck feeling a wave of relief, as if a heavy burden had just been lifted from his shoulders.

That quiet was disrupted by Anna, who came rushing in screaming, “Eddie! Are you okay? What happened!” Then, as she looked out the windows from the bridge, “Eddie! What have you done!”

He didn’t answer. He just picked up the mike, pressed the tit and uttered, “Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. Αυτό είναι Francisco Morazan. Over.”

Someone answered immediately, “Vessel in distress, this is Coast Guard North Manitou Light Station, one-six. What is your position and nature of distress. Over.”

“Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. This is Francisco Morazan. I am a 235-foot package freighter with fourteen crew members aboard. I am stranded on South Manitou Island Shoal. Request immediate assistance. Over.”

“Freighter Morazan this is Coast Guard North Manitou Light Station. Standby.”

“Freighter Francisco Morazan this is United States Coastguard Station Traverse City on channel one-six. Say again your position and distress. Over.”

Coast Guard, Francisco Morazan. I have struck the shoal. Ship is pounding on bottom ... Position 59-40 North, 08-34 West. Over.

“Freighter Morazan this is Coast Guard Traverse, say again ... are you aground?”

“Καταρατική ... er, Si ... ah, I mean yes, affirmative. We are aground. Firmly aground.”

“Freighter Morazan this is Coast Guard Traverse, one six. Standby.”



That's mostly fiction, of course. Nobody but Edwardo Trivizas and those who were in the Long Island office know what really happened at Chicago, or along the way on the Francisco Morazan’s fateful voyage to South Manitou Island.

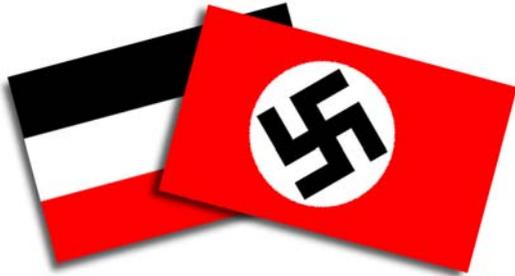
It is a fact that the Morazan left Calumet Harbor on November 28, 1960 with no chance whatsoever of making it into the St Lawrence canal system in time. The Seaway was scheduled to close at midnight on November 30, and that was well known to everyone who had reason to know. As it turned out, a problem with the Eisenhower lock at Montreal resulted in a slow-down which caused a back up of ships hurrying to exit before the closing, and the closing was therefore postponed, but only for one day.

The Francisco Morazan had had a checkered past. She was built by the German shipbuilding company Deutsche Werft at the Finkenwarder shipyard in Hamburg. Launched in June of 1922 and finally completed in September of that year, she was 235-feet long overall with a beam of 37-feet, her single-screw steam system designed to provide a top cruising speed of 9.5-knots. During World War II the same shipyard produced 113 U-boats for the Kriegsmarine. In 1968 a merger produced Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft, which is still in business, and still builds a variety of vessel types, including attack submarines.

The ship was originally launched with the name *Arcadia*. She served German Hamburg-Amerika Packet A.G. under the Deutsche Levante Linie until 1934, when she was sold to coal



importer Kohlen-Import & Poseidon Schiffs of Königsberg, and renamed *Elbing*. During World War II she no doubt served the Third Reich, her national merchant ensign being replaced by the *Hakenkreuzfahne* merchant ensign. Seized by the Allies



on the Elbe River at the end of the war, the ship was taken over by the British Ministry of War Transport, and put back into service by the British government as the *Empire Congress*. A year later, she was turned over to the Norwegian government as part of war reparations, who put her into service as the *Brunes*. The next year, 1947, she was acquired by the Norwegian company R.Mithassel and renamed *Skuld*." In 1948 the Mithassel company was acquired by Birger Ekerholt, also Norwegian, and her name was changed yet again, this time to *Ringas*. Ten years later, in 1958, she was purchased by her final owner, listed as Chris T Trapezountios of New York, now sailing as a Liberian registered vessel with the name *Los Mayas*. In 1959 she was chartered under a new name, Francisco Morazan.

Her master at the time was a young Greek; 24-year old Edwardo Trivizas (tree-vee-ZHAS), recently graduated from the Greek Maritime Academy in Athens. A native of Corfu, the largest of the Greek Ionian islands, he had been sailing since age 19, but had held masters papers for less than a year. The Francisco Morazan was his first command. He was accompanied by his wife, Anastasia, who had also been his sailing companion during his five-years at sea. They had one child, with another on the way. Sixteen-month old daughter Sophia had been left in the care of the Captain's mother in Athens. Ana was two-months pregnant with their second child.

The relationship between the Captain and his wife, and the vessel's owner, is fictional, but such a relationship would, in fact, have been likely, given the Greek merchant marine tradition at the time, much of which is still alive and well even today. Like the Trivizas', other Green members of the crew were also from the Ionian islands, a traditional source of shipping entrepreneurs and magnates who carry on their business in close-knit networks.

Eddie did indeed continue on with a career in shipping, finishing it up as a marine surveyor on the east coast, then finally retiring and returning to his homeland. He did in fact have an older brother Nick. A cargo vessel named the *Glenview*, twice the size of the Morazan and twenty-five years younger, wrecked about three years later on Chinchorro Bank, off Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. She too was of Liberian

registry, and owned by Theo Naviera, Inc., one of the entities named by Anastasia Trivizas as the owner of the Francisco Morazan. Edwardo's brother Nicholas Trivizas was the last Master of the *Glenview*.

The Morazan was no stranger to the Great Lakes, having navigated the St. Lawrence Canal System into the inland seas several years before the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway. She visited the Great Lakes for the first time in 1952 as the Norwegian vessel *Ringas*, delivering china clay to Muskegon, Michigan. The photo appearing above shows her in the Welland Canal as she was in 1953. She returned that year with pulpwood and general cargo for Port Huron, Michigan. Three years later she was back on the Great Lakes, returning in 1958 as the Greek-owned freighter *Los Mayas*. She was then registered in Panama under management by Moa Navigation S.A. *Los Mayas* ran aground in Muskegon during that visit and breached her hull. With cargo removed, a cement patch was poured inside the hull so she could complete her voyage.

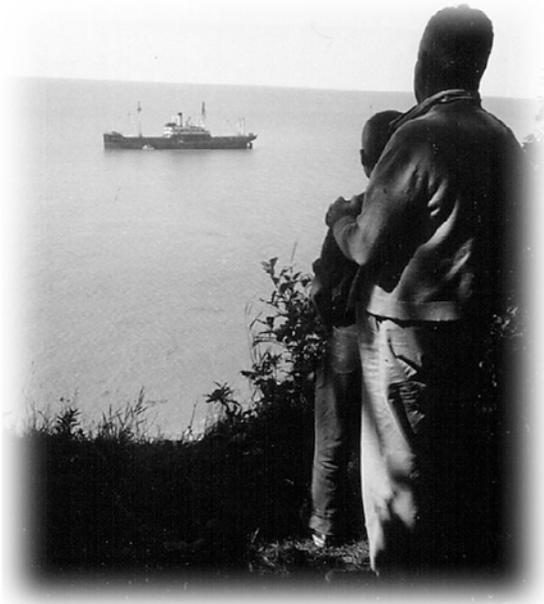
The ship's last voyage began at Tampa, Florida on Friday, October 21, 1960. She was now owned by C.T. Trapezountios, a.k.a. West Indies Transport Company of Long Island, New York and Monrovia, Liberia, with Liberian registry. She sailed under charter to Interamerican Marine Operators, also of New York. Rounding the southern tip of Florida and, sailing through the Keys, she worked her way up the east coast and into the St. Lawrence Gulf. On her way through the St. Lawrence canal system, she made stops at Montreal and Toronto, finally arriving at her Chicago destination in mid-November. Departing Chicago's Calumet Harbor on Monday the 28th of November, her final voyage ended on the rocks at South Manitou Island the following evening.

The South Manitou Island shoal was an ideal crash site. It's solid bottom of sand and rocks eliminated any possibility of the ship's sinking, and massive granite boulders littered here and there were likely to assure its destruction. It had eaten other ships, one of which the Morazan ran over on its way in. It was only about nine miles from the North Manitou Island Shoal Light Station, which was manned full-time by the U.S. Coast Guard, yet with the ship hidden behind the island's bluff, the light was just out of eyeshot. The weather was somewhat less than ideal, with a light fog and occasional snow showers making for a dark night on rough seas, with no identifiable lights or landmarks visible along the shoreline. That left her dependant on navigation aids – the buoys, North Manitou Shoal Light Station, her LORAN, and radio compass – to negotiate a safe course through the Manitou Passage that night.

Wednesday morning, the Coast Guard buoy tender *Mesquite* arrived from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, and was joined later that morning by the cutter *Mackinaw* from Cheboygan, Michigan. The high seas making it impossible to approach the ship with lifeboats, the buoy tender *Sundew* was summoned to bring a breeches buoy from Charlevoix and arrived early the next day. Late in the day, however, the weather moderated



enough to permit a boarding party from the Mackinaw to visit the stranded freighter. When they left, they took the Captain's wife off the ship with them. Two months pregnant, and complaining of pain, she was flown from the Mackinaw to more comfortable quarters in Traverse City on the Coast Guard helicopter's return trip. Her husband and twelve fellow crewmembers remained aboard the stranded ship. That evening a salvage tug and barge arrived from Sturgeon Bay, joining the growing fleet of rescue vessels. With the Mackinaw and salvage tug on the scene, the Mesquite and Sundew departed during the night. The next day, Friday, an insurance agent and marine surveyor arrived from New York, and were flown out to the Mackinaw by helicopter from Traverse City. The Coast Guard, the company representatives from New York, and salvage engineers from Roan Salvage of Sturgeon Bay met with Captain Trivizas aboard the stranded ship, and after examining her condition and situation, concluded that salvaging the boat would not be feasible.



Mrs. Trivizas flew to New York the day after being taken off the ship. Her husband, his twelve remaining crewmembers, and the two company executives from New York finally abandoned the ship three days later, after having spent the previous night with fifteen-foot waves crashing over the stranded ship's hull. It was Sunday, the 5th of December; the sixth day the Captain and crew had remained aboard their stranded ship with the big lake pounding her from above, and smashing her hull onto the rocks below. With the Weather Service posting gale warnings for the area and predicting winds gusting up to 60 miles-per-hour, the Mackinaw left the scene, sailing to Traverse City to place the crew in the custody of immigration officials. The salvage tug *John Roan V* and its companion barge *Maintland* stood by in the bay at South

Manitou, still entertaining the possibility of salvaging the ship's cargo. After the weather finally cleared several days later, they gave it up and returned to Sturgeon Bay.

As the Francisco Morazan sailed on towards the South Manitou Island shoal on that late November evening, she already had three strikes against her.

The 48-year old ship had reached the end of her life. Roan Salvage had a diver onboard, as requested by Captain Trivizas, but on Friday, the group inspection of the ship's interior made it plain to Roan and company representatives Alvin Tublin and James Sweeney, who had flown in from New York, that she wasn't worth what it would cost to lighten the cargo, pull her off the shoal and tow her to Sturgeon Bay for repairs. Tublin and Sweeney, representing the owners, therefore ordered further efforts to salvage the ship stopped. Islanders boarding the ship in the months that followed reported that she was badly rusted; so much so that when down in the darkness of her holds one could see daylight here and there through cracks and rusted out voids in her hull.

But even if she had been in better shape, her usefulness was over. Originally designed for shallow water operations, she was uniquely well suited for global shipping into and out of the Great Lakes, being able to transit the original St. Lawrence Canal System and work the shallow Great Lakes harbors. But the whole point of the St. Lawrence Seaway project was to open the Lakes to newer, speedier and more efficient world class vessels, and local ports were deepened to accommodate such ships. When the Seaway finally opened in 1959, the Morazan's special advantage was eliminated, and she was sorely out-classed.

And finally, the Morazan came under Greek ownership in 1958. That was quite in line with the Greek business tradition of buying when everyone else is selling, then profiting handsomely on their investment by putting their cheaply purchased used boats to work once the market rebounded. The 1958 freight rate crisis had depressed rates well below operating costs, so the Ringas' Norwegian owners were probably quite happy to peddle the old ship to Chris Trapezountios at bargain price. Unfortunately, the world-wide recession lingered on longer than expected. Furthermore, the closing of the Suez Canal in 1956 had generated a heated demand for more ships, and a plethora of new buildings had been ordered prior to the freight rate crisis. As these newer, bigger and faster tramps began to be delivered in the midst of the crisis, supply far exceeded demand, keeping freight rates depressed for some nine more years.

Given these three realities, her new owner's choices were probably limited to two: sell her to a scrap yard, else to the underwriters.

The owners of the Morazan were never really identified. Anastasia Trivizas identified them variously as "Theo Navira"



and “Mao Shipping Co.,” with the ship sailing under charter by charter by “Interamerican Marine Operators Co.” The ship index lists the real owner as West Indies Transport Corp., of Monrovia, Liberia, who was actually Chris T. Trapezountios, of Long Island, New York. This sort of obfuscation was typical of Greek shipping, its purpose being the avoidance of taxes, liability claims, and other legal problems. Under maritime law at the time, ownership would not have been an important issue, since a vessel abandoned by its owner became the property of creditors, with the owner then exempted from any liability. Insurance proceeds for the vessel itself would, of course, be paid to which ever party, within the above maze of entities, was listed as the loss payee on the policies.

The Morazan’s cargo was listed as including canned goods, lard, machinery, hides, packaged goods and chemicals. The cargo was insured by Charles Worman & Co. of New York, and three other underwriters. They appeared in Leeland in January, some six weeks after the Morazan’s stranding, to make arrangements with the Lake Michigan Hardwood Co. for the salvaging of the ship’s cargo. The group planned to use its lumber carrier *Glen Shore* to transport salvaged cargo to Leeland, from whence it would be transported back to Chicago by truck. Meanwhile, they hired Leeland’s George Grosvenor to begin the process using his mail boat, the *Smiling Thru*. With

his smaller boat, he was able to operate in the shallows where the ship had finally come to rest, and he succeeded in removing about five tons of canned chicken and hides before the weather set in once again.



Much of the remaining cargo was removed over the years that followed by scavengers and private would-be salvagers. Islanders spoke highly of the “Blue Star” canned chicken which, they claimed, was delicious right out of the can. The shipwreck

was naturally a great plaything for boys. Among its obvious attractions, the cargo included a consignment of balsa-wood model airplanes manufactured by Monogram Models of Chicago; a great find for boys of any age. The only fatality associated with the wreck of the Francisco Morazan was the tragic drowning of one of its playmates in August of 1967, an island boy just turned sixteen-years old, who evidently lost his way within the darkness of the hulks flooded interior after swimming out to the wreck with a best friend.



A year later, in August of 1968, Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelly filed suit in Leeland to have the rusting hulk of the Morazan removed, claiming its damaged condition and the rotted remnants of its cargo represented a health hazard. Since the ship had been carrying some 6,500 gallons of

fuel oil, the suit further alleged that the rusting hulk presented a serious pollution risk to nearby resort beaches. Named defendants were the Francisco Morazan Corp of Leeland, Moa Naviera Co. of Panama City, Panama, and Time & Freight Charterings of New York. The following day, the shipwreck mysteriously caught fire, and burned overnight, evidently incinerating its contents and consuming whatever might have been left of the fuel oil. Two of the named defendants having disappeared, or perhaps not actually having been involved with the Francisco Morazan at the time of her loss anyway, the law suit was dropped. Under current law, the ship is now the property of the State of Michigan, and is protected by the conventions of the Manitou Passage Underwater Preserve.



Thus ends the story of the Francisco Morazan. Forty-eight years ago, her plight was front page news across the country. A week later, coverage degenerated to condensed versions of syndicated articles appeared on page five of the evening papers.

For the locals, the shipwreck brought back to mind the many shipwreck sagas from a century of maritime activity in the Manitou Passage. For a while it remained a popular topic of conversation, an interesting speculation for some and serious debate for others. Was her stranding accidental or deliberate – bad luck, or barratry? Had the young Captain been “set up” by the ship’s owners? The Coast Guard seemed dubious, but without any hard evidence to support such suspicions, reported the incident as yet another casualty of the treacherous Manitou Passage and the unpredictable weather on the Great Lakes in late November. The consensus of opinion among the local seafarers was that the wreck was not an accident.

After a half-century of battering by wind and waves, and the crushing pressures of winter ice, what’s left of the Francisco Morazan protrudes above the waters, the rusting hulk of a once proud ocean-going ship, now a refuge for shags, detestable double-crested cormorants, roosting atop white streaks of their own stinking excrement. It’s an image that seems pathetically symbolic, perhaps an appropriate monument to a colossal failure wrought of our impudent dreams and greedy schemes – the disappointing St. Lawrence Seaway. The Morazan was the harbinger of things to come. After the Seaway opened, instead of more Morazans bearing riches, it brought destruction – sea lampreys, alewives and zebra muscles. And as a consequence of the alewife invasion, an infestation of what the Greek’s called “bald ravens” – ugly black shags such as those that now own the Francisco Morazan – the Manitou Passage’s last shipwreck. ❀



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