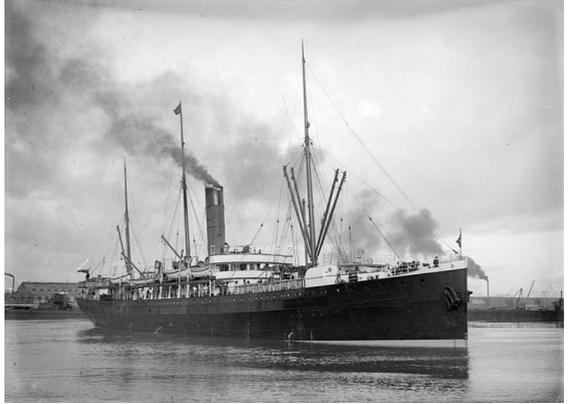


Serendipity

The passenger steamer *SS Warrimoo* was quietly knifing its way through the waters of the mid-Pacific on its way from Vancouver to Australia. The navigator had just finished working out a star fix and brought the master, Captain John Phillips, the result. The *Warrimoo's* position was latitude $0^{\circ} 31' N$ and longitude $179^{\circ} 30' W$. The date was December 31st 1899.



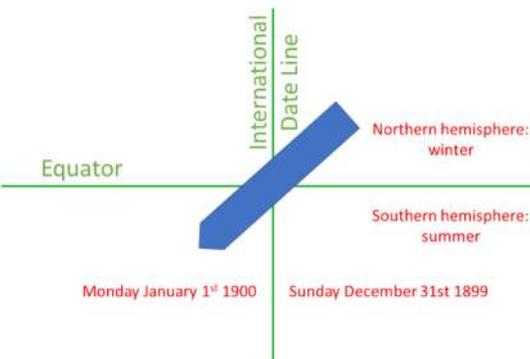
“Know what this means?”, First Mate Payton broke in, “We’re only a few miles from the intersection of the Equator and the International Date Line.”

Captain Phillips was prankish enough to take full advantage of the opportunity for achieving the navigational freak of a lifetime. He called his navigators to the bridge to check and double check the ship’s position. He changed course slightly so as to bear directly on his mark. Then he adjusted the engine speed. The calm weather and clear night worked in his favour.

At midnight the *SS Warrimoo* lay on the Equator at exactly the point where it crossed the International Date Line! The consequences of this bizarre position were as follows:

- The bow of the ship was in the Southern Hemisphere and in the middle of summer.
- The stern was in the Northern Hemisphere and in the middle of winter.
- The date in the aft part of the ship was December 31st 1899.
- In the forward part it was January 1st 1900.

This ship was therefore not only in two different days, two different months, two different years and two different seasons, but it was also in two different centuries—all at the same time!



My cousin lives in the small town of Warrimoo, New South Wales. I was quite surprised to see this name in a totally different context, in this (true) account.

The marvels and mysteries of the International Date Line are explored in the short story 'What day is it?'. Go to the Bosham Life website (www.boshamlife.co.uk), click on 'Downloads' and look for it under 'Science Spot'.

Mike Whittle