

MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

Newsletter of the Merchant Navy Association and the
Merchant Navy RSL Sub-Branch NSW

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TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA

THE ILL FATED M.V. SOUTH ESK

By Ian Coan (1955 - 2017)



M.V. SOUTH ESK with Derricks

The M.V. SOUTH ESK was named after the South Esk River in Tasmania. The ship was built in Maryborough, Queensland by Walkers Ltd in 1959, for the Australian National Line as a general cargo vessel. She weighed in at 1,616 tons when built, length 80.4m, a beam of 11.4m and a draught of 5.5m. Her engine was a 6 cylinder 2 stroke British polar oil engine, driving a single screw with a speed of 9.5 to 10 knots, more like 7 to 8 knots when I was on her. The engine was built by the NSW State Dockyard in Newcastle.

Between 1960 and 1961 the ship was converted to a unit load vessel and the derricks were replaced with three 15 ton deck cranes. Also the hatch bottoms were fitted with moveable platforms added to allow the cargo to be moved under the hatch wings and her gross tonnage was dropped to 1,318 tons. This work was carried out by Storey and Keers Pty Ltd in Balmain, Sydney.

THE ILL FATED M.V. SOUTH ESK



The ship then went on the Melbourne - Tasmania run for a time, carrying containers, cars and the like. When I was on her in the early 1970's she was running between Port Kembla, Newcastle, Townsville, Cairns and Gove at the top end of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. We always went up through the reef taking about eight days just to get to Townsville from Newcastle, a very slow run indeed but scenic.

She was an interesting ship with a more than interesting crew. The Captain was Dinger Bell an old school skipper, very proper. The Chief mate we called Ack-Ack as he stuttered and when he became exited his stutter became worse, and the Bosun was known as King Rat, all around the coast he was known and appropriately named. The Bucko, well there was a case, when he went ashore in the tropics he always wore this big thick fur coat. He paid off in Townsville or Cairns on my second trip and was never heard of or seen again. One of the Engineers was called Flat Out Fred not because he was fast or went quick, but when he had a couple of drinks under his belt he was flat out on his back and, the list went on.



The SOUTH ESK was known as the largest fishing vessel in the fleet and catch big fish we did as the ship was flat out sailing at trawling speed. The engineers in their wisdom rigged up an old ships log line with a meat hook the chief cook gave them from the galley turning it into a large fish hook. They used some shiny forks and spoons from the chief steward as

THE ILL FATED M.V. SOUTH

spinners or lures on the line. The log line was set up over the aft end of the ship and it also had a horn system rigged to it so when the fish hit the line the horn would go off. And then, it was all hands on deck to bring in the catch of the day on the drum end of the aft mooring winch. Spanish Mackerel, Shark or whatever and, believe it or not, fresh fish was something the ships cooks could actually cook. Yum.



getting a little lumpy

One of the most scariest experiences I have ever had at sea was on this small ship loaded with steel products and top heavy with her three deck cranes. We were hove to somewhere off Gove NT in a category 4 cyclone. All hands were sitting in the mess room with life jackets on, other than the bridge team, and the life boats were broken out ready to go. Let me tell you that was not a lot of fun, even some of the old salty sea dogs looked concerned about the ship's situation, as it was only about a year before that the NOONGAH went down.

In 1972 the ship was laid up in Sydney and in December of that year she was sold off to the Eastern Shipping Line in the Philippines and re-named EASTERN MINICON. In 1980 on a voyage from Hong Kong to Manila the EASTERN MINICON ex-SOUTH ESK was lost in a Typhoon with the loss of all 29 crew. No sign of her or her crew was ever found although her position was given by radio before she disappeared. A shocking loss of seafarers lives and a sad end to a good ship.

NORAH HEAD MERCHANT NAVY MEMORIAL

SERVICE - 2nd December 2017

ADDRESS: by Capt. IAIN STEVERSON F.N.I.



Today, we gather here in this lovely peaceful setting, to remember and acknowledge with thanks the Service and Sacrifices of Seafarers of the Merchant Navy during the two World Wars.

We especially remember two **Australian Merchant Ships** lost close by, here in in our very own backyard, that are remembered by plaques on the memorial.

In the first case it saw the **European War** finally arriving in **Eastern Australian** waters in December 1940.

The North Coast Steam Navigation Company's small motor coaster **NIMBIN** on a grocery voyage from the Richmond River to Sydney struck a mine off Norah Head at 1530 hrs on the 5th of December 1940.

The mine had been laid as part of a group of three rows laid off Norah Head on the night of 28 October 1940, by the German Commerce Raider **PINGUIN** with the intention of sinking shipping, travelling between Sydney and Newcastle.

NIMBIN sank immediately, taking with her the Captain and six crew members. The remaining survivors spent several hours in the water finally being rescued by sister ship **BONALBO**.

The **Pacific War** arrived in **Eastern Australian** waters 75 years ago commencing with the loss of the BHP cargo ship **IRON CHIEFTAIN** on a voyage from Newcastle to Whyalla with a cargo of coke and structural steel for the ships that were being built at BHP's new Whyalla shipbuilding yard.

At 2230 hrs 3 June 1942 **IRON CHIEFTAIN** was torpedoed by the Japanese Submarine I-24 in a position 35 miles east of Manly, sinking quickly with the loss of her Captain and 11 crew members. One of the two lifeboats with 25 survivors, sailing under the direction

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of Second Officer Phil Brady, landed on the beach at the Entrance at 0600 5 June. Captain Brady AM later became BHP's Marine Superintendent.

Australian Merchant Seafarers served on the many Australian registered ships, a number of which were amongst the 24 ships attacked or sunk off the NSW Coast from 1940 to 1944, between the borders of Queensland and Victoria.

Australian Merchant Seafarers served world wide, on British (UK) ships and on ships of many of the Allied nations, including on displaced Merchant ships of a number of nations over run by the Nazi regime.

During this era, Australian ships like those of other British Empire countries were considered to be 'British' ships and were under the overall jurisdiction of the British Admiralty. Britain was able to commandeer any 'British' ship as they wished, and this saw some Australian Merchant ships requisitioned for work outside of local waters. Example of local ships were the two passenger ships **KANIMBLA** commandeered on the wars outbreak, as **HMS KANIMBLA** and Burns Philp's **BULOLO** as **HMS BULOLO** both as Armed Merchant Cruisers. **BULOLO** later served as a Headquarters ship for the D-Day landings.

This 'British' flag arrangement was in force until finally on 26 January 1982, Australia obtained its own Australian Shipping Register.

In total 2,500 British Empire and displaced Foreign ships under Admiralty jurisdiction were sunk with the loss of 37,500 casualties, a fatality rate of 17% which compares unfavourably with that of the British Army of 6%.

Australian Seafarers included in the above figures had a conservative casualty rate of 386 dead, of whom 288 were killed in action with another 37 dying as Prisoners of War. This fortunately low casualty rate reflects, that the Japanese submarine fleet did not press home their advantage, attacking the comparatively small Australian Merchant Fleet, then comprising mainly old coal burning steamers. The Japanese unlike their German partners who relentlessly targeted Merchant shipping turned their attention to Naval shipping as their main targets.

As an '**Island Nation**' then as now we were and are, totally reliant on Merchant ships to transport 98% of this countries import and exports. This especially is important, in the case of the 34million tonnes of oil products imported, such as petrol from overseas sources and of which we currently have at best a 45 day ready reserve.

It was the **Merchant Navy** that turned the war, that carried the troops, that returned the wounded, transported the raw material for the war effort, the oil, the coal, iron ore, limestone for steel making, the end product of steel, the munitions, construction material, newly built aircraft and tanks, urgently required foodstuffs, and countless other tasks that were initially carried in slow poorly defence equipped ships.

Inexplicably, the importance of the Merchant Navy is not appreciated by the general public. Those of us that gather here today, are the exceptions and rightly acknowledge the valiant efforts of Merchant Seafarers.

We owe an enormous debt of Gratitude to those gallant Merchant Seafarers, from both World Wars and in the case of the WW2 veterans are now sadly very thin in their ranks Lest we forget, their Service.

Thank You.

THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

DENIS ASHTON 14/2/2017 RAN WWII

JOHN HUNTER BROWN 10/12/17 WWII US Army Small Ships

RAYMOND ROY YOUNG 13/12/17 WWII US Army Small Ships

Capt. THOMAS MARTIN NORTH 18/12/17

Capt. LYNN FELDMAN 20/12/17

JOHN CARROLL 16/01/18 WWII

Capt. RODNEY (Mac) COATES 29/01/18 WWII

TREVOR JOHNSON 1/02/18

Capt. ARTHUR JOSEPH ROBERTS 21/2/18 WWII

KEITH STIRLING BUTLER 7/03/18 WWII MN & US Army Small Ships

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

COMING EVENTS

ROOKWOOD ANNUAL MN SERVICE: Sunday 8th April, 2018 at 1100 hrs

A.H.S. CENTAUR SERVICE: 113 Memorial Chapel, Concord Hospital Friday 11th May, 2018 at 1030 hrs

U.S. ARMY SMALL SHIPS: Annual Reunion / Service & Luncheon at Grace Hotel Sydney on Sunday 20th May 2018. (Contact - Dan O'Brien Phone: 0411 027 319 E-mail: usassa@hotmail.com)

MERCHANT NAVY REMEMBRANCE SERVICE NEWCASTLE: Saturday 2nd June, 2018 at 1100 hrs.

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH MEETING: Chatswood RSL Club - to be advised.

MERCHANT NAVY ASSOCIATION MEETING: Cabra-Vale Diggers Club, Saturday 24th November 2018 at 1030 hours

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH NEWS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has usually been a quiet period between November and February. This year has been a bit different. All RSL members would be aware that some of our elected and salaried officials at NSW State Branch have either somehow been involved or, at least witnesses, to allegations of corruption, causing an unprecedented upheaval. This came about, initially, with the departure from office of our long-serving State President, Mr Don Rowe. We were originally told that Mr Rowe resigned because of 'ill health'. It transpires that this was not the correct reason. Mr Rowe's membership of the RSL has been cancelled, also his award of Life Membership of the RSL.

Things were so bad at State Branch that the NSW Government intervened and decided an independent enquiry was needed. Hearings of that enquiry headed by a retired NSW Supreme Court Justice. M/s Patricia Bergen, were held in September and October 2017. Her report was presented to the State Government early in February. The report, of some 700 pages, has been widely distributed. Recommendations include Mr Rowe be referred to NSW Police. Almost all former RSL State Council members were either dismissed or 'asked' to resign. This was due, firstly, to allegations that they conspired to conceal the real reason Mr Rowe left. Other allegations against the State Council members were that they received money from RSL Life care and, as 'Board Members,' voted at meeting to increase their own payments. This was described as 'conflict of interest'. A new State President, Mr James Brown, had been elected at State Congress in May last year. He has been extremely busy and has been reporting regularly to all sub Branches. A former Army officer, he has been described as a 'breath of fresh air.'

A new state constitution is being prepared, a new State Council has been elected and the prospect for a complete renewal for NSW RSL seems assured.

Your Merchant Navy sub Branch is functioning correctly and has not come under any adverse notice. Our Annual General Meeting was held at Roseville ex services club at Roseville on Wednesday 28th February. Due to the pending sale of the those premises your committee has decided to hold further meetings at the Chatswood RSL Club. Details of this move will shortly be circulated to all members.

Elections for sub Branch committee members were not held this year at the AGM due to sub Branches only being required to hold elections every three years. The meeting dealt with all matters on the agenda including deciding that we will send a member as our delegate to State Congress at Albury in May this year. Vice President Mr Alan Read agreed to undertake that role on our behalf. Alan will investigate the plans put forward by State President, James Brown. Delegates will also be able to examine and vote on a new State RSL. Constitution. I have been in touch with State Branch re Sydney Anzac Day march arrangements. Once again Commander Ken Swain RAN (Ret), will assist the Merchant Navy by allocating a place in the navy contingent. Details have not yet been announced so I will ensure our members are advised well before the date.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is arranging another celebration of the Battle of Atlantic, (75 years on), This time it is to be held in Canberra for three days, early in May. I understand I am to be one of the veterans to be selected.

Very best wishes to all of you. You will receive an updated memo, late in March or early in April.

Don Kennedy
President

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC



The Athenia sinking after being torpedoed by U-
<http://ww2today.com/s-s-athenia-first-ship-torpedoed-in-world-war-ii>

During almost six years of World War Two between 3rd September 1939 and 5th May 1945 there were many battles. Most of them lasted a few days, some several months and, others longer.

Britain's wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill was well aware of all the battles fought during that dreadful war. He was quoted at describing one that was bitterly fought in the Atlantic Ocean as the one battle that caused him 'the most concern and anxiety'. Britain's survival in its' struggle to continue the war against Nazi Germany absolutely depended on the outcome of this battle.

Churchill named it 'The Battle of the Atlantic'. It commenced at about 7.30 pm on Sunday 3rd September 1939, the first day of the war. A German submarine, U-30, commanded by 26 year-old Kapitann leutnant zur Fritz Julius Lemp, one of 30 submarines Adolf Hitler had despatched to the Atlantic in anticipation of the war between Germany and England was patrolling some 250 miles west of the Hebrides.

Hitler had earlier claimed to his staff that Britain was weak and absolutely un-prepared for war. Thus, her government would not be prepared to go to war to honour the pact she had with the Government of Poland.

Earlier that fateful day after Germany had failed to withdraw its' troops from Poland by 11am London time, as demanded by the British Government, at that time headed by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, described as 'the Birmingham Gentleman', he declared that a 'state of

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war existed between Britain and Germany'. Hitler was, much later, reported to be surprised when the message reached him. He did not, at that time wish to have a war with England.

German U Boats had been put on notice that if war was declared their role was to prevent merchant shipping arriving in British ports. This had been a significant feature of action by Germany during World War One. The design and capabilities of German submarines had been dramatically changed and improved since Hitler had come to power. Strangely enough, Hitler had decreed that if war broke out this time, the U Boats were not to attack passenger ships. It was said that he did not want to antagonise neutral countries, especially America, whose citizens may become casualties.

Shortly after 7.30 pm that first day the U-Boat 30 lookout reported a large steamer approaching in the gathering dusk. There was a brisk sea running so, when Captain Lemp examined it in his periscope, he wrongly assumed it to be an auxiliary cruiser. In fact, it was the British 14,000 - ton passenger ship 'Athenia' which, earlier that day, under the command of Captain James Cook, had rounded the northern tip of Ireland and was steaming westwards into the Atlantic swell at a steady ten knots, on a course to Canada.

Aboard the 'Athenia' Captain James Cook reassured his passengers that they had nothing to fear about the war as his ship was immune from enemy submarine attack under international law. However, in accordance with standard procedure, lifeboat practice had been conducted.

Without taking further steps to confirm if the ship was armed, 'Lemp' ordered his U Boat to dive and decided to prepare for attack. Shortly afterwards one of U-30's torpedoes struck 'Athenia's port side. Most of the force of the explosion shattered the bulkhead between the boiler rooms. The ship stopped and immediately took on a six -degree list to port, making it difficult for frantic passengers to reach the lifeboats on the upper deck.

The 'Athenias' urgent SSS signal (attacked by submarine) sent Royal Navy destroyers and merchant ships racing to her aid but it was not until early the following day that they were able to reach the scene . They found 'Athenia' just barely afloat with full lifeboats nearby, 1300 survivors were rescued but a later count revealed 118 lives were lost, including 22 American citizens. 'Athenia' sank stern first, that morning, 4th September 1939.

One of those who died was an Australian crew member. It has since been claimed that this Merchant Navy seaman was the first Australian casualty of World War Two.

There was international outrage at the sinking of 'Athenia but due to Hitler's claim that there would be no attacks on passenger ships, the German Government initially denied responsibility. They claimed it was not an attack by a German submarine. They said they had information that the British Government was responsible as they had placed a large bomb on board the ship. This was intended by the British so the German Navy would be blamed for the attack. This outrageous lie was revealed when rescued passengers of the liner reached safety. Some of them reported that they had actually seen the German submarine on the surface before it submerged.

The survival of the United Kingdom during the second world war depended entirely on it's very large fleet of some 3000 ocean- going merchant ships which, at that time was the largest merchant fleet in the world. Also, there were about another 3000 smaller ships over 500 tons. Their Merchant Navy consisted of about 120,000 men. Its peacetime task had been to bring into the country all its oil, half its food and most of industry's raw materials. The nation's

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economy also depended on its ships to export manufactured goods to world markets.

British merchant seamen were sometimes described as being a fairly rough lot, given to heavy drinking and, as a result, to be avoided in port if any arguments arose in or around pubs. Those who worked 'below' in the engine room, firemen and trimmers, were usually from the area around Liverpool. Most ships in those days were coal burners. Their working and living conditions on board were, compared to most jobs on land, extremely harsh. The shipping companies which owned most of the ships, exercised extremely frugal arrangements with low wages and strict food rationing.

Merchant seamen, unlike members of the Navy, Army and Air Force, were not supplied with any clothing or personal requirements. They were required to purchase their own. When 'signed on' to a ship they were subject to a form of discipline from the ship's captain. He had the power to dock them pay and even have them sacked from the ship. This could mean, should it have been a serious offence, that the man could be denied employment on any other British ship. His discharge document would reveal details of his conduct, his employment status and his conduct.

However, all British merchant ships abided by strict safety rules laid down by the Board of Trade. All Masters, deck Officers and ship's engineers were well trained and very professional. A few weeks after this attack, on or about 26th September 1939, two German 'pocket battleships' were sent into the southern Atlantic, one to the area off Bermuda and the other, the 'Graf Spee,' to the coast of Brazil. Their mission was to intercept British and allied merchant ships and destroy them. History reveals that the 'Graf Spee met its match there in a naval battle. It never got home to Germany.

As a result of mounting ship losses the British Admiralty made the decision to introduce the convoy system. A typical convoy consisted of a maximum of seventy merchant ships sailing in a compact formation covering about 20 square miles of sea, initially with some small naval support craft.

Station keeping in a convoy was at first chaotic as engineers and masters struggled to keep in their appointed columns with fine adjustments of propeller revolutions to maintain a constant speed. There were often uneasy moments of tension, especially in bad weather and at night, between the captains of the few Royal Navy escorts and the independent-minded merchant skippers who believed they knew as much about seamanship as those in the 'Grey Funnel Line'.

While the war in Europe had been labelled the 'Phoney War' between September and December 1939 there had been no let up at sea. By Christmas that year Britain had already suffered the loss of 150 merchant ships, almost entirely due to submarine attacks. This represented about 2 percent of the total British Merchant Navy's pre-war strength

Before the end of May 1940 losses of merchant ships had approached 300,000 tons. On 16th June 1940 the British Government received an alarming report from a member of Churchill's War Cabinet which said, 'however indomitable the spirit of the country, the task of maintaining our resistance until such time as our material have so increased as to enable us to attempt a military decision against the enemy will be well nigh impossible unless we are able to draw assistance on a large scale from the New World.' This was a reference of the consistent plea for assistance from the United States and the fact that the battle in the Atlantic was in real danger of being lost.

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

During the three months from July to October 1940 the U Boats destroyed another 217 merchant ships. The U Boats attacks on the poorly guarded convoys gave a new sense of urgency to the need for more destroyers, for which Churchill had already pleaded in a cable to US President Roosevelt.

On 21st September, convoy HX 72 consisting of 42 merchant ships was attacked by a 'Wolf Pack' of four U Boats. A naval report to Admiralty reads, 'At about midnight there was a very heavy explosion and a tanker burst into flames. Terrific explosions continued during the night as ship after ship was hit by torpedoes. Over a period of seven hours eleven merchantmen were attacked and sunk and over a hundred thousand tons of American supplies sent to the bottom.'

During the next month convoy SC7 was attacked by a pack of five U Boats. One U Boat accounted for six of the eighteen merchantman that were sunk. This came about in a running battle. The slaughter was made worse because the convoy had scattered under the fierce attack leaving the stragglers to be picked off one by one. Over 80,00 tons of shipping and nearly 100,00 tons of supplies were destroyed in one of the worst convoy disasters that the war was to experience.

The escorting senior naval escort officer's report was 'Friday, 20 October 1216 made my ETA Liverpool and informed C-in-C Western Approaches that NO ships were in company.' On the morning after, a convoy of 49 ships, HX 79, loaded with American military supplies was spotted by a crew member of the wolf pack. In five hours one fifth of the convoy was wiped out.

And so, it went on, day and night for another four years. Hitler was said to be happy. It is recorded that he told his staff that England would soon be willing to sue for peace when it no longer had enough food for its people and sufficient fuel for its military forces.

Many books have been written about this longest battle of the war but most of them pay little attention to the men who, time and time again, went back to sea to face a very uncertain fate in the usually violent seas and an extremely relentless enemy. The losses of ships and their valuable cargo were, naturally, the main subject of despair but on each merchant ship there would be approximately 45 men. When a ship was torpedoed, especially at night or in bad weather there was little hope of crew survival. If it was a tanker laden with oil or petrol there was just about no hope of survival. Should a tanker crew member manage to get into the water uninjured he would almost certainly be devoured by fire as the burning oil spread across the oceans' surface.

Author Nicholas Monsarrat, a former Royal Navy wartime officer, in one of his books, 'The Cruel Sea' depicts the life of Royal Navy crew engaged in wartime convoy duties in the Atlantic. His story has graphic images of what it was like for sailors in the navy. However, when he described the following morning the carnage of merchant ships being attacked and sunk during the night he almost always refers to 'ships lost during the night'. He never makes mention of those brave souls who perished as their ship was blown up or as it took them down as it just slipped beneath the waves.

During the years 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944 the battle raged non-stop with Germany, at one stage, dangerously close to victory. The supply of 50 old naval destroyers from America and the acquisition of the ultra-secret 'enigma' code machine from a captured U Boat, gradually turned the tide.

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

When the Battle of the Atlantic ended in May 1945 over 23,351 ships (fifteen million tons of allied shipping) had been sunk, as had 175 allied naval vessels. Numbers of British Merchant Navy crew lost in the Atlantic were 30,132.

On the German side the losses were also terrible. In total, 1162 U Boats had been built. 781 were lost. Of the 40,900 men recruited, about 28,000 lost their lives, mostly entombed in their steel coffins on the ocean bed. A few were fortunate to be able to escape and became prisoners of war.

All those British and Commonwealth veterans who took part in the 'Battle' were awarded the campaign medal, the Atlantic Star. There were a great many naval personnel, mostly Royal Navy, and a large number of British and Commonwealth Air Force air crew who died, but the major participants and by far the most deaths were Merchant Navy men. No bravery decorations were ever awarded to Merchant Navy veterans in the Atlantic or anywhere else at sea between 1939 and 1945.

However, the British Government has remembered its' Merchant Navy veterans. In May 2013 they arranged a number of commemoration services in England entitled 'Battle of the Atlantic-70 years on.' Eight Australian veterans (four RAAF, three Merchant Navy and one RAN) were taken to England by Australian Department of Veteran Affairs officers. They participated in services and revisited certain historic wartime locations. Each of those men had a host of memories and many recalled those they had sailed with or flew with and who had paid the ultimate price.

The Department of Veteran Affairs will conduct yet another round of services for a few survivors of the 'Battle of the Atlantic' (75 years on) in Canberra early in May this year (2018)

It is now 74 years since that long, cruel battle came to an end. The majority of those who played a part in it are no longer with us. Britain survived and, to a large extent, she did so as a result of the courage and the sacrifice of those seamen of the Merchant Navy.

Seamen whose ships were sunk in the Murmansk convoys to Russia, up near the Arctic Circle suffered terribly. It was said that three minutes in the water was about as long as they could live.

Authors have, over the years, in publications paid tribute to the seamen who, faced with horrendous conditions time and time again re-joined their ships in Liverpool and many other British ports, leaving the shelter of the ports and facing not only the often- raging sea, the bitter cold and the real prospect of having their ship sunk from under them with precious little hope of rescue.

Exact figures are not available but it is certain that a great many of the British and allied ships sunk during those six years had aboard at least one Australian crew member.

At the end of the war Winston Churchill declared, referring to those wearing the Merchant Navy lapel badge, "If you ever meet one of those men, take your hat off to him because we would have lost the war if it was not for them."

Their casualty rate, on a proportional basis, was at least four times greater than the casualty rate of the Navy, Army and Air force. The great majority resulted from the 'Battle of the Atlantic'.

There were no shore jobs in the Merchant Navy. Everyone went to sea, and into 'harm's way'.

Don Kennedy.

President Merchant Navy RSL sub Branch

UNVEILING OF MERCHANT NAVY MEMORIAL, POINT DANGER

Daniel McKenzie, Tweed Daily News



A PERMANENT memorial to all seafarers two and-a-half years in the making was dedicated at Point Danger on International Merchant Navy Day on Sunday 3rd September 2017

Members of the SEQ Vindicatrix and MN Mariners Association, who raised \$25,000 to have the monument erected, were on hand with seafarers, their families and dignitaries as flags were lowered to half-mast to honour the more than 100,000 merchant mariners who have died since 1788.

Once consigned to Davy Jones's locker, treasures of the sea rarely rise to reveal their stories on land again, but a bow anchor retrieved from the SS Alberta off Point Danger in 1990 found its final resting place as monument's centrepiece, which was dedicated by Queensland Governor Paul de Jersey AC.

"The memorial's central anchor is a powerful reminder of the perils awaiting those who venture beyond our shores, but the memorial also stands as the spirit of service and recognition," Gov de Jersey said.

"We owe a tangible debt to seafarers and merchant sailors, they are the seniors of the trade which has made our nation prosper. For without their labour, both in peace time and in war, the trade of goods on which our society depends would grind to a halt."

The anchor's shank has been placed to guide viewers' eyes out to sea, leading directly to the point where the SS Alberta met its demise off Sunderland Reef 137 years ago.

Sitting beside it is the Alberta's recovered ship bell, which poignantly sounded the watch for those in attendance during the dedication.

UNVEILING OF MERCHANT NAVY MEMORIAL, POINT DANGER

MN Mariners Association president Brian Hunt paid tribute to the Merchant Navy, the fourth arm of her Majesty's forces, but also, the largely "forgotten service".

Mr Hunt, who joined the service in 1951 and trained in the catering department, urged everyone in attendance to remember all the men and women who plied their trade on the sea, including some 40,000 who died in the Second World War.

"September 3 also marks the first day of the Second World War - the first casualties of (the war) were merchant seamen, and they were also the last to die in the Second World War," he said. "Merchant seamen are seen to be serving in all theatres of war."

The Governor called on the younger generation to ensure the memory of those whose experiences are consigned to the annals of history are never forgotten.

"Seafaring is deeply embedded in our common culture, and with great respect, I acknowledge the contribution of older Australians. I want to also acknowledge the younger members of our society," Gov de Jersey said. "It's so important that younger people are involved in these events to ensure the continuity of the message, and the memories are preserved."

"Thanks to the tireless efforts of the south-east branch of this organisation (MN Mariners Association), we now have a dignified and fitting memorial through which we can channel our gratitude for the service and sacrifice of merchant sailors.

"Through your combined efforts, you've given public prominence to a legacy so vital to secure our prosperity; may they no longer be the forgotten service."

The Point Danger monument also had the involvement of local tradespeople and the Gold Coast City Council, Gary Fidler Architect, Boyds Bay Group builders, Palmer Flags, Chris Morrissey Tiling and Neumanns of Currumbin, who restored the anchor.

Gordon Solomon OAM, 1923-2008



The 9th of May 2018 will be the 10th anniversary of the passing of Gordon Solomon.

The late Nick Lampe so aptly epitomised the dedication of Gordon to the 'merchant navy fraternity' in an SMH obituary titled 'Merchant man a fighter for rights' "Gordon was a passionate advocate for Australian and other Allied merchant seafarers. For more than 50 years he worked to achieve symbolic and practical recognition of the contribution of the merchant navy during World War II and subsequent conflicts, and in peacetime. He became a father figure for what he called "the merchant navy fraternity", binding them through social events, and his endless, cheerful welfare work with the sick and frail." (<https://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/merchant-man-a-fighter-for-rights/2008/06/08/1212863448733.html>)

Life of a Seafarer

By Bill MacGinnes (1928 - 2014)

Starting out in the Ketches



The Ketch 'Capella' sailing off Thevenard

It was 1943 when my Dad (Capt. Percy MacGinnes) was approached by the then South Australian Harbours Board asking him if he would be interested to Master the No. 6 Bucket Dredger on a delivery voyage to Cairns Queensland for the Commonwealth Government. Money wise things were very tight at home, he accepted, by all accounts the job would pay well; he figured that this would be the opportunity towards paying off some of the mortgage on our home.

Accompanying the dredger would be the Tug Morglay towing hopper barges that are used in dredging operations.

Prior to Dad departing from the S.A.H.B. Dockyard he gave me a hug and told me to look after Mum and assist with the jobs about the house, I bade him farewell as he blew the dredge siren to signal the opening of the Birkenhead Bridge, I then headed on my push bike to the beach at the end of Bower Road Semaphore Park to watch the operation proceed to sea on a dangerous voyage for a dredge would not be a good sea vessel in adverse weather conditions, and further to add Merchant Shipping was being sunk on the South and East coasts of Australia.

Dad being away I started to wag it from school until my mother became aware to what I was doing. Just wait until your Father returns my boy and you will cop it my mother said. I never went back to school but spent many hours visiting the wharf area looking at the many Ketches moored at the Copper Company, Musgrave and Birkenhead wharves.

On this occasion the Ketch Capella was tied up by Walter & Morris Timber Mill at Cooperation wharf waiting for the swinging Jervois Bridge to open at 11am, I spoke to the Skipper who was assisting in washing the decks as the ketch had come from the Barley Board

Life of a Seafarer

At the time I was just a weed of a boy fairly lean in build but I asked him for a job. "You're a bit too small laddie for this type of work" was his reply, "come back and see me when you beef up a bit".

I let things go for a few weeks, Dad had returned home after the delivery voyage and I knew that he was very disappointed with me for not continuing my education that he never had. I was hopeful our friendship and the love between father and son would eventually return to normal, but I knew it would take time.

Once more I approached the skipper of the Capella; again it was berthed at the Cooperation Wharf waiting for the bridge to open. I was invited on board as the Ketch was shifting to the berth directly opposite to the Wharf Hotel situated between No 3 and No 5 berth.

On berthing at No 3 berth I asked the skipper if he would give me a chance by employing me. I was over the moon when he said that little word "YES". I sailed with Bert for quite a while, before he decided to have me registered on the ships articles of agreement. Maybe he could see the value in his latest crew member. It was also illegal to have me working on board sailing as a crew member without being registered on the articles.

I never realised that I was losing articulated time towards Ordinary Seaman by not being registered. The sea was to be my life for the next thirty eight years.

The Capella, registered tonnage 77g tons approx., carrying capacity 1500 bags of wheat. We plied the ports of South Australia where ever there was a cargo available, Musten to load salt that was a small place in American River Kangaroo Island. Ketches traded in the two gulfs lightering grain from the Spencer Gulf ports.

Being a ketch hand meant long hours and hard work. At first I steered the ketch to allow the helmsman to take a meal break, assisted in the hoisting and lowering of the sails, and also with the loading and discharging of the cargo.

Bert Tainsh was a good skipper and fed his crew well. We ate good stews, sometimes a roast meal, and plenty of bread and butter puddings. One of the older seamen did the cooking; I washed the dishes and kept the accommodation clean besides all my other chores.

Capella manning was a crew of four, as I had previously mentioned the skipper had his cabin aft, and the three of us slept (Forehead) for'd in the (Forecastle) fo'c's'le

All hands washed out of an enamel dish, the toilet facilities were non-existent. When nature called you had to place your backside over the lee side bulwark rail.

At sea this was a risky procedure but when nature calls you took the chance that the ketch never tipped the top of the bulwark rail under as you sat hanging on to the mizzen mast stays for dear life. At times you had your bottom washed for you.

The first night I slept on board, the hurricane lamp was turned down low so as we crew could get some sleep; the lamp was the only means of lighting up the fo'c's'le. Sleep was hard to come by for me that evening; excitement had taken over my tiredness. Bang, I then heard the squeal of a rat. Don one of the crew members had set two rat traps prior to going to bed, the first rat had been caught. I pulled the blanket over my head just in case one happened to venture my way during the night.

There were more rats to be caught after the trap had been reset. Next morning the score for the night was three rats; two others had managed to get themselves caught in the traps. The rats came on board by running along the wharf stringers then jumping onto the ketch, mainly to eat the barley grain that would be lying about the deck.

Life of a Seafarer

One day discharging grain at the Barley Board in the Port canal a grey cat came on board looking for new board and lodgings. The cat would have lived and survived within the vicinity of the barley stacks. I christened the cat with the name of Moggie agreeable by all on board.

Bert our skipper had a soft spot for cats. The rat problem went on the down turn once Moggie became a crew member of Capella. Eventually we could all sleep in peace with Moggie curled up at the foot of my bunk.

The cat was still a crew member when I left Capella after I had fallen down the hatch when placing the hold hatch boards on after we had discharged our cargo.

My time with Capella lasted nine months. I learnt to box the compass in a couple of weeks. My further training consisted of learning the practical use of throat and peak halyards, downhill's, what the mainsheet, travellers and reef points were. I was entrusted to stand a watch, shown the use of the wheel becket in favourable weather conditions. The skipper enlightened me to what was meant by catting of the anchors, showed me how to trim the oil navigation lamps. What the different rigs were of craft that were mainly propelled by sail, and the naming of such sails.

The skipper was a good teacher. I was a good listener and learnt fast, but it was all left up to me to benefit from his teachings. On taking all things into consideration, I felt that I was worthy of the time Bert spent teaching me. In my eyes he knew everything there was to know about the workings of a Ketch and Schooner.

Capella was a sturdy vessel, she could stand hard weather sailing and we sure got plenty of that. Most times when loaded the decks would be awash, this saved us the chore of washing them down with a bucket. With a free board of less than 12 inches to the main deck when fully loaded, her bulwarks were a couple of feet in height above the main deck.

The sailing rig of Capella consisted of a jib, staysail, mainsail and mizzen sail, with tall top masts above the main and mizzen masts. Although there were top masts she never carried topsails during my time as a crew member.

Capella was driven by a (50 BHP) Union Engine burning power kerosene. The ketch never had a wheel house, as I remember it was bloody cold at times when taking your turn at the wheel especially with the wind on the quarter or dead astern. The skipper paid me 15 shillings a trip; hopefully we did two trips a week in the gulf. When we ventured further afield I was paid six pounds a month or twelve dollars in today's currency.

Standing my own watch in foul weather on board Capella would see me rugged up to the nines. Sea boots were a must as the decks were mainly awash when fully loaded. I would wear my woollen beanie, gloves and dads old over coat that was down to my ankles, but the cold always found a way to sneak in somewhere.

I previously mentioned the reason that I left Capella; it was when I fell from the deck into the empty hold. I was hospitalised in the R.A.H. for a couple of weeks and it was a few weeks later when I was ready for sea once more.

When I returned I joined the ketch Active. Sailing with Norm Irvine was quite an experience; he had the nick name of Rocco and was known by all the ketch hands. We all lived rough on board Active. When I say rough I mean rough, the crew consisted of Rocco, Ocker Johnson and I. During my time on board Ocker left and my brother John joined us after having paid off of the ketch Annie Watt.

Life of a Seafarer

Active was a ketch of approx. 42 gross tons with a carrying capacity in the vicinity of 850 bags of wheat and 900 bags of barley. The ketch carried more of barley because it was lighter grain than wheat.

Between the No 1 and No 2 Hold the persons carrying the grain below had very limited head room when stowing the bags, their bodies would be practically bent over at right angles with the 190 lbs of grain on their back to stow this space.

The food on board Active was far inferior to the Capella; the meat that we ate was kept in a sugar bag. It was hung up in the mainmast rigging. The idea of this was to keep the blow flies from getting into the meat and blowing it.

When the ketch was under way it was much cooler hanging aloft, this was Rocco's philosophy and he stuck with it, anyhow if the flies did happen to get into the bag whey wouldn't have found much meat to blow, maybe a few sausages.

We usually ate mutton chops or snags with mashed potato for our main meals.

Breakfast was porridge and toast to follow if we were lucky. There were times when we arrived off of a port at day break and the grain would be stacked on the wharf.

If there wasn't ample water to allow us to berth and the tide was still on the make, a line would be run to the jetty by the means of the work boat. The ketch would then be slowly winched towards the wharf assisted with the help of the rising tide.

Once we were alongside we would commence loading immediately. If all went according to plan we would be on our way again with enough water under the keel before the tide was again on the ebb.

I made reference to eating breakfast if we were lucky. This situation never allowed for meals, we waited until we were underway again before we ate once more. It was head down and arse up, the prize for the skipper was the chance to discharge the ketch cargo into a steamer at Port Adelaide where the work was carried out by waterside labour. This meant that the skipper saved paying for shore labour to discharge the cargo into trolleys if you were alongside of the wharf.

During my time with Active there was an occasion when we went across to the Harbours Board Dockyard to have a new mainmast stepped into the vessel. This was all good experience for a lad of fifteen years of age. Prior to the stepping of the mast the old one had to be removed. First the top mast and its stays had to be lowered. Next came the unrigging of all standard from the mast prior to the lifting of it from the ketch to shore. John and I did the unrigging and the re-rigging throughout the whole procedure.

When discharging the cargo of grain onto trolleys we used the mainsail boom as a cargo derrick. First of all the mainsail had to be unlashed, a block was then attached at the head of the boom called a gin block. A wire runner came from the deck winch and was then reeved through a heel block attached a few feet above the base of the mast then up through the gin block. A cargo hook was attached to the end of the wire, and then a guy rope was attached lower down the boom from the gin block. This procedure enabled a person to pull the boom back into the hold of the ketch; he was referred to as the guy man.

The ketch was always kept with a slight list when discharging; this allowed the cargo to swing freely from the hold to the wharf. By doing this, it done away with a second guy man. The deck winch lifted three bags of wheat at any one time, four bags when discharging barley. A discharge of approx. 900 bags took us five to six hours. (To be continued next edition)

Secretary Daniel O'Brien

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AUSTRALIAN MERCHANT NAVY & U.S. ARMY SMALL SHIPS SECTION MEMORIAL SERVICE

OPEN INVITATION

All Members and friends are invited to attend a very special ceremony, commemorating the Service of the Australian Merchant Navy and U.S. Army Small Ships Section during World War II.

The Memorial Service will be held at South West Rocks Cenotaph, commencing 11:00 AM on Monday 11th June, 2018.

Plaques will be unveiled during the ceremony, dedicated to the men and boys who served the Australian Merchant Navy & Small Ships Section during WWII. Coincidentally, the 11th June marks the 73rd anniversary of the foundering of *S-96 Coweambah*, which sank near to South West Rocks at the mouth of the Macleay River with the loss of one crew member.

The Cenotaph is in close proximity to the Maritime Museum South West Rocks. Please arrive early to spend time at this amazing museum, which is really like a big treasure chest of local shipping histories and interesting items; including a deck-chair from *S-96 Coweambah* that washed ashore in 1945. Amongst the countless stories of seamanship, you can read individual accounts written by Bernie O'Brien and John Bird, of surviving the sinking of *SS Fingal*. Both were teenagers when *SS Fingal* was torpedoed off Nambucca Heads on 5th May 1943 and both subsequently joined Small Ships Section.

This is an opportunity to commemorate the Australian Merchant Navy and Small Ships Section alongside Veterans in a very pleasant part of the world. South West Rocks is approximately five hours drive from Hornsby. I recommend enjoying a 'weekend' at this idyllic location and booking your accommodation as soon as possible. Waterfront accommodation in cabins, caravans, or tents is available in very close proximity to The Cenotaph, at Horseshoe Bay Holiday Park, Phone: 0265 666 370.

You may also consider the South West Rocks Tourist Park, Phone: 0265 666 264
Or Trial Bay Gaol Campground, Phone: 0265 666 168.

There are also several motels and holiday units in South West Rocks. Port Macquarie is only 1 hour & 15 minutes driving time from South West Rocks and also has a wide range of accommodation options. If you require assistance with transport arrangements or accommodation bookings please do not hesitate to ask!

Anybody wishing to lay a floral tribute at the Cenotaph, may consider placing an order prior to 2nd June with South West Rocks Florist, Lisa on 0265 665 488.

After the Memorial Service all are invited to an informal BBQ luncheon at the South West Rocks Country Club. For catering purposes please advise the Association Secretary (Daniel O'Brien) of your intention to attend, by phone (0411 027 319) or via e-mail, prior to the 1st June.



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