

It took a day and a half to go through the formalities. An official came on board to measure The Aegre and estimated us as 2 tons displacement. At 72 cents a ton, our Canal passage would cost just \$1.42.<sup>3</sup>

We had a few more days to wait and put the time to good use. Firstly we moved The Aegre to the marina close to the Yacht Club and used the Club's showers and washing machines. Clean bodies

and clothes, what a refreshing change that was. We found twelve letters waiting for us at the Club and had a wonderful afternoon reading them aloud to each other, excitedly hearing all the news from our families and friends in far away England.

More seriously, we needed to address our navigation equipment problems. Firstly we needed to get our little radio receiver

repaired. It required seven new transistors. But with no chronometer, we were now acutely aware that we were totally reliant on it for time signals and thus longitude. It would be critical for our next long westward trans-Pacific passage. But what if it got wet again? Should we carry a spare? Tom Blackwell suggested we look for a super accurate Bulova Accutron wristwatch (like his) in the Panama duty-free zone. This was the most accurate watch of the time (and a forerunner of the quartz watch), and he was pretty sure we'd get one at a reasonable price. It would make an excellent chronometer.

But we had a problem with our compass as well. This had been given to us by the Ridgways back in Scotland but had leaked much of the alcohol the compass plate floated in and become nearly unusable. It seemed impossible to repair and would have to be replaced. Again, our best hope seemed to be in the duty-free zone of Panama City.

Christobal/Colon, the city at the Caribbean end of the Canal, was very run down and dangerous. Panama City, at the Pacific end, was much bigger and more modern, we heard, but no safer.

Fortunately, Tom Blackwell being an ex-Navy man, knew his way around Panama City. Together with him, feeling fresh-faced and naïve, we took a train from Colon to Panama and found the Duty Free Zone with his guidance and advice. There we did indeed find and eventually buy both an Accutron watch (for US\$80<sup>4</sup>) and a second-hand small boat compass (for \$72<sup>5</sup>). Navigationally now, I felt equipped for the Pacific. Somehow, we got back on the train without being mugged, but even Tom couldn't protect us from the daytime approaches of the many 'ladies of the night.'

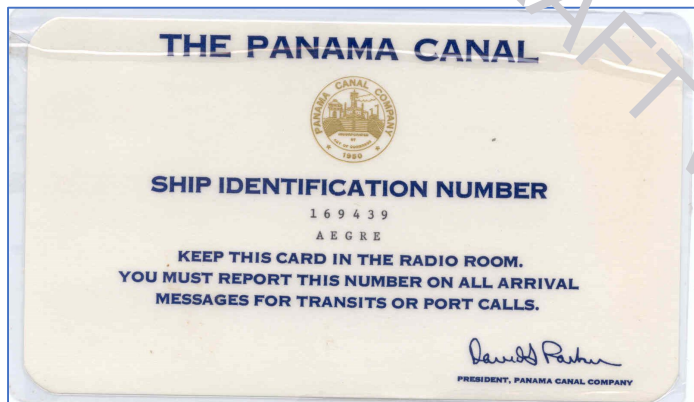


Figure 5 The Aegre's Panama Canal Transit ID card

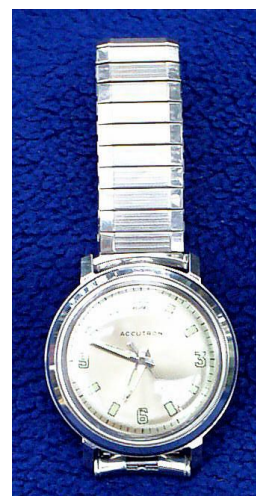


Figure 6 Our Bulova Accutron