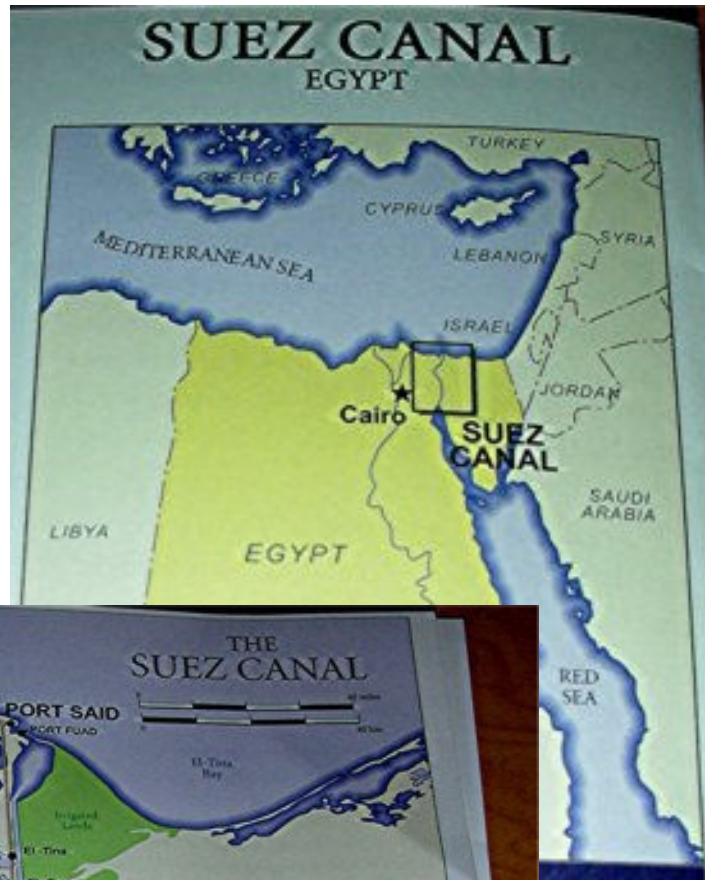


4/3/07 Day 78 – Suez Canal -  
Tuesday, 3 April, 2007: At  
daybreak the Amsterdam was  
gathered with many other ships at  
the southern entrance to the Suez  
Canal. Here is where we were  
located on the map.



We continued to have good weather so that it was pleasant to walk around the deck and check out the passing scene as we traveled along the Suez Canal at about 10 miles an hour.

Here are some factoids about the Suez Canal that provide some background.

1. The canal is 101 miles long and connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea,
2. Average transit time is 15 hours, although the Amsterdam did it in about 10 hours
3. The canal has no locks because the entire length is at sea level,
4. Ships with up to 150,000 tons displacement and 50 feet or less draft may use the canal,
5. Egypt charges for use of the canal and the average charge is \$205,600 USD per ship,
6. About 20,000 ships pass through the canal each year (about 14 percent of world shipping,
7. Giuseppe Verdi's opera Aida was written to commemorate the opening of the Suez Canal,
8. The Suez Canal opened for business in November 1869 after 11 years of construction,
9. The Frenchman, Vicomte Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps, drove the project to completion,
10. The canal was closed in 1967 by ships sunk during the 6 Day Israel - Egypt War,
11. The canal reopened in June 1975 under the control of Egypt,
12. The canal is too narrow for cargo ships to pass so traffic is one-way,
13. Ships gather at the north and south entrance and start through as convoys that either pass each other in the Great Bitter Lake or moor in side channels until the opposing convoy passes.
14. About 50 ships make the single file journey each day,
15. The Suez Canal separates the Sinai Peninsula from the rest of Egypt and marks the division between Africa and Asia.

These following photos were taken at the entrance to the Suez Canal where ships had gathered prior to forming a convoy for the transit.



Soon after daybreak the Amsterdam entered the Canal at the southern end city of Suez.



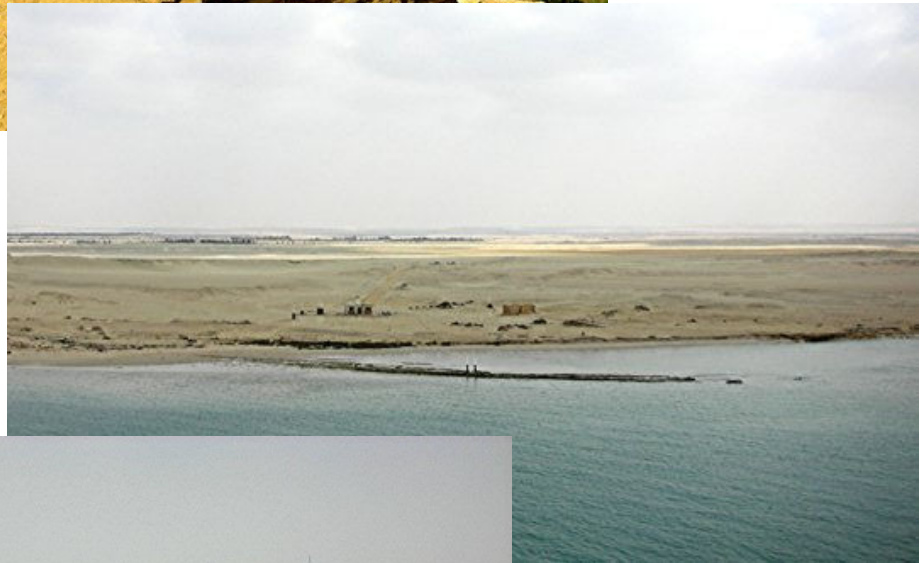
We soon noticed that nearly all the commerce, population and infrastructure were on the west side of the canal. On the east side there was usually just desert. Here is a typical photo of the west side with Barbara showing that her Oak Ridge Library Card has made an appearance in Egypt at the Suez Canal.





Another view of the west side of the Canal showing a town and a sentry guarding the Canal.

Here, on the right, is a typical view of the east side of the canal.



About every mile there were Egyptian military sentries posted on both sides of the canal. This camp was on the eastern side.



This guard station was on the eastern side.

The view on the west side of the canal was usually a lush farm or city scene like in these three photos.





When we passed towns or groups of workers on the shore we would often hear a shrill whistle. We assumed that the people were just giving a characteristic Egyptian greeting when they saw the passengers on the deck of the Amsterdam. Normally there would be no people visible on the decks of the cargo ships that people are used to seeing in the Suez Canal.

When we reached the Great Bitter Lake, about one third of the way through the canal, we could see that the southbound convoy had arrived and about ten ships were visible. They were not moving and appeared to be just drifting and waiting for us to pass.



Ferry boats provide a means for vehicles and people to cross the canal at several points along the way.

There is one bridge over the Canal. It is located near the northern end of the canal at El Qantara and it is high enough that large ships can pass under.



Suez

so



Several irrigation canals coming from the Nile pass under the Suez Canal by a siphon tunnel. Here is one example of a canal on the west side leading to the gate for the tunnel that directs the fresh water under the Suez Canal that is filled with salt water. This facility is near the northern end of the Suez Canal. The irrigation canal proceeds eastward to farmland in the Sinai Peninsula on the other side of the Suez Canal.

A railroad line runs between towns on the west side of the Suez Canal. In this picture a southbound train is on the tracks that run parallel to the canal.



We noticed some conical shaped structures on the west shore from time to time and later found out they are pigeon houses. An interesting hobby of many Egyptians is to have a flock of pigeons that they keep in the houses we saw. They train the pigeons to fly in groups that obey commands given by a whistle from the owner. Of course, some of them also eat pigeons on special occasions. Here are a couple pictures of the pigeon houses.

The pigeon houses in this



picture are the white conical structures in the background near the middle of the picture. There are holes in the walls of the houses so the pigeons can come and go at will.

Here on the left are four more of the large pigeon houses.

At a point near the town of El-Firdan the canal splits into two channels. A southbound convoy of ships had moored in the western channel so that our convoy could pass northward in the eastern channel.





As we passed by there was an interesting visual effect where it appeared that the moored ships were nearly buried in the desert sand. Here are a couple examples.



The weather was so pleasant and everyone was in a festive mood so we had a few friends over for drinks and conversation as the Egyptian countryside passed smoothly by. Here are Jane and Tom with our dinner table mates, Roy and Gayle.



Late in the afternoon the city of Port Said loomed up on the port side and this signaled the end of our Suez Canal transit.



The pilot, who had advised the Captain during passage through the Suez Canal, left the ship at this point and we bid him a fond farewell.

We cruised out into the Mediterranean Sea and headed for Alexandria, Egypt, our next port of call.

