

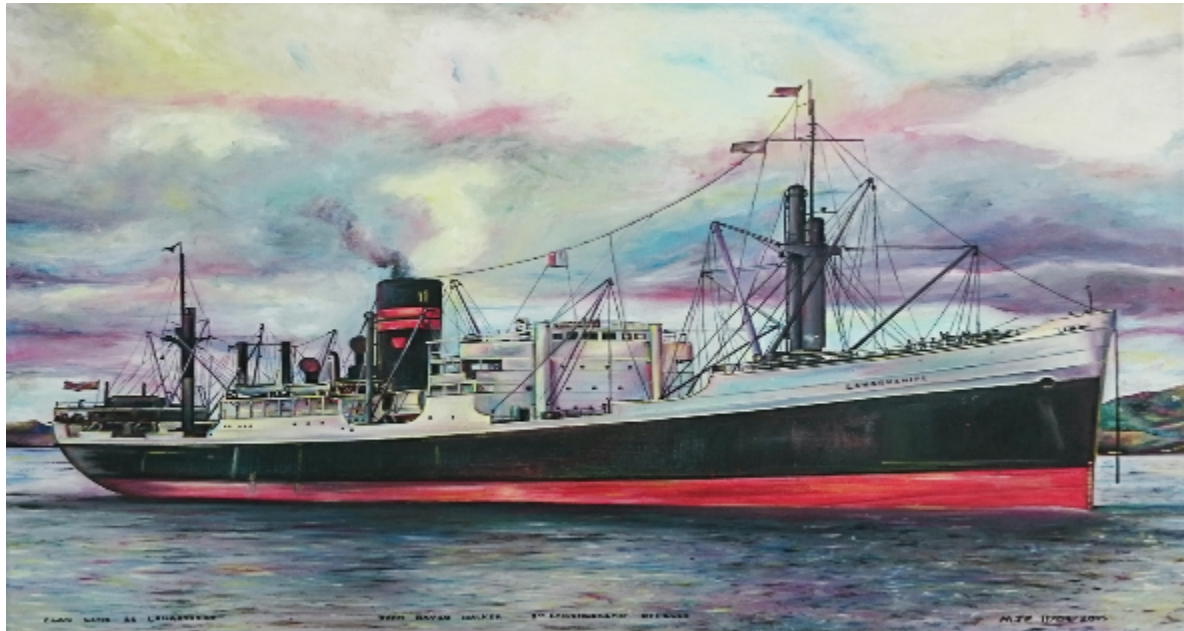
MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

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

Edition 16
Spring 2018



TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA



S.S. LANARKSHIRE

WORLD WAR TWO – PACIFIC FLEET-- MERCHANT NAVY SUPPLY SHIPS

By Alan Read - Vice President Merchant Navy RSL Sub-branch

At the Merchant Navy War Memorial Annual Commemoration service held on Sunday 22nd October, 2017, in Canberra, the guest of honour Rear Admiral Michael Noonan, AM, Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Navy, in the annual address reminded those assembled that without the support of the merchant navy supply ships, the navy, air force and army could not have operated in the Pacific during WWII

In November 1944 following final agreement between President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill the British Pacific Fleet was formed and within a few weeks the fleet started to assemble in Sydney. It soon comprised 2 battleships, 4 aircraft carriers, 4 cruisers {including 1 from New Zealand) and 16 destroyers, L6 frigates, minesweepers (including a number of Australian units). Adding repair ships, oilers and 2 hospital ships etc. the total number was around 60 ships

To supply this fleet a "Fleet Train" was planned and established by the Admiralty Trade Division (Defensively Equipped Merchant Vessels Division) in London and research shows that around 20 Merchant Navy vessels were allocated to this task.

One ship selected was the T.S.S.'Lanarkshire', on which the writer served as a cadet. Built in 1939 for the Scottish Shire Line, a subsidiary of the Clan Line and designed for the UK, Australian/NZ chilled and frozen meat trade; with an operating speed of 18 knots and a maximum of around 22 knots, two round voyages were completed before hostilities ended in



S.S. Lanarkshire loading material
for Australia

<https://www.steampicturelibrary.com/places/docks-newport-docks/newport-docks-1950->

In addition to the normal peacetime crew of 14 officers and cadets and 50 cooks, stewards and Indian deck and engine room crew, an extra 2 radio officers were employed; 22 DEMS gunners were quartered in specially constructed cabins etc. in No.5 hatch upper tween deck. 1 Royal Navy Petty officer and 4 Ratings (Radar) were berthed in accommodation built in the fo'castle.

DEMS gunners were an assortment of seconded Royal Artillery Marine Regiment personnel and civilians. All were required to sign the ships articles, a form of UK government Board of Trade employment contract under which they acknowledged the ultimate authority of the ships master. Their day to day commander was a RN Chief Petty Officer.

The ships armaments consisted of a Bofors 40mm gun forward and 8 -twin Oerlikon 20mm guns and a 6 inch gun on the specially constructed poop deck at the stern.

The radar was located in a steel cabin above the bridge, and the scanner was above the cabin sheltered in round grey Perspex housing. It was an early model where the scanner was turned by hand and the target range was read off a vertical A-scan screen . A contact would create a "spike" on the screen and the distance, in yards, being measured off a horizontal scale at the bottom of the screen. The target bearing was indicated on the hand driven scanner drive shaft. The green shimmer on the screen caused eye strain problems after about 20 minutes and operators were rotated at that interval. The radar operated from sunset to sunrise while at sea and was very effective.

Leaving Glasgow and with one fuelling stop at Aden the ship approached Sydney from the south mid -June 1945 and off Jervis Bay was met by two destroyers and escorted into Sydney to berth at Browns Wharf, Woolloomooloo.

The waterside workers reported for work and within minutes walked off when they discovered the nature of the cargo. A large danger money allowance was demanded and refused. Within hours buses arrived with RN and RAN sailors who were reasonably fit and recuperating from illness and injury. In addition the ships officers and cadets were asked to volunteer to discharge the cargo; acting mainly as hatch men and winch-drivers.

The cargo consisted of shells, mines, torpedoes, detonators, small calibre ammunition, cases of explosives, engine spares and replacements etc. On the after deck were 8 - 14 inch gun barrels, which were later unloaded using the giant crane at Garden Island.

HMS "Black Prince" was a cruiser with 5.25 inch guns - an unusual size. We had on board ammunition for this ship which had steam up ready to sail and urgently wanted her ammo. Fortunately, we knew exactly where it was, and this was our first priority.

Two or three days later the waterside workers accepted the danger money allowance offered and the cargo discharge proceeded without incident. When ready the ship was prepared for loading frozen and chilled meat etc and we moved to Gladstone Qld. and then via Panama, home to a hungry Britain.

AUSTRALIA'S ICE BREAKER TAKING SHAPE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4yzwOT_hs8

Australia's new icebreaking research vessel RSV Nuyina is taking shape in the dry dock at Damen Shipyards in Romania, with more than 7,000 tons of steel cut and the assembly of the base of the hull complete.

The RSV Nuyina is being built from 10,000 tons of steel, made into 229 sections that will be moulded into 57 steel blocks. At Damen Shipyards, block sizes are limited to 300 tons, which is the lifting capacity of the cranes. Because of her weight, only about half the ship will be constructed in the dry dock before she is floated out to a wet dock for completion. A large number of sections are required due to the weight of the steel needed for icebreaking; some of the steel plate is 130 millimetres (five inches) thick. A number of high tensile grades are being used to ensure the ship can cope with freezing Antarctic temperatures. Above the water line the steel can withstand temperatures down to -40°C , while the steel below the water line can withstand -10°C .

The Nuyina will serve as a scientific research platform, icebreaker and resupply ship. She is designed for helicopter operations in up to sea state 3 (1.25 metre wave height) and the deployment of watercraft in up to sea state 4 (2.5 metre wave height). Her cruising speed is 12 knots.

She will be able to break 1.65-metre (5.4-foot) ice at a continuous speed of three knots and will use a hybrid propulsion system with two diesel engines driving controllable pitch propellers when icebreaking. Electric motors, powered by diesel generators on flexible mounting systems to absorb vibration, will power the ship for noise-sensitive research operations.

Harbour acceptance trials are scheduled for 2019; delivery for 2020. Nuyina will be painted in International Orange, reminiscent of the nation's current icebreaker, the Aurora Australis.



A very discerning Cockatoo



Sent in by WWII MN Veteran Keith Prior : My retired son Stuart for the past couple of months has been sailing his yacht along the Queensland coast and sent me this photo today from the Whitsundays area of this cockatoo sitting atop his Red Ensign.

THE ILL FATED M.V. SOUTH ESK

By Ian Coan (1955-2017) - "Merchant Navy News" Edition 15 Autumn 2018

Reply by Greg A Quilter (1951-) Seaman PK5155

I greased on the MV South Esk while relieving for 3 weeks 5/7/1971 to 23/7/1971

I'm almost 100% certain I was on that same voyage with Ian Coan that he describes.

The weather we experienced was because we couldn't steam away from the approaching cyclone that also created two nearby typhoons and the crew all prayed to "Davy Jones" but we made it through safely. It was this weather that hit Townsville 1971 with 100 knot winds that wiped out a third the town including, the port dock, wharves and the wooden clock tower built on the wharf. Townsville was yet again hit with another cyclone (Althea) in December 1971.

I recall the bit in Ian's story how we had to get around for 1-3 days wearing life jackets even wearing them while sleeping in our bunks rolled onto our sides.

Another madman and I spent time playing darts while the ship surfed up and down 20-foot waves. We carried two D9 CAT dozers as deck cargo chained to the hatch lids. Chains as thick as my wrist, snapped like junk jewellery chains and the valuable cargo was washed overboard. I wouldn't have the ticker for that sort of stuff these days.

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH NEWS

The Battle of the Atlantic Commemoration Services in Canberra.

Serving and ex- service RSL members will be aware that the Department of Veterans Affairs in Canberra does, from time to time, in accordance with its' charter, organise Commemoration missions whereby eligible veterans are invited to apply in order to participate.

In May 2013 I was fortunate to be accepted as part of a group of eight World War Two veterans who were taken to England because they had been issued with the campaign medal, 'Atlantic Star' having had service in the Atlantic Ocean. This mission was called 'Battle of the Atlantic -70 years on.'

Earlier this year DVA once more called for applications from eligible veterans to go to Canberra to take part in Commemoration services entitled 'Battle of the Atlantic – 75 years on'.

I was pleasantly surprised to, once again, be accepted as one of the eight veterans. I was doubly pleased to learn that Mr Douglas Gilling, who accompanied me to England in 2013 had also had his application approved. Doug and I had formed a friendly association as a result of that great trip.



I would like to record details of just how professional and generous the DVA staff were to the elderly veterans who were able to travel to Canberra between Monday 30th April and Wednesday 2nd May.

At the appointed time, a limousine arrived at my Sydney home to pick up myself and my family member carer. It had been deemed essential for each veteran to have a carer accompany him.

We were met at Mascot airport by several DVA staff members who cheerfully handled all our baggage and check-in problems. Upon arrival at Canberra airport once again DVA staff met us, assisting with baggage, before leading us to a waiting taxi.

A short trip to a very up-market hotel followed where more DVA staff were waiting to greet us. Name badges were issued and one of them escorted us to our allocated hotel room. Here, on the table was what I described as a 'show bag'. It was an elegant plastic bag containing a variety of items, including a DVA '100 years on' men's tie, an attractive ladies scarf, a lengthy wool men's cold weather scarf, a large book containing hundreds

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH

of photos of Australian servicemen and women taken during WWII, some chocolates and biscuits, accompanied by an individually addressed letter from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, The Hon Darren Chester MP, inviting me to a special welcoming dinner that night. A large coach was available at the appointed hour that evening for all eight veterans, eight 'carers' and a similar number of cheerful and most helpful DVA staff, to go to a 'Veteran Welcome Dinner' at the Aegean Room -Hellenic Club, Canberra City. A couple of short, well- constructed speeches of welcome delivered from senior DVA staff was followed by a delightful three-course meal.

Upon return to our hotel we were asked to be ready at 8.30 the next morning to board the 'bus' for our next days' activities. This proved to be a very interesting and well-organised day.

A tour of the 'Old' Parliament House would probably not have been my choice on my personal tour of Canberra but, to my surprise, it turned out to be a surprisingly interesting and informative tour. A charming and well-informed lady guide spent almost three hours taking us to all the rooms of what is now really a museum, accompanied by a detailed talk from her on what had happened in those chambers so long ago. A highlight was an inspection of the Prime Minister's office, previously occupied by none other than former Prime Minister, Mr Bob Hawke.

A late morning tea/early light lunch was provided in the dining room where hordes of media types circulated eager to hear stories from some of us about our wartime activities. Many more group photos were taken by DVA staff, carers and media people in the adjacent courtyard.



An hour or so later we had a short bus trip to the Australian War Memorial where we were to participate in a commemoration service organised outdoors in the Captain Reg Saunders Courtyard. This service had been arranged and was conducted by that enterprising and much -admired Repatriation Commissioner, Major General Mark Kelly AO DSC .

He had earlier contacted both my friend Doug Gilling and myself asking us to take a small part in the service, Doug to read a poem and I to deliver the Ode.

I was, once again surprised that, especially for our group, this service was attended by the DVA Minister and a representative of the Federal Opposition together with the Director

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of the AWM, Dr Brendan Nelson. Our group of veterans, by this time increased to nine, were seated separately facing the small crowd. A catafalque party, a small band and the Australian Rugby Choir assisted in a very nice service entitled 'In recognition of the service and sacrifice during the Battle of the Atlantic'.

At the conclusion of the service we were told we could, if we so wished, spend a couple of hours inspecting the War Memorial before assembling at a point near the Memorial entrance at 4.45pm. This time the veterans were ushered to seats provided for us in the forecourt in front of the pool of remembrance in order to witness the daily 5pm service. This extremely moving service was well attended by a big crowd including about fifty school children from Victoria. Wreaths were laid and special mention made about the 'Battle for the Atlantic' veterans present. Many photos were taken.

Major General Kelly acceded to my request for the accompanying DVA staff to join us in a photo.

Arriving back at our hotel we were informed by DVA staff about the time each veteran and his carer would be picked up the following morning to be taken home. In my case it was 9.30am and, once again, all those fantastic DVA staff were at the hotel entrance to say farewell and wish us all a safe trip to our homes. They were also at Canberra airport and on arrival back home at Mascot airport.

We, as Australian veterans, are extremely fortunate to be entitled to the services so splendidly provided for us by the staff of that unique Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Don Kennedy

President Merchant Navy RSL sub Branch

Sydney

Convoys By Joe Earl (c)

Our lads that sailed in convoys - officers and ranks,
Deserve a special mention and our heartfelt thanks,
Most vessels were quite sound - manned by crews well trained,
Others were the opposite, most scrap and rusty stained.

These doughty merchant seamen knew their cruel fate,
When struck by cunning sea wolves lurking there in wait,
If they lived to tell the story and strived to stay afloat,
They struggled then with hardships aboard an open boat.

Still they served our country sailing there and back,
Hauling vital cargoes in times that looked so black,
A dangerous job in peacetime they continued just the same,
During war at sea my friends - through the shock and flame.

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH

Course it was the ammo ships that were blown to smithereens,
While plodding past the periscopes of hidden submarines,
Also on the tankers - one hardly had a chance,
When spotted by the enemy re-armed out of France.

The mines were pretty lethal, lurking God knows where,
Happenstance to strike one - turmoil then and there,
The bombers stretched to reach `em had a bit of fun,
Dropping tons of dynamite against a paltry gun.

Then there was the weather, with storm and hurricanes,
Very near impossible to steer intended lanes,
Especially wild Atlantic and freezing Russian run,
Casualties horrendous `till the job was done.

There was a school of thought - to foil the U-boat ace,
Just give the Royal Air Force some extra fuel space,
In long range Liberators to patrol as ocean scout,
Instead of burning cities and knocking civvies out.

Later on this was done - though several months too late,
Condemning many cargo ships with their precious freight,
Gradually the sinkings were cut by lessons learned,
Though still appalling losses until the tide was turned.

So crucial were these convoys to the war by land and air,
There's a mighty debt to seamen that served for us out there,
They paid the price of liberty by standing firm and fast,
And still we fly their ensign - stubborn from the mast.

**MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH MEETING:
Chatswood RSL Club, on Wednesday 28th November 2018 at
1030hrs.**

THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

**ALLEN RENWICK 16/03/18 WWII MN & US Army Small
Ships**

Capt. EDWARD THOMAS LILEY 30/5/18 WWII

Capt. GEORGE CARTER 26/06/18

Capt. RON CHARTER 20/07/18

DAVID BARROW 22/07/18

DALLAS HOGAN 24/07/18

**MARTIN JAMES SCANLAN 26/07/18 WWII US Army Small
Ships & RAN**

Capt. EIRIANYDD (Bill, Bronc) JONES MBE WWII 31/8/18

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

COMING EVENTS

**CANBERRA MN MEMORIAL DINNER: Saturday 20th October
2018. Garden City Hotel Canberra at**

**CANBERRA ANNUAL MN SERVICE: MN Memorial Kings Park
Canberra, Sunday 21st October 2018 at 1100 hrs**

**MERCHANT NAVY REMEMBRANCE SERVICE NORAH
HEAD: Saturday 1st December, 2018 at 1100 hrs.**

**MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH MEETING: Chatswood
RSL Club, on Wednesday 28th November 2018 at 1030hrs.**

**MERCHANT NAVY ASSOCIATION MEETING: Cabra-Vale
Diggers Club, Saturday 3rd November 2018 at 1030 hours**



BURNS PHILP LINE - REUNION LUNCH

will be held at

THE ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF AUSTRALIA

In the Elizabeth & Philp Rooms on Level 2

89 Macquarie Street Sydney 2000

FRIDAY – OCTOBER -12 - 2018

Drinks commencing at 1200 followed by lunch at
1230 to 1500 hours

Dress Jacket and tie (Club regulations)

Price inclusive of drinks. \$90.00 per head

MENU

SOUP

Pea & Ham, served with Sippets.

MAIN COURSE

Roast Turkey Breast, Leg Ham with Sage and Onion
Dressing

DESSERT

Rhum Negrita & Raisin Ice Cream

BEVERAGES

House Beverage selection served during the meal
Please send cheque: - with your name and address
on the back,

Including phone number and e-mail if available

Make cheque payable to: - Burns Philp Reunion

Addressed to: - Merv Hampson - 9 Violet Street
Balgowlah NSW 2093

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

A ceremony commemorating the service of the Australian Merchant Navy & U.S. Army Small Ships Section during World War II was held at South West Rocks Cenotaph on Monday 11th June, 2018. More than 100 people attended to pay tribute to WWII merchant mariners on a clear and sunny day. Guests of Honour, Members Harry Cruger and Jim Gadd unveiled memorial plaques dedicated to the service of the Australian Merchant Navy & U.S. Army Small Ships Section. 11th June also marked the 73rd anniversary of the foundering of *S-96 COWEAMBAH*, especially meaningful for Jim as a surviving crew member.



***T.S. CULGOA* Australian Navy Cadets mount the Cenotaph**

After welcoming those assembled, Association Secretary Daniel O'Brien referred to the triumphs and tragedies that occurred along our coastline only 75 years ago, as 'events that helped to forge our national identity and a path to Victory' in WWII. Prayers were offered by Sister Mary Leahy O.A.M. conveying the deeper nature of our commemoration. A strong sense of warmth and purpose became prevalent as soon as Sister Mary started to speak.



The Australian National Flag, the Red Duster, and the Stars and Stripes waved lazily next to the Small Ships Section Unit Banner, while the Merchant Navy Association contribution was offered by Director Elizabeth Sandeman-Gay.

Elizabeth delivered a sincere and very interesting tribute to the Merchant Navy during WWII, focussed on an incident which occurred just to the north of South West Rocks.

It was based on an account of the sinking of *S.S. FINGAL*, told through the eyes of our esteemed late Member BERNARD O'BRIEN.



South West Rocks Cenotaph

Elizabeth read excerpts from letters Bernie had written concerning his experience as a young Galley Boy on *FINGAL* and in this personal way explored the nature and sacrifice of the service. Twelve crew members and R.A.N. Gunner Sidney Payne perished on 5th May, 1943 when *S.S. FINGAL* was torpedoed by Japanese submarine *I-180 KUSAKA* off Nambucca Heads, just south of Coffs Harbour. Nineteen crew members and R.A.N. Gunner Geoff Miller were eventually rescued by the escort vessel *U.S.S. PATTERSON*. Association Member John Bird is currently the only surviving crew member of *FINGAL* and his version of the event can be found alongside Bernie's in the Maritime Museum South West Rocks.

The U.S. Army Small Ships Association contribution was delivered by the Secretary, who spoke about the formation of Small Ships Section in terms of necessity and the haste experienced by the crews who conducted the first U.S. Army attack landings in the South West Pacific Area, using Australian fishing trawlers in 1942. After outlining the value of Small Ships Section to the allied campaign, he explored the nature of the service through the personal experiences of Guests of Honour Harry Cruger and Jim Gadd.

Harry joined the Merchant Navy at 14 years of age during May, 1941. He was employed by Small Ships Section during August, 1943 and served *S-177 UKI* as Able Seaman until discharged in Sydney during March, 1944. During 1944 the Australian Government attempted to prevent members under the age of 18 from returning to the combat areas with Small Ships Section. Harry's discharged certificate was stamped, 'Eligible for re-employment when 18 years of age.' The following month Harry steamed away with the Merchant Navy again, and served throughout the war.

Harry's father BILL CRUGER also served Small Ships Section, engaged as Able Seaman on *S-135 LORINNA* during July, 1943. He served several Small Ships vessels and was discharged after peace was declared. Bill also went to sea at 14 years of age during 1909, and had been

torpedoed three times during the Great War. After WWII he continued serving the Merchant Navy until 1968.

Jim Gadd left home in a stokehold on *RMS QUEEN ELIZABETH* during 1941, sailing around the world carrying prisoners of war and allied soldiers until 1943. At 17 years of age Jim joined Small Ships Section, serving three and a half years on a variety of vessels.

Jim served as Trimmer on the vessel *S-142 PULGANBAH* and recalls running her ashore to pick up a group of wounded soldiers making their way from the Kokoda Track.

Jim also recalls the crew of *PULGANBAH* rescuing two Australian airmen who had crashed outside Sydney Heads; unforgettable memories that illustrate the high degree of co-operation and dependency between the various Branches of Service. . After rescuing the airmen outside Sydney Heads, Member Don Campbell impressed Jim when he followed the Captain's orders and attempted to rescue the aeroplane also.

While winching the plane from the water it crashed against the bow of the ship and concerned crew members could see the brightly coloured bombs rocking against the side of *PULGANBAH*. The Captain issued new orders to dump the aeroplane, and then deciding it would present a hazard to shipping he asked the Gunners to sink it. The first shell missed the target, and according to eyewitness accounts 'may have landed near Wollongong'.

The Captain then declared, "We might need some of those shells when we get up north," and called the R.A.N. requesting that they sink the obstruction.

Jim's also served *S-153 WANNON*, *S-146 MAIWARA*, and *S-151 ERINA* before being transferred to *S-96 COWEAMBAH*, a wooden coal burner, 82' in length, built in 1919.

During 1945 *COWEAMBAH* was heading for Sydney under-tow. On 10th June, she anchored just north of South West Rocks near the mouth of the Macleay River. The tow-line had been disengaged and the Skipper, Captain Hansen was aboard the other vessel. Approximately 0300 the next morning, winds increased to gale force and *COWEAMBAH*'s anchor would not hold. Jim was in the engine room putting on a pitch when the sea came through the door. Jim was first to go overboard and he saw *COWEAMBAH* begin to break up as the others abandoned ship.

Six survivors were washed ashore on the northern side of the Macleay River. They were Ian Cripps, James Ford, James Gadd, Keith Roals, Arthur Salt and Eric Thrower. All young Australians excepting the Ships Engineer, disabled New Zealander, 57 year old Arthur Salt, serving with only one arm. Unfortunately one crew member did not survive the foundering of *COWEAMBAH*, the ship's Cook George Michalitsis lost his life that day. George was a married man from Melbourne, only 45 years old; and was remembered along with the unknown number of Merchant Mariners who paid the Ultimate Sacrifice during WWII.

After recovering in Kempsey Hospital Jim continued to serve Small Ships Section until November 1946, as a crewmember of *C W PASLEY*. She steamed to the Phillipines and was abandoned during a typhoon in the China sea. Don Campbell was also a crew member of *C W PASLEY* at this time. She was recovered and the crew spent time in Japan.

The Veteran contribution was delivered Jim Gadd who paid tribute to his shipmates, "Some were young and fit. Others were old, or disabled. They were Aussies, Yanks, New Zealanders, Aborigines, and men from all over the world. They were great crew members, and good shipmates." Jim also recalled the day that he asked his parents for permission to go to sea, and told a short story about crew discipline on *RMS QUEEN ELIZABETH*.

CAPT Bisset had issued explicit orders that all port-holes remain closed. Upon returning to Sydney Harbour it was Jim's turn to clean the musty cabin and anticipating no emergencies he asked for the port-hole key. Fresh air had quite an effect on other crew members who followed Jim's lead and opened port-holes in their own cabins. Trouble followed and Jim admitted to opening the port-hole in his own cabin, however the other crew members did not

however the other crew members did not admit to opening the port-holes in their cabins. The following morning when the Skipper had assembled the troublemakers, they were fined one by one, until at last it was Jim's turn. "You can go Gadd," was the Skipper's directive, and Jim reflected, "I'd learned to tell the truth, but the other boys didn't."



Jim Gadd addresses the crowd at South West

Sister Mary accompanied Jim and Harry while they unveiled the plaques, then offered a brief reflection on the nature of relationships. Sing Australia – South West Rocks led us in singing the hymn Eternal Father while Sister Mary blessed the plaques.



Jim Gadd and Harry Cruger after unveiling the plaques

L.S. Shamus Phillips signalled 'eight-bells' and R.A.N. Veteran Bill Gadd delivered the Naval Ode. After Reveille, the wreath laying ceremony commenced.

Guests of Honour Harry and Jim laid a wreath in memory of mariners lost during WWII, followed by Kempsey Shire Mayor Liz Campbell, Merchant Navy Association Patron Phyllis Solomon, Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch Secretary Merrill Barker, South West Rocks RSL sub-Branch President Alex Robinson, U.S. Army Small Ships Association Treasurer Vernon Kite, Nambucca Valley Naval & Mariners Association Secretary John Kent and Maritime Museum South West Rocks President Bill Jackson.



Those assembled were led by Sing Australia –South West Rocks, and proudly sang the Australian National Anthem, followed by benediction offered by Sister Mary.

Thanks are due to all the families, friends and community members who attended the Australian Merchant Navy & U.S. Army Small Ships Section Memorial Service, especially those who travelled long distances to be there. Sincere thanks are also due to several organisations and their representatives for their invaluable support, including Stella Maris - Apostleship of the Sea; The Merchant Navy Association; Kempsey Shire Council; Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch (NSW); Nambucca RSL sub-Branch; Nambucca Valley Naval & Mariners Association; South West Rocks Maritime Precinct Committee; Frank Partridge V.C. Military Museum; and Maritime Museum South West Rocks.

Certificates of Appreciation endorsed by Association President Frank Finch O.A.M. were presented to three organisations whose overwhelming support was instrumental in making the event a success. The members of South West Rocks RSL sub-Branch, Sing Australia-South West Rocks and *TS CULGOA* Australian Naval Cadets enthusiastically participated in support of our members, and we are very grateful. The unanticipated level of support for this event is a reflection of very healthy community organisations on the mid North Coast. The region is truly a paradise of which we can all be proud. Thanks are also due to the South West Rocks Country Club for supporting our post-service BBQ, and local sub-Branch member Tony Knutson for doing the cooking!



Jim Gadd surrounded by daughter Barbara, niece Susan, brother George, son Bill and daughter Pam.

Life of a Seafarer

By Bill MacGinnes (1929 - 2014)

Starting out in the Ketches continued from last edition



The Ketch 'Capella' sailing off Thevenard

John and I slept in a small dingy fo'castle; this was for'd in the vessel. Because the bulkhead was only made of ply wood there was always a constant smell of rotting grain coming from the bilge. A person had to have a very strong stomach to put up with this constant odour.

We made the fo'castle as comfortable and homely as possible. Mum gave us a couple of pillow slips to cover the old grimy pillows and a sheet to cover the mattress and also a blanket each.

The day I gave up trying to keep the fo'castle tidy and liveable was when Rocco pulled down the bulkhead and pushed our bunks into the ships side. His intention was to fill the quarters up with bags of grain. I was never short of a few words so I asked him what his caper was and where was we to sleep that night. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible on the wooden deck of his cabin. Whoever came off watch jumped into the make shift bunk that had just been vacated. This was better than the skipper's first suggestion of sleeping on top of the deck cargo.

John and I shared the steering between us most of the time. The skipper would take the wheel going up and down the river while we were both handling the sails.

On one trip we were taking a short cut across the North bank at the Outer Harbour. The wind was blowing too hard to tack through the river entrance; it was a very strong South Wester with plenty of teeth in it. We were either heading for Ardrossan or Pine Point. On clearing the bank the ketch was brought up into the wind and the sails reefed down carrying only a reefed Main sail and Mizzen sail. When I went for'd to the fo'castle I found it awash, I could see daylight through the hold planking where the caulking had been dislodged from between the planking.

As the ketch buried her bow into the sea the water would shoot up into the fo'ç's'le. An attempt was made to solve the problem by pushing some Hessian from where the caulking had dislodged

Life of a Seafarer

but to no avail. Rocco decided to come about before he lost the ketch. He beached her near where the container terminal now stands at the Outer harbour.

On pumping the vessel dry we steamed up the river running her aground on the beach outside of the Birkenhead Hotel. To me this was the straw that broke the camels' back. First of all having been turfed out of ones bunk on the previous trip to make way for a few more bags of grain to be loaded, this latest problem was enough for me. The leak was bad enough that the ketch had to be slipped at and on the Central Slipway.

I bade farewell once we were on the central slipway to have carried out the hull repairs. It took Rocco some time to find a replacement for me, brother John stayed on for a spell longer working the ketch with the skipper before joining the Schooner Milleeta.

"Adonis" 53 gross registered tons was my next job having joined her immediately after leaving the slipway from Active. In the 1910's a ketch race was held off of Semaphore. The ultimate prize for winning the race was a copper rooster to be displayed from the main topmast. The ketch that won the race was classed as the fastest ketch under sail. Adonis displayed the prize proudly from her main topmast.

The name of Heritage among the ketch skippers was as old as some of the ketches. I sailed with two Heritage brothers Gordon and Ron. Gordon was the skipper, Ron was the other deck hand, they were both good chaps to sail with. The three of us kept a steering watch. I did the cooking and helped with the loading and discharging of the cargo besides other duties expected of a ketch hand.

When we were loading I handled the wheat barley or salt as it came down the chute from the wharf. The bag was turned and dropped onto the stack in the hold to be then carried away and stowed by Gordon and Ron.

I was too light in build to go down into the hold of the ketch and carry wheat on my shoulder, some of the grain would weigh 190 to 200 pounds especially wheat. The hard work performed by ketch hands was beginning to show in my body build. I was developing a good pair of shoulders with a strong chest. The time was fast approaching when I would be required to lump grain. What kept me on deck passing down the bags was, I had to also attend to firing the stove and keeping my eye on what I had cooking for the meals.

Adonis was a deep draft vessel, so we mainly loaded in deep draft ports where there was a reasonable amount of water. There were occasions that we loaded salt at Port Price, or grain at Pine Point, both of these ports had to be worked on the tide. On one occasion we loaded at Pine Point berthing on the Eastern end of the T shaped wharf. Most ketch skippers avoided this end of the wharf; they mainly berthed on the Northern and Southern side.

We were loading grain as the tide was moving towards slack water. At slack water the ketch was left practically high and dry with very little water beneath us. Adonis opened up a couple of hull planks wetting some of the grain that was already in the hold. The damage was far more noticeable nearing the end of the discharge at Port Adelaide when coming to the bottom bags of the stow.

Leaving Port Price on another occasion were the ketches Mary, Amphibious and Adonis, it was first home best dressed for a steamer discharge. The Mary required very little water, and the Amphibious was very flat bottomed and also needed very little water to negotiate the Port Price creek.

Life of a Seafarer



The Ketch Adonis

Alby Krouse was the skipper of Mary and Jack Tulloch with Amphibious was first away. Adonis had to wait for another thirty minutes to get the required draft to navigate the creek. We could steam and out sail both ketches once we were under way with the wind in our favour.

We left the wharf and cleared the creek but the skipper's enthusiasm to catch the other two ketches. When approaching the Bird Spit pole the skipper brought the ketch about too soon, before we knew it we were aground. In the distance were the other two ketches in full flight and there was Adonis hard and fast on the bird bank. This miscalculation and misfortune had us waiting until the next high tide twelve hours later before floating free.

We sure lost that race but I dare say the skipper would never make the same mistake twice if he ever had to visit the port of Price again. I enjoyed my time as a crew member of Adonis sailing with Gordon Heritage. I said farewell to the ketches, I had the urge to join the Seamen's Union of Australia and sail on the Australian coast and beyond.

Having signed off of Adonis I bided my time working as a Ship's Painter and Dockers working on board the Dutch ship 'Thedens'. The vessel was undergoing a refit along with two other Dutch ships 'Van Heutze' and 'Karsic'. The three ships had come down from the Pacific islands. The 'Thedens' was alongside and at A berth Birkenhead, and 'Van Heutze' and 'Karsic' were across the river at No1 Berth.

My job was to keep the water boiling in a copper out on the wharf. This water was for making tea at 'smoko' and lunch times, also for washing come knock off time. I also worked chipping anchor cables and cleaning and painting hold gaining as much knowledge as I could about ships.

Clausen who were boat builders at Port Adelaide employed the Painter's and Dockers working the 'Thedens'. Having worked a few weeks for Clausen the day came when their truck driver told me that the Shipping Master was seeking a Deck Boy to join the Adelaide Company vessel S.S. Aroona.

This steamer was built at Glasgow by W. Beard more & Sons as War Typhoon. Purchased by the Adelaide Steamship Company in 1921 and renamed 'Aroona'. With a heart that was full of hope I stoked the fire under the copper then headed for the Shipping Office as fast as my legs could pedal my old push bike. I wanted that job for I only had a couple of months to go to complete my deck Boys time, then I would be eligible to sail as Ordinary Seaman. This was the end of my days sailing on the ketches out of Adelaide.

LEST WE FORGET

Merchant Navy Day falls on 3 September each year, the anniversary of the sinking of the first British merchant vessel in 1939 during the Second World War.

Australian service personnel and civilians have served on merchant vessels in times of war and conflict for more than a century, transporting service personnel, supplies and equipment across dangerous seas and oceans.

Merchant vessels were often defenceless and their work was perilous with the constant threat of attack from enemy submarines, surface raiders, aircraft and mines.

Earlier this year, Australia commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Atlantic, possibly the most well-known battle involving merchant mariners.

The battle lasted almost the entire duration of the Second World War and was fought over thousands of miles across the war's most dangerous shipping lanes.

More than 3000 British and Allied ships were sunk and some 30,000 Allied and merchant mariners died during the Battle of Atlantic.

These were extraordinarily brave sailors, doing a job that had to be done under some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

While the exact figure will never be known, the Australian War Memorial lists the names of more than 800 merchant mariners who have died in all wars on its Commemorative Roll.

Thank you for your service. Lest we forget.

Darren Chester MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs





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