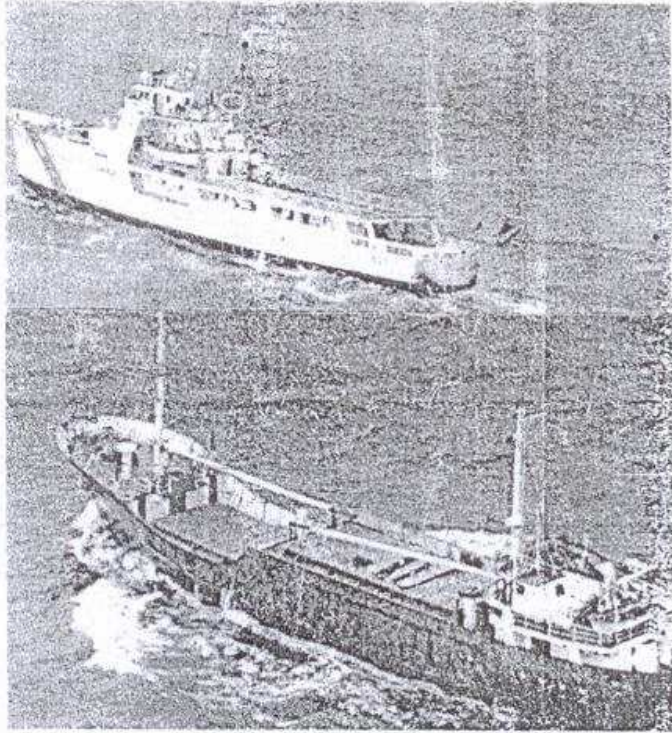


## The Hetty diary



Whopping haul. US Coast Guard cutter *Vigorous* escorting *Hetty* to New Jersey

Feb 4, 1983. James Howard joins *Hetty*. Ship clears Port Said for Kelang, Malaysia with a cargo of 14.75 tonnes of explosives loaded in Bilbao, Spain. Feb 21. *Hetty* arrives in Cochin.

Feb 28. Customs, under the command of Additional Collector Venugopalan rummage the ship.

March 23. *Hetty* unloads explosives in Kelang.

March 24. In Singapore. Richard Murkley represents Primrose Investments, the owners.

June 10. The name of the ship is changed from *Hetty Mitchell* to *Hetty*. *Hetty* sails from Singapore for Surabaya in Indonesia to load timber.

June 14. *Hetty* again enters Port of Singapore and leaves. But the agent is not contacted.

Aug 14. *Hetty* leaves Surabaya for the United States with a load of timber.

Nov 1. US Coast Guard seizes *Hetty* 110 km off the coast of New Jersey after the vessel tries to evade Coast Guard cutter *Vigorous*. Search reveals 25 tonnes of hashish.

*Hetty's* log book shows that on her voyage from Indonesia to the USA she deviated from the normal route and came within 60 miles of Cochin, in response to a radio message. *Sunday Times* suspects it was here that hashish was loaded.

There is another interesting piece of information from the files of the high commission. Jim received \$ 20,000 and £ 3,000 between 14.1.83 and 25.2.83 from London and Hongkong (over Rs 7.5 lakh). From where did he receive the money? For what purpose did he use it? Did any government agency keep track of the fund flow to foreign tourists?

—MF, RP

There has never been a scratch on my camera. Idi Amin jailed me, so did the Algerians. I had a close brush with death in Vietnam.

The man in black shirt spoke at length of his life and career. Although his passport showed that he was 60, he told us he was only 50. His father was a real estate businessman near Perth in Australia. Jim's two brothers died in war. Married twice, he has three sons. At the age of 19 he joined the army and served in Korea as an army doctor. The camera made him leave the stethoscope.

He made a lot of money and wanted to retire from journalism. In the 60s and 70s the profession was more challenging, he said. "I want to do some business from Cochin. I like this place. I am planning a book on Cochin. Also plywood export. But the customs are harassing me..."

What has the Australian High Commission got to say about Jim? Here is the exact quote from a secret document: police liaison file 70/1/1:

SUBJECT JAMES CHARLES HOWARD WAS SUBJECT OF ENQUIRY FROM DRI TO AUSTRALIA THROUGH INTERPOL CHANNEL. AUSTRALIA RESPONDED THROUGH INTERPOL. REF IP/5375/83. SUBJECT APPARENTLY HAS 17 CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS IN AUSTRALIA. ACCORDING TO DRI SUBJECT HAS DUAL NATIONALITY: AUS/BRITISH.

A vessel is seized off New Jersey by the US Coast Guard with Rs 250 crore worth of hashish. A couple in Australia read the news in a local paper.

The telephone at Lt Commander Booth's office in New York rings.

"US Coast Guards".

"This is Brian Milgate from Australia. We read about the drug seizure in *Western Mail*. I have a lot more to tell you about *Hetty*".

That was the crucial step in the unfolding of the mystery behind *Hetty* which had touched Cochin in March with a load of 'explosives'. No longer were Brian Milgate and his girlfriend Alison called—mad. The strange things they alleged came true when US Coast Guard cutter *Vigorous* intercepted *Hetty* on November 1.

Under logs of timber loaded from Sorabaya in Indonesia there were hashish bricks—29,300 of them, weighing 15 tonnes. *Western Mail* which broke the news in Australia put the price at \$ 250 million.

Brian Milgate was invited to New York as an honoured guest of the Washington Drug Enforcement Authority to give more details of the drug racket. He was also financed to visit Cochin for further investigation.

What is Brian's story?

Brian, a Sydney yachtsman and naval architect arrived in Cochin on January 6 last year with his girlfriend Alison McGuinness. Alison had met Brian in Darwin in Australia a year earlier and joined him in his yacht, *Tiger Rag*. They sailed through the Indonesian Islands and halted at Singapore for a few weeks, where they met other yachts sailing to Cochin.

The travel plans of the couple was 'work and sail'. Halt at various ports, work for a while and then sail again. Singapore did not give them such opportunities. So they moved on to the Malaysian coast, where they rented out their yacht and made money. They returned to Singapore, bought provisions and sailed to Galle, Sri Lanka in October. It was on January 6 that they arrived in Cochin. They hoped to get their damaged rudder repaired at Cochin.

It was then that they met James Howard, who introduced himself as a retired businessman. Howard appeared wealthy and wanted Brian to supervise the work of *Steppenwolf* being done at a private boatyard in Cochin. Since Brian himself was on the look-out for a job, he welcomed the offer. He could save some money and get his yacht also repaired, he thought.

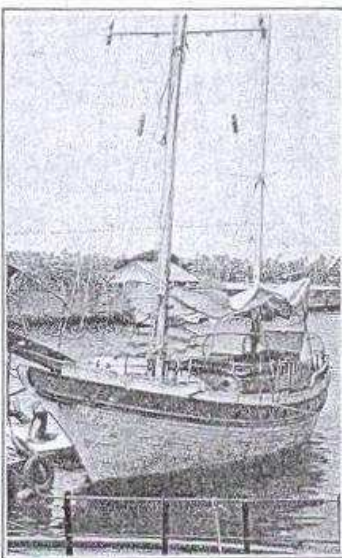
Through Jim, Brian got acquainted with Jyl Gocher, Jim's girl, a self-styled freelance photographer. Many more foreigners came to Cochin on yachts and most of them landed at the same boatyard where *Steppenwolf* was, for repairs. They knew Jim. There was something fishy about the movements of these vessels and the men on board, Brian felt.

Jim used to make frequent trips abroad from Cochin while his yacht was being repaired under Brian's supervision. Meanwhile, something else happened. On March 21, a ship named *Hetty Mitchell* with 14.75 tonnes of explosives made an unscheduled call at Cochin on the pretext of engine repairs. But Brian had observed the vessel coming in at full speed without the aid of any other vessel.

On March 28, a customs team searched *Hetty Mitchell*. Jim Howard was aboard the vessel and he explained his presence as a supernumerary representing Zenith Enterprises, London,

which intended to purchase the vessel. But the customs found him in possession of Rs 5,900 after the vessel had taken clearance for a foreign port. This being an offence, the money was confiscated and Jim was fined Rs 5,000. The customs officials also found that gasoil was being loaded onto *Hetty Mitchell* from a fishing boat. 2,400 litres had already been taken in and 11,600 litres were to be loaded. Since the agents had not filed shipping bills, Rs 15,000 as redemption fine was imposed on *Hetty Mitchell*. Again, the explosives were not declared properly and a fine of Rs 10,000 was imposed on the owners of *Hetty*. Harrison and Crossfield, *Hetty's* agent in Cochin, was fined Rs 10,000 for various omissions and commissions. The captain Stanley Frederick was fined Rs 1,500. Jyl gocher who was aboard Jim's vessel *Steppenwolf* which was by the side of *Hetty* at that time was fined Rs 2,500 and

**Brian's allegation was that in the hollow compartments of *Steppenwolf* and its fuel tank there was hashish. All said and done, the customs men could not get any evidence to pin down Jim and Jyl—so they said.**



Brian's target. *Steppenwolf*

the currency that she had, Rs 6,400, was seized.

The seizure and fine amounted to over Rs 56,000. (Jim now claims he won an appeal against the customs, but he is yet to get the refund.)

*Hetty* left after the fine was paid. But the question whether the customs raid was a routine check or after a tip-off from somewhere remained unanswered. The keen interest that Additional Collector of Customs M G Venugopalan took in the matter showed it was no routine check. "The captain telling us that the explosives would burst if light falls on it made me wonder if it was only an explanation to ward off a thorough check of the vessel", Venugopalan later said.

"Was it really explosives in the vessel?"

"That we checked with Kelang. The stuff was explosives meant for that port".

Venugopalan did not clarify if the captain's threat that the whole of Cochin will go up in flames if torch light fell on the cargo deterred the customs from a thorough probe.

Though *Hetty* was let off, the doubts remained. Jim's troubles, however, had just begun. The customs seized some deep-diving equipment from Jim which was supposedly to be used for luxury trips. But according to customs, it was for some other purpose. The dark room arrangements in Jim's Bolghatty Palace Hotel room, the sophisticated electronic equipment, the communication devices, micro computers, and evidences of prints being taken—all these made the customs think again about the ace photo-journalist's long stay in Cochin. He has been around the place since September 1982. Venugopalan told THE WEEK as early as March-April 1983 that he was checking on Jim's background through Interpol.

Meanwhile, Brian Milgate had begun to 'work' for the customs. The customs even gave him Rs 500 to keep an eye on Jim. Raids on *Steppenwolf*, Jim's vessel, followed. Brian's allegation was that in the hollow compartments of *Steppenwolf* and its fuel tank there was a lot of hashish. All said and done, the customs-men could not get any evidence to pin down Jim and Jyl—so they said.

Meanwhile, when Jim was away, Brian and Alison managed to wean away Jyl for a while from the hotel. They put her up in a women's hostel in Ernakulam and, later took her to their yacht. "Our idea was to make her confess", Brian said. "We promised her that we would

The police, the customs and the local press too thought that Brian had gone soft in the head...Jim sued *Express*. So far no case has been filed against the *Western Mail*.



JOY PULIMOOD

Girls in the story. Jyl and Alison

help her to have a new life if she told us the truth. But evidently Jim had kept her in the dark and she could not say much."

According to Brian, Jyl was scared of Jim. However, when Jim tracked her down to the boatyard where Brian's yacht *Tiger Rag* was being repaired, she immediately went back with him. By then, the relationship between Jim and Brian had soured. One day in front of the biggest hotel in Cochin on Shanmughom Road, there was a row between the two men. Jim accused Brian of cheating him financially. Brian was detained in jail for three days. Later without stating any reason, the police let him go.

According to Brian, bizarre things now started happening. One night when Alison was away in Colombo to brief the high commission officials on the drug ring in Cochin, Brian was attacked by three men while he was on *Tiger Rag*. But he managed to fend them off. Later, when he was on a trip to Madras to inform the customs bosses about the happenings in Cochin, he was attacked again. Someone tried to shoot him, he said.

The customs, however, had given up their hope of trapping the photo-journalist. Asked about the progress of the investigations, Collector Venugopalan told THE WEEK: "It is like looking at the sun. You watch the sun for a long time and you become blind. Brian has been telling us that *Steppenwolf* is full of hashish. We rummaged it twice. We

could not find anything. There may be circumstantial evidence against Jim. But unless we seize a bit of the stuff from him, we can't do anything."

But why did the customs let go their investigation all of a sudden, Brian kept asking. By now he was a shattered man. He went to the Cochin office of the *Indian Express* to tell his tale of sorrow. Here is a man trying to expose the biggest racket in Cochin and people are dismissing him as mad. The police, the customs, and the local press too thought that Brian Milgate had gone soft in the head.

The *Indian Express* came out with Brian's version of the story without mentioning Howard by name. But saying that he was easily identifiable in the story, Jim filed a libel suit against the newspaper. Brian and his girlfriend were also dragged into it. Knowing that he was likely to be arrested to block his escape to Australia, Brian tried to get some people to stand surety for him. But no one was willing. Even the "professional" sureties backed out. The couple then took a tough decision. They abandoned *Tiger Rag* in Cochin and just disappeared.

Back in Australia, they tried to get police help against the alleged smugglers. In Australia too none believed him till Hetty was caught with hashish on November 1.

The hashish haul off New Jersey which the US and Australian papers estimated at \$ 250 million, probably the second biggest catch in the world, alerted

the *Sunday Times*, London. Its feature editor Barry Penrose flew down to Cochin to interview Jim.

"Like all the big fish caught, he blamed the crew," Penrose told THE WEEK after the interview. Penrose showed Jim some of the papers he had collected about him. It included an inward cablegram sent by Australian High Commission in New Delhi to Canberra which mentioned Jim's 17 criminal convictions in Australia. Jim's reaction, according to Penrose, was a query: "How did they arrive at this figure 17?"

Jim, however, admitted to Penrose that he was jailed once in Australia when his cheque bounced. Penrose asked him about the South African government extraditing him. "Yes, it was because I published pictures of the atrocities committed by them."

There were contradictions in his statements. According to newspapers, Jim now denied that he had anything to do with Hetty. But to the customs he had said that he got nearly a lakh of rupees from Primrose Investments to look after Hetty's interests in Cochin. He bought fuel for Hetty. He has given in writing that he represents Zenith Enterprise, London. But he told Penrose that he did not know Zenith.

Jim sued the *Indian Express*. The Australian paper *Western Mail* then came out with a story with allegations of smuggling, espionage and murderous intentions against him. (Brian claims to have witnessed Jim clicking pictures of Russian ships arriving in Cochin.) That the *Western Mail* had flashed the news was told to him by Penrose. So far, no case has been filed against the *Western Mail*.

According to Penrose, the *Sunday Times* team in Singapore, Australia, Washington and New York have collected a mass of material to defend the paper against any threat of defamation. His interview with Jim at Cochin was taperecorded and the statements like the one that it is not a difficult job for Jim to get anyone bumped off are stored for future use. He told Penrose that he had saved some mercenaries from death and if they knew that someone had hurt him, it would be difficult for Jim himself to stop them from killing that person...

The Queen of Arabian sea, Cochin, sleeps blissfully oblivious of the weird happenings around her. So also the law and order authorities.

—MAXWELL FERNANDEZ,  
R PRASANNAN