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Anecdotes from Western Australia

Much of a preventive officer's work was unrewarding, and was carried out in dirty, confined parts of ships seldom glimpsed by the public. Bob Stone recalls a light-hearted incident on the wharf early in his career.

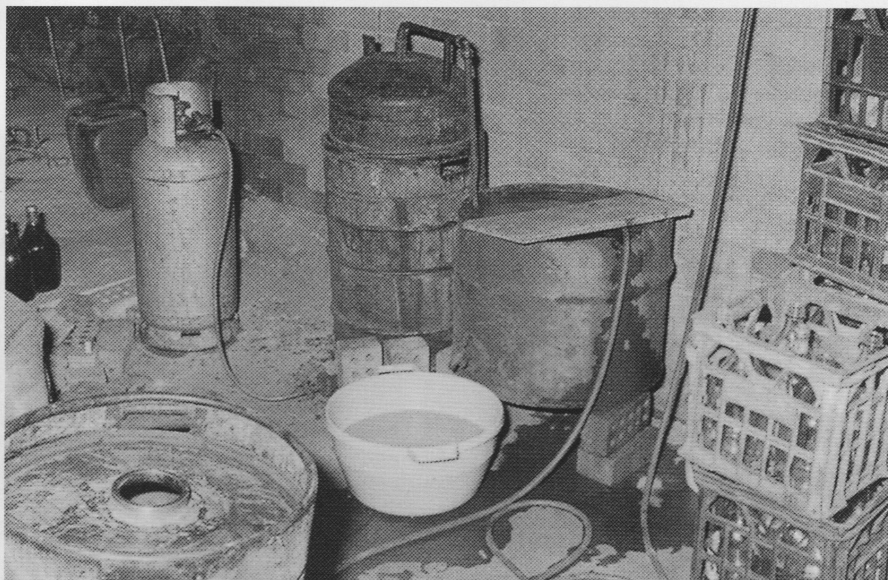
In the early sixties and seventies the Chinese-crewed vessel *Golden Wonder* was a regular caller at Fremantle, and invariably was searched by preventive officers, as the ship's hatches were a favourite hiding place for contraband goods. On one occasion Bob and Officer Morrie Brown were searching through stacks of timber in the vessel's hold before making their way to the hatches, which were closed at the time. Suddenly Bob and Morrie became aware that the hatches were being opened. Morrie, turning to Bob, said, 'Watch this!'

He removed his hat and false teeth, pulled his overalls down to waist level, exposing his singlet, ruffled his hair and began to climb the stacks of timber towards the top of the hatch. As he got near the top, Morrie attracted the attention of one of the waterside workers, yelling, 'Is this Orstralia, mate?' Without waiting for a reply, he escaped back down the timber, and he and Bob made a hasty exit from the ship.

Soon afterwards all the searching officers were summoned to the captain's cabin, where they were solemnly informed by Immigration and other officials that a waterside worker had reported a stowaway on board, who must be found. The search proved fruitless.

Patrolling the wharves can be a hazardous occupation. In the mid-seventies Bill Gardner — an ex-Aberdeen policeman — and Jim Wilkinson were confronted by three irate Japanese crew members bent on exacting vengeance on the crew of an adjacent European vessel after an earlier fracas in Fremantle. One of the Japanese suddenly produced a knife. He was quickly disarmed by Bill, whose judo skills were to stand him in good stead in his later career as investigator of illicit spirits.

John Chescoe, who partnered Bill on numerous inquiries, was threatened by two men on a property at Rose Hill,



Illicit still seized in April 1988 at Spearwood, Western Australia.

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Margaret River, during an inquiry. Bill, observing the situation, swiftly applied an armlock to one of the men, and restored the situation to normal.

On another occasion Bill and John were driving along a mud embankment, headed towards the residence of a farmer who was alleged to be making illegal spirits. The vehicle accidentally slid over the embankment and overturned, smashing a flagon of spirits — seized from an earlier inquiry — that drenched them both. Fortunately neither of the officers was hurt. But they did feel embarrassed when they were rescued by the farmer they had come to investigate.

Clayton Roberts

Clayton Roberts is Senior Investigator, Petroleum Products, Fremantle. His articles on the origins of Customs and Excise, a survey of Customs in Western Australia, and Fremantle Customs House have appeared in the two previous issues of the *Australian Customs History Journal*. In 1990 he completed a Masters thesis on a Customs legal and historical topic through the University of New England.