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## COMPASS ROSE: THE TRUE COURSE OF GIL PORTER

By Patrick Lapinski  
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*A ship's place in the line is not set  
By the weight of her broadside,  
The spread of her sails,  
The strength of her scantlings,  
But by the heart of those who sail in  
her.*

**October 2, 1941**

A myriad of densely forested islands sprinkled across the middle of the Pacific Ocean form the archipelago of the Palau Islands. Many consider the tropical islands of Palau to be a paradise. Forests of ironwood, banyan, coconut and breadfruit trees cover the hillsides in this sparsely populated area. Divers cover the pristine waters surrounding the islands; waters and reefs with more than 1,500 species of fish and 700 species of coral and anemone.

For those acquainted with the region's history, a different picture of Palau comes to mind, a darker image. Scattered throughout the archipelago and its outlying reefs are memories associated with war in the Pacific: remains of Mitsubishi Zeros, Corsairs, Japanese "Jake" seaplanes and dozens of shipwrecks. The Japanese occupied the Palau Islands from 1914 until the end of World War II. Prior to the war, portions of the islands were heavily fortified and defended by the Japanese, so that as the end of the war drew closer fierce battles raged around Angaur and Peleliu as Allied forces wrestled the islands from the grip of occupied forces.



Gil Porter commanding aboard WOODRUSH.

GIL PORTER COLLECTION

Memories of islands like Palau are still familiar to Duluth resident Gil Porter, although they are not as clear as they once were. As a member of the Coast Guard, Gil served in the South Pacific, but only after the war had ended. He saw plenty of evidence of the destructive battles waged in the decade prior to his arrival. In 1952, at age 29, Gil received his first vessel commands, buoy tenders BASSWOOD (WLB 388) and IRONWOOD (WLB 297), while stationed at Honolulu. For four years, in an operation area covering most of the Pacific, Gil and his crew cared for all of the lighthouses and buoys in the U.S. Trust Territories.

"We logged a lot of miles. I think 40,000 one year on the IRONWOOD alone," recalled Gil.

In spite of the miles, Gil remembers that the joys of being a new captain made days fly past, while a minimum amount of supervision gave them a great freedom.

Gil's career in the Coast Guard began early. Before the United States was "officially" at war, Clarence "Gil" Porter joined the U.S. Coast Guard on

October 2, 1941, two months prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Growing up in Canada, many of Gil's friends had already joined the Royal Canadian Navy, but as an American citizen, Gil was unable to enlist in Canada at that time. While his peers were dying in the cold, dark waters of the North Atlantic, Gil had to wait until he had graduated

from Westmount High in Montreal before he was old enough to return to the States to enlist. His uncle, serving as a chief petty officer in the Coast Guard at Eaton's Neck lifeboat station on Long Island, willingly encouraged Gil to sign up.

Al along the eastern seaboard, German U-boats harassed merchant shipping, sinking or destroying ships at will. The United States remained neutral in the war, but the Coast Guard was already mobilized to protect harbors and shipping with its meager resources. Stationed at Portsmouth Navy Yard in New Hampshire, Gil was busy on river and harbor entrance patrols. He vividly remembers that after the December 7 attack at Pearl Harbor, "Everybody was seeing lights off shore, everybody was in a panic more or less."

In the Coast Guard, the panic translated into putting to sea "anything that could float." More than 60 years later, Gil is nearly ashamed to show a picture of his first ship, a 123-foot-1-inch requisitioned Norwegian whaler named BRONCO (WYP-340). The Coast Guard spent nearly a quarter million dollars at the start of the war re-fitting BRONCO with depth charges and weaponry for escort duty in the North Atlantic. The memory of a harpoon gun mounted on the bow still brings a laugh to Gil.

BRONCO, camouflaged in light blue and white for Arctic duty, never saw convoy duty in the North Atlantic. During training exercises in Casco Bay, off Portland, Maine, the old whaler iced up so badly that the ship returned to port with a dangerous list. The Coast Guard quickly reassigned them to the Caribbean, sending BRONCO into the shipyard at Boston for supplies, while hastily repainting the hull to a tropical scheme.

"It's snowing and raining, and they're spray painting everything gray." Gil chuckled when recounting how the comically urgent pace as BRONCO departed the shipyard.

"We're backing away from this Navy yard to head south, and they're walking down the dock still spraying paint."

BRONCO escorted convoys

traveling to and from the Panama Canal and north to Guantanamo, Cuba. In 1942, off Morant Point Light on the eastern end of Jamaica, BRONCO rescued 88 survivors from a sunken Dutch freighter. After his 15-month tour in the Caribbean, Gil was briefly assigned to the 240-foot cutter MODOC (WPG 46) in the North Atlantic, escorting merchant convoys from Boston to a cryolite mine at Ivigtut, Greenland. This began a string of assignments on shore

"My timing wasn't  
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and at sea that are typical of a military career with any longevity.

By 1945, fresh out of Officer Candidate School (OCS) at New London, Connecticut, Gil headed back to warmer climates, this time assigned to the fabled Pearl Harbor as a brand new ensign aboard DE DURANT (DE-389).

"My timing wasn't very good. I joined the ship just at VJ day."

The welcomed conclusion of war made it a short-lived tour. When it became evident that the Japanese would honor their treaty, the Coast Guard sent DURANT to Brooklyn Navy yard for decommissioning. Many regulars and reservists headed home; Gil headed to Iceland to spend Christmas on the Coast Guard cutter COMANCHE (WPG-76).

After the war, convoy duty gave way to more traditional Coast Guard duties – buoy tending, ice breaking, search and rescue. Starting in 1946, Gil served two years on CACTUS (WLB-270) out of Boston, where he learned buoy tending, then two years on CASTLE ROCK (WHEC-383), a sea plane tender working weather stations in the North Atlantic, and finally a year at an isolated LORAN station in the Philippines before returning to Boston for a tour ashore.

Having worked in the Caribbean,

Pacific and North Atlantic, Gil and his family reported for duty with some trepidation at the inland port of Duluth on Halloween 1959. In spite of his apprehensions, the job aboard WOODRUSH (WLB-407) turned out to be one of the best of his career.

"I had been used to running 3,000 miles to set a buoy, where here you had to run to Ashland, or Bayfield or somewhere, and then it'd freeze up all winter long. Golly, it was great!"

It didn't take long that first winter for Lake Superior to make memories that have lasted a lifetime.

"We were taking in the lighted buoy at Red Cliff. It was 20 below zero that morning, everything was steaming like mad, you know – it's cold, the buoy is all iced up and this is early November! I thought, 'Holy buckets, what did I get into here?'"

Gil's experience at Red Cliff was only the beginning of a long relationship with The Lake. During his four years command of WOODRUSH, Gil recalled one winter where the ice jammed her so tightly that the crew could only wait for the wind to change direction to blow the vessel out into the open lake.

A steady wind had been blowing from the east for several days, pushing and packing the ice into the western end of the lake. With only about 1,000 hp WOODRUSH was not powerful enough to break through the ice without "outside" assistance.

"I left word, 'Call me when the wind shifts.'" The break came several days later when the wind finally came around from the west.

"I remember it was early one Sunday morning, the wee hours ... when we got called. The wind had shifted, so we were underway by 7 o'clock in the morning, and we were able to go straight out to Knife River approximately and then a ways down across the open water and come back on an angle to Duluth piers. In a matter of twelve hours that whole big pie had just moved completely out."

*June 18, 1961*

As lighthouses around the Great Lakes became fully automated, the days of staffed lighthouses passed into romantic legend. Stannard Rock

Lighthouse is a place of such legend, and sadly as well, of tragedy.

Described as "the loneliest place on earth," the isolated Stannard Rock lighthouse rises 110 feet above the surface of Lake Superior. Hailed by the state of Michigan as 1 of the 10 greatest engineering feats of the 20th century, the lighthouse was constructed in such a remote and exposed part of Lake Superior that it took five years to complete. At night, on the open lake, Stannard Rock's beacon could be seen by mariners at a distance of 18 miles, but it was not visible to its closest neighbor, the Manitou Island light station, 23 miles away. Rather than risk a perilous, nearly 50-mile small boat ride to Marquette, station keepers relied upon biweekly visits by tugs and cutters to refresh provisions like food and fuel and to sustain contact with the outside world. Stannard Rock light was normally re-supplied by a tug out of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and occasionally, if the tug was unavailable, WOODRUSH filled in.

One such occasion brought Gil and WOODRUSH to the upper entry of the Keweenaw waterway to take aboard supplies for the 24-hour round trip to service the Rock of Ages, Passage Island, Manitou, Stannard Rock and Huron Island light stations. The would-be routine supply run turned out to be one Gil's most memorable experiences.

As WOODRUSH readied to get under way, the officer in charge at the Houghton station casually asked Gil to send in WOODRUSH's electronic technician at Stannard Rock.

"They've got some trouble with their radio," said the bosun. "We haven't heard from them."

Gil jotted a note for himself, and WOODRUSH headed for its first stop at Rock of Ages, near Isle Royale. On a normal trip, WOODRUSH would reach Manitou Island around midnight before making the run to Stannard Rock. Gil went below to catch some sleep during the two-hour trip between stations when the ship's executive officer awakened him.

The crowded pilothouse of WOODRUSH was unusually quiet when Gil stepped inside.



Among Gil Porter's early assignments was on CASTLE ROCK stationed in the North Atlantic.

GIL PORTER COLLECTION

WOODRUSH was where it was supposed to be, but no one could see the lighthouse – the Stannard Rock beacon was dark.

The crew members strained their eyes against the darkness to see into the distance. Obviously something isn't right, Gil thought. He ordered the executive officer to take the ship's launch to the lighthouse to determine the problem.

Tension in the pilothouse was palpable as the crew waited for the launch to report back.

"Dammit!" came the executive officer's excited exclamation into the radio. "We've got big troubles. They've had an explosion."

Smoke was billowing out of the top of the lighthouse and charred debris littered the basin. During the next several hours, WOODRUSH rescued the two survivors of the blast, removing them by Stokes litter and getting underway as quickly as possible for the Lower Entry of the Portage Lake Ship Canal to transfer the victims to a waiting ambulance.

"The engineer was missing," said Gil. "We never found him."

Later that morning, WOODRUSH returned to Stannard Rock to put out the fire and install a temporary battery-powered light. Gil speculates that the engineer was filling his day tank when fuel overflowed

into the caisson beneath the manhole on the lighthouse apron.

"Either an automatic pump or something started and provided a spark and blew."

As for what happened to the rest of the light station crew, Gil described the event like this:

"They were sitting in the mess room. There are spiral staircases for different levels, and one man happened to be facing the door as it came up, so he got the full blast; he was burned badly. The other man was sort of sheltered, and the blast went by him so he had only minor burns."

The explosion blew the roof off the generator house, while the inside of the lighthouse became an inferno fueled by a large supply of coal abandoned years before in the station's old fuel bunker. The two men managed to get outside, taking shelter beneath a tarpaulin while the fire burned inside. Gil shakes his head when he thinks about the severely burned man laying exposed to the elements on the concrete apron.

"It's a wonder he survived at all."

The surviving crew of the light station would spend a harrowing 52 hours on the lighthouse before rescue.

#### *Life after the Coast Guard*

While stationed in San Francisco, Gil began thinking of a life beyond

the Coast Guard. After 24 years, it was simply time to put down roots. The only real question was how to do that while staying connected to the sea, the life he thoroughly loved.

A chance visit to the home of a local harbor pilot on sunny afternoon in Eureka, California, rekindled Gil's interest in piloting. Several years earlier, working in the Captain of the Port's office in Philadelphia, Gil befriended a number of harbor pilots on the Delaware River. He had often thought that piloting might be a good way to make a living, while enabling him to spend more time at home. That afternoon, from his vantage point nestled in the hillside, Gil could see all of Eureka Harbor beneath him. Down the long brass barrel of a gleaming telescope Gil swept the deck of a foreign freighter moving gracefully through the harbor. He gazed intently, seeing not only the ship below, but, quite possibly, his future beyond.

Tony Rico, president of Upper Great Lakes Pilot's Association, had already contacted Gil, enticing him to join the organization when his career with the Coast Guard was completed. The timing for Gil could not have been better, but before he could legally become a pilot, he would need to obtain his master's license.

Ironically, although his work on the buoy tenders qualified him for the tonnage necessary to hold a master's license, the Coast Guard never required an officer to be licensed to command a vessel. Gil had to go back to school basically to "learn" what he already knew. While still in the service, he began taking classes and lectures at a maritime "cram school" in the evenings or during the day when he could get away from his job. While he estimates that it took twice as long, Gil obtained his master's license and made the move toward his second career as a pilot on the Great Lakes. On November 1, 1965, officially Gil retired from the Coast Guard, concluding his career as Captain of the Port in San Francisco.

Pilotage on the Great Lakes is regulated by the federal government.

"All mates on Great Lakes ships hold pilotage. There's only two



Gil Porter served two dozen years in the U.S. Coast Guard before becoming a Great Lakes pilot.

Dr. Porter Collection

licenses. There's a first-class pilot, which qualifies you as a Third Mate, Second Mate or a Chief Mate, then upgrade to Great Lakes Master. You need that to be skipper, but then for the "salties" (an ocean vessel), you had to become not only a licensed Great Lakes pilot, but a 'registered' pilot."

The first step for Gil was to get his pilotage license for the lakes and rivers, which required a minimum number of actual trips plus a written exam.

"My district, District 3, was Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Superior and the St. Marys River. I had to get pilotage for the three lakes and the St. Marys River. They put you on the trans-lake first, and when you get to the river, you'd take a river pilot aboard until you got the number of trips you needed for that, over and above the basics."

By the summer of 1966, Gil had completed all of his license requirements, enabling him to work on his own as a pilot.

"It was completely different, and it was a challenge. I believe I was the first Coast Guard 'retired' that came piloting, certainly up in our district anyway."

In comparison, most in Gil's new peer group had accumulated hundreds of years of experience on the Great Lakes.

"There were a lot of very experienced skippers who came from Midland (Midland Steamship Line) that had folded and those who came

from some of the other fleets that had folded, and so they were really very, very capable people as good ship handlers. I was really busting my tail to keep up."

Gil's recent experience with the navigation school brought additional opportunity to fill the off-season shortly after he moved back to Duluth. In 1966, at the request of the Lake Carriers' Association, Gil started a winter school at Duluth for mates. The Lake Carriers' had operated a school for engineers and mates in Duluth, but in the early 1960s, there was no school at Duluth. Gil recruited Jack Saunders to help run the school. Jack's father was a skipper with Interlake Steamship Company, and so it was natural that he and his brother would also sail on the lakes.

The mates and masters school ran successfully for 15 years before it was again closed down. Gil got to know many of the men who would have long careers as mates and captains on the lakes. Among alumni of the mates school are Ed Coppens, former captain of STEWART J. CORT; Fred Cummings, who went on to a long career with U.S. Steel's Great Lakes Fleet; and Mitch Hallin, former captain of PAUL R. TREGURTHA, the largest ship on the Great Lakes.

As a pilot, a typical down bound (off Lake Superior) trip for Gil would begin with a ride out to the salt-water vessel from the pilot boat at Buoy 45, just below Gros Cap in Whitefish Bay. The Gros Cap pilot boat was a fishing tug operating out of the Ojibway Indian reservation at Brimley. It was a larger boat than those that carried pilots at DeTour, but it was also a riskier, open lake boarding as well.

Getting aboard a moving vessel usually meant climbing the Jacob's ladder up the side of the ship's hull. A ship with ballast water pumped out could easily mean a long climb up of 30 to 40 feet above the water. In heavy seas, stormy weather or at night a slip could be fatal. In fact, the vacancy in District 3 that gave Gil his opportunity to join the pilot's association came about when a pilot drowned after falling from a ship's ladder at Gros Cap.

After a pilot boards, the first stop is the Soo Locks, which requires a ship to provide line handlers on the dock as the vessel transits the locks.

Gil explains how the pilot works with the captain of the ship to make sure the trip is uneventful: "The captain on the ship has his responsibilities in the pilot and captain team. He has the responsibilities for all of his crew's activities, handling of the lines and cables and this sort of thing and doing what they've been told. Landing crew on the lock walls is a new experience for them, where they have to swing them out on the landing boom."

Beyond the Soo is the St. Marys River, where a pilot earns his money.

"For every turn in the river, you've got your marks, so that you know when you've got to start your turn. It isn't like a small motor boat. You have to anticipate way ahead and start your turns. ... When this range is up, or this buoy with this fixed aid or something, then you better get her going, better start her turning and every move, every turn in the river is accompanied by your marks. Something the size of the WOODRUSH can turn around in the channel, for goodness sakes, but you get something six, seven hundred feet long ..."

The course direction from the Soo would either head a vessel south down Lake Huron, or west towards the Straits of Mackinaw and into Lake Michigan. In the early days, while Gil was still working on his special certifications, the river pilot would get off at DeTour, at the bottom of the St. Marys River. The pilot boat LINDA JEAN, an old fish tug, was a fixture for years at DeTour.

One assignment that came early in Gil's career was his selection to pilot the first Russian vessel allowed above Port Huron.

"I really don't know why," Gil wondered out loud. "Tony picked me to go down specifically to take this fellow from Port Huron to Kenosha. I don't know whether he figured maybe a little diplomacy possibly, I don't know."

Gil remembers the difficulty he had in trying to communicate with the ship's captain, a man who did not speak any English. Relying upon his piloting experience on other vessels, Gil sketched out the maneuvering needed to bring the boat into the harbor at Kenosha. In the end, it was rudimentary and simple.

"I drew pictures, and it worked well."

On another run, in October 1969, Gil took the Greek freighter SALAMIS outbound from Duluth with a load of grain. Before the first day was over Gil knew this was not going to be the usual trip across the lakes, but little did he know how many twists and turns it would eventually take! Just past the Keweenaw Peninsula, a little over 12 hours from Duluth, something went wrong with the ship's engine.

"We went into Bete Grise Bay to give their engineers a chance, and they had to tear down this big Docksford engine. Something was wrong with the bearings and the crosshead, or something."

Twenty-four hours later, they got underway again to test the repair, but

it wasn't satisfactory to the chief engineer. Rather than head back to the shipyard at Superior, or north to the one at Thunder Bay, the ship's owners and agent figured that they could pull into Marquette and make repairs there, with the assistance of a machine shop at the Brownstone Mine, near Negaunee.

Gil brought SALAMIS to anchor in Marquette's lower harbor – quite possibly the first ocean vessel ever to stop at Marquette, or certainly one of the very few. It took some ingenuity and teamwork for the engineers and crew to dismantle the engine, lift the piece through the engine room skylight, swing it onto a waiting fish tug, ferry it to the dock, lift it onto a flat bed truck, and haul it to the Brownstone Mine. By this time, Gil had moved into a hotel room and was temporarily acting as the liaison between the shipping agent and the vessel owner. Gil rode up to the mine with the piece of machinery, as much out of curiosity and a lack of anything else to do.

The entire process took about a week. A representative from the



WOODRUSH took the C.D. SECORD in tow to safe anchorage in Bete Gris behind the Keweenaw Peninsula during trouble in 1961.

GIL PORTER COLLECTION

shipping company eventually arrived from London to supervise the repair. He arrived at the end of the week, just as the piece was being reassembled in the engine room. Gil remembers the man being skeptical about the repair because of the foundry's limited machining capability.

"Let's take it out and try it, but boy, it's doubtful," he said. True enough, the second sea trial proved that the piece was not yet honed smoothly enough, so the ship returned to Marquette. Once again, the engine was dismantled, but this time the piece was sent by truck to the Nordberg Diesel factory in Milwaukee. Gil eventually moved on to another assignment, leaving SALAMIS quietly at anchor in Marquette harbor, while the clerks at the Upper Great Lakes Pilot's Association in Duluth generated one of the company's largest invoices.

A number of years later Gil would more than make up for the slow trip on SALAMIS by taking part in the fastest known cargo trip across Lake Superior.

AFRICAN DAWN was a C-4 cargo vessel built by Ingalls Shipbuilding at Pascagoula, Mississippi. Sailing for the U.S.-flagged Farrell Lines, the vessel was up bound on Lake Superior heading towards Duluth, following behind the speedster of Great Lakes freighters, CLIFFS VICTORY, known for running at speeds up to 23 miles per hour while most ships on the lakes did 12 to 15. A typical trip across Lake Superior would take 24 hours, from Gros Cap light to Duluth. If pushed, CLIFFS VICTORY could make it in 16 hours.

"I caught up with the CLIFFS VICTORY off of Stannard Rock," recalls Gil, "and went by him like he was standing still; 27 miles per hour."

As the relatively "new guy" on the block, Gil sometimes came out on the short end of the assignments when veteran pilots dumped jobs that they didn't really want to take. Unusual as it may seem, there are ports and docks where ships usually don't go, and in particular, foreign ships. As Gil would soon find out, taking a ship into an

unfamiliar port or dock easily fell into this category of "jobs declined" when both the port and the dock proved to be the one at Michipicoten, Ontario.

Gil was piloting the Italian vessel WEST RIVER, up bound from Chicago. As WEST RIVER passed eastward beneath the Mackinac Bridge, Gil checked in with the dispatcher at DeTour to update his progress, as it was customary to be relieved by another pilot at DeTour. Gil was more than a little surprised to hear that no one was available and that he would have to continue with the ship up the river and take the

## To the best of Gil's knowledge, no salt-water ship has ever gone back to Michipicoten.

vessel into Michipicoten on his own.

Michipicoten itself is a relatively well protected harbor, except when the wind blows from the southwest. The harbor is tucked neatly in a corner of Lake Superior where the rugged, rock-strewn shoreline takes a 90-degree bend as it heads south toward the Canadian Sault. Even today, land access to the harbor is obtained only after traversing a long and twisting dirt road leading out from the edge of Wawa. A traveler is more likely to encounter a moose along the roadway than a human at any given time of day.

As he headed his ship up the St. Marys River past DeTour, Gil wondered at the sudden lack of available pilots to relieve him.

At the time of Gil's trip there, the Algoma Central Railway owned the dock at Michipicoten. It was seldom used by lakers, let alone salt-water vessels. As far as anyone could recall, the only ocean vessel to stop at Michipicoten had been a small German ship that unloaded machinery for Algoma Central's mining operation at Hawk Junction in the 1950s.

When WEST RIVER arrived at the Soo Locks, Gil was able to get his hands on a chart of Michipicoten harbor, as well as talk to Algoma's agent at the Canadian Sault, who reported to Gil that it was "flat calm up there" at Michipicoten.

"Well, it's blowing like hell here," Gil recalled telling the agent. "We'll have to see what it looks like in the morning when I get there."

Morning brought Gil's worst fears to reality. A fierce southwest wind had Lake Superior rolling directly into, and over, the dock at Michipicoten. Gil turned WEST RIVER toward the lee of Michipicoten Island, spending the next 24 hours jogging back and forward in the protection of the island until the wind died down. The next morning Gil headed WEST RIVER back toward Michipicoten harbor where they were finally able to get the vessel tied up to the dock.

Consigned to WEST RIVER at Michipicoten was a small cargo of mining tailings. The tailings, when viewed from the deck of the ship, seemed hardly worth the effort it would take to load them. Gil recalls having other doubts too as he watched the loading rig being inched up to the side of the vessel.

"They had literally, like a Briggs and Stratton, a conveyor with wire wheels and, golly," laughed Gil, "that damned thing wouldn't even come up to the gunwale."

It soon became apparent that the equipment on hand at the dock might not be adequate to do the job. The loading proved to be troublesome, beginning a weeklong adventure.

The first problem to solve was to determine whether it was worth the effort that it was going to take to load the cargo. Gil found a small store with a pay phone and, acting as an interpreter for the ship's Italian speaking captain, he contacted the ship's agent in London. Gil verified that the cargo was to be loaded. "We don't care what it takes," was the reply.

"Just stay there and get it."

Gil and the Italian captain returned doggedly to the ship.

The "getting" did not prove to be easy. The store owner – who turned out to be the local customs agent and immigration officer as well as the former head of the local chamber of commerce – secured use of a flatbed trailer to extend the reach of the shoreside conveyor. For his part, the captain created a list, or a tilt, in the vessel by heavily ballasting the port side to accommodate the short reach of the conveyor. The severe angle of the ship made it possible to load the cargo, but also made it impossible to trim the load. Once again, the store owner was called. This time he leased a bulldozer from the Ontario Highway Department. After some difficulty in getting the piece of

machinery into the cargo hold, the crew managed to spread the cargo of tailings evenly.

"It ended up in one hold, about eight feet deep, and that was the whole cargo."

Some time later Gil learned that the cargo of mining slag was rich in gold, silver and other trace minerals, proving to be a rather valuable cargo after all.

To the best of Gil's knowledge, no salt-water ship has ever gone back to Michipicoten.

From 1965 until 1977, Gil logged roughly 1,400 different assignments, ranging from harbor moves, to river runs or cross-lake transits. Working with crews and captains from all over the world required great communication skills, patience, diplomacy and, in some

cases, all of the above. Remarkably, in all those years, only one skipper questioned Gil's knowledge and experience. Characteristically, Gil did not take it personally. "Anything to do with the USA he didn't like anyway. He was one of those."

Gil's life, like the compass rose that guides the mariner, has taken him in many directions, helping him to steer a true course in all that he has done.

As an esteemed member of the Twin Ports maritime community and a member of the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association, Gil lives a (relatively) quiet life in the Duluth. He operates a small compass repair and adjustment business and these days most enjoys frequent meetings with friends and old colleagues.