

MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

Newsletter of the Merchant Navy Association and the
Merchant Navy Chapter of Forestville RSL sub-Branch NSW

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TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA



Seasons Greetings to All

Canberra MN weekend 2025

For the 35th commemoration service it was a gloriously warm and sunny day, though windy. Without counting, I imagine there'd have been a hundred participants seated and eight more directly involved, with four Sea Scouts delivering the wreaths to those designated to lay them.

The previous evening for dinner, there were twenty-eight guests and the very short address was delivered by Capt Chris (Kit) Rynd, speaking on the need to repetitively tell the Merchant Navy story so that it is not lost as age overtakes experience and memory.

Sean Barrett was the Master of Ceremonies who did a beautiful job.

Everything went well, but of course there have to be glitches so that we have stories to tell next time we meet. The first glitch was that Sr Mary's room had not been booked. In panic for all concerned, the resolution was that she was awarded the only remaining vacant room in the motel which was a suite! She was delighted and thus had a separate room in which to entertain after we got evicted from the main dining room that night.

That story prompted the retelling of Tom and Joan Curry's 2024 glitch in which they had driven from Mittagong for the service on Sunday and were unable to enter the Kings Park where the service is held. The roads were blocked by barriers too heavy for the WW2 veteran to move and no-one was there to speak to, no mobile phone access, so eventually Tom and Joan turned back and returned to Mittagong disappointed.

Over the years, different methods of dispensing after-service-refreshments have been used. As for the last couple of years, the Garden City Hotel, where we had our dinner-bed-and-breakfast, had been organised for Light Refreshments. So we thought!

With deep embarrassment Sean rang the neighbouring German Club and found that we could get refreshed at their bar and servery before setting off homeward.

At our various lunch tables, we reviewed the morning's event – the highlights and any problems. It had been announced that unfortunately Ms Finola McMahon had been unwell enough to feel obliged to stay home. Therefore, we had no strong voice to lead the singing. Sr Mary and Sean took the role jointly and satisfactorily, but (I will get my hearing aids re-calibrated) I told them I'd had difficulty hearing even the two voices because of the wind carrying the sound sideways rather than into the microphone.

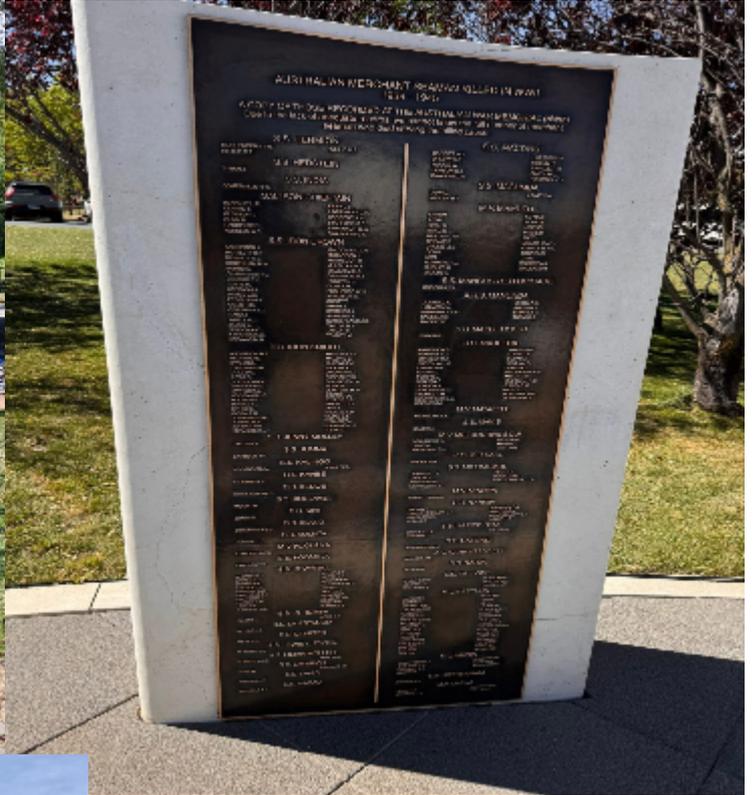
In future. Not only would that raise the volume of voices, but would encourage

Canberra MN weekend 2025

Sean then suggested he was considering adding a choir of school children in future. Not only would that raise the volume of voices, but would encourage and spread the knowledge of the value of Merchant Navy, and the roles played by them, amongst younger generations now and into the future (in a similar way to the Address at the September 3rd Mosman Service, which is shared each year by the two – male and female - Mosman High School Captains). We agreed with Sean that was an excellent idea. ***Elizabeth Sandeman- Gay (Secretary, Merchant Navy Association).***



Canberra MN weekend 2025



Many thanks to Michelle Myers (MUA) and others unknown for providing photos of the event.

ANGUS DONALD CAPORN

PART 2

A PERSONAL RECORD OF SERVICE IN THE MERCHANT NAVY



What to do back in civvy street. I could not face going back to complete my apprenticeship in the railways so my immediate thoughts were to go to sea in the merchant marine. I made the necessary queries as to how to go about this, then conducted the usual requirements of medical and eyesight and becoming a member of the Seamen's Union of Australia before joining my first the *SSTime* [Howard Smith Limited] as ordinary seaman as only part of my navy sea-time was recognised in the merchant marine. This was a whole new world to me. I shared a two-berth cabin with another of the crew [an able seaman]; I had a bunk with a rubber mattress rather than a hammock; a wash basin with running hot and cold water; fresh bed linen changed weekly; a mess room with a refrigerator with lots of good food including fresh bread, and fruit and milk. Compared to what I was used to in the Navy I thought I was in Buckingham Palace. Being a coal burning ship its best speed [with good coal and sober engine-room firemen and trimmers] was 9 to 10 knots depending on the prevailing weather.

This being the late 40's there were plenty of ships trading on the Australian coast and gaining a position was easy especially once I had completed my 12 months sea-time as ordinary seaman and qualified to sail as an Abel Seaman. I sailed on several coastal ships until joining an American built wartime oil tanker, sailing first to Abadan in the Persian

Gulf for three voyages then down to South Africa. Later I joined a British freighter which took me around the world via the Panama Canal outward and the Suez Canal homeward.

Over time I got to know which coastal ships were good and those that were bad and which regular runs were better or worse and those that simply tramped making those years from 1946 to 1951 happy years.

In late 1950 I joined as AB the Australian coastal passenger ship TSMV Manunda [Adelaide Steamship Company]. The "Manunda" had been a hospital ship in WW2 and was in Darwin when the Japanese launched their first air raid on the city, shortly after the bombing of the American Pearl Harbour naval base. It was on this ship that the first thoughts of obtaining officer status were hatched, at the prompting of one of the deck officers who must have seen something in me, who suggested that I should consider study towards a Certificate of Competency. He was generous in his encouragement and provided me with the guidance I needed such as the requirement of having first completed four years approved and recognised sea-time before enrolling in a nautical college. At first I was reluctant as I was concerned that I would have difficulty having only attended school to sub-junior level. But I stood firm with myself and made the decision which was to irrevocably change my future life from being a happy go lucky seaman to being a responsible ships officer.

I remained on the "Manunda" and completed the required four years qualifying sea-time before paying off. At the time there were two nautical schools in Sydney both in competition with each other. It appeared to me that both were essentially the same as they both offered a mixture of levels of Certificates of Competency from Coast Trade certificates to the full range of Foreign Going certificates being taught as one group with only one lecturer, a master mariner, teaching across all levels of certificates to a mixture of students in the same class. This seemed rather cumbersome to me and I decided to go to London as I had read about several highly regarded nautical colleges in the UK. I first entertained the idea of working my passage but ended up booking a berth on a P&O liner sharing a six-berth cabin for £96 one way. The first morning out of Sydney I met two sisters who were also travelling to London. Four years later one of the sisters, Dorothy, became my wife. The voyage took six weeks and three days as the vessel [MV Mooltan] had a cruising speed of 15/16 knots, calling at nine ports en-route.

Before departing from Australia I had written to a girl I had met in 1948 who was now working in Australia House in London telling her of my plans and seeking her assistance. While the vessel was in Colombo

en-route I received a reply from her telling me that I was booked into the King Edward VII nautical college located in the East End of London. Arriving in the UK at the port of Tilbury it was a boat train to London where Dorothy and her sister departed company, them to tour and myself to 'Teddy's as the college was affectionately known.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Hospital Ship "Manunda" in wartime livery at Madang

All the expert Master Mariners were there to drive the knowledge into me and each time I thought about it I felt like I was the person on the limb of a tree sawing it off between myself and the trunk! It must have been desperation that drove me to continue (*or the memory of the Roseville Technical School Teachers, or the 10/- per hour that my mother paid for me to have private tuition although she could ill afford the money*) but with time now spent mastering the complexities of trigonometry, stability, ship construction, coastal and astro navigation, seamanship, cargo work, meteorology, signaling, buoyage and the International Rules for Preventing Collision at Sea I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. An added assistance was provided by the northern summer when the college closed for a three-week summer vacation. I took this time to link up with a fellow British student who arranged a job for both of us as deckhands on a 60-foot private motor yacht [*no pay but keep*]. We joined at Weymouth and cruised

to Cherbourg for ten days then down to St Peter Port in the Channel Isles where we left and returned to London and back to college.

At the end of the course I sat for the final exams but failed the chart work subject which meant I had to repeat all the written exams again [if you failed one paper you failed the lot]. On re-sit I passed all papers and the final orals examination and received the Certificate of Competency as 2nd Mate Foreign-Going. A great achievement considering my background.

I considered all of the shipping companies but for financial reasons I targeted the two main British companies that operated out of Hong Kong. They were not popular with British Officers as they only sailed in Eastern waters but as an inducement they offered higher rates of pay and this won the day for me. I applied to the Indo China Steam Navigation company and was offered a flight to Hong Kong to work on vessels on the China coast or a position as 4th officer on a brand-new cargo freighter almost completed in Belfast. An easy decision. A new ship and a new Certificate of Competency it was first off to the Southampton School of Navigation at Warsash to complete a course in Radar and Gyro then back to London to do a Merchant Navy Defence course onboard an RN Frigate moored on the Thames.

I arrived in Belfast and began my new life as 3rd Officer. What a change from being an AB. A Chinese crew with a Chinese steward shared by the 4th officer and me. He was most offended when I started doing my own washing and shining my own shoes so I had to change my seamen's ways and adopt the standards of an officer. I often wonder what the ships Master [Captain Fraser] thoughts were as to my instant promotion from a deck seaman to the bridge of an expensive modern cargo freighter but after an initial 'nursing' while at sea he left me to it.

On completion of sea trials and the official handover we moved to a cargo berth, loaded, and sailed for our next destination Sydney via the Panama Canal arriving late January 1952. I had a joyful reunion with my father and aunt who I had not seen since they farewelled me in 1951. More importantly my girlfriend Dorothy came onboard and our romance continued. The vessel was on a trading run from Australia to ports in Japan and then Hong Kong and back to Australia. As I was anxious to get my next Certificate of Competency [1st Mate FG] I remained on this ship for 18 months and 3 days without taking any leave or time off. With my qualifying sea time completed I paid off in Brisbane along with the ships Master, he to accept a position as a Torres Strait Pilot and me to return to the UK for my Chief Mates.

I travelled back to London as a passenger of the P&O liner "Otranto" and enrolled in the Southampton School of Navigation in Warsash. Situated on Southampton Waters I could see from my room the constant stream of vessels of all sizes and nationalities sail past. After four months of intensive study I was successful in passing all written and oral exams for my 1st Mate Foreign-Going [FG] Certificate of Competency. Having had to pay my way to London on the 'Otranto,' my college tuition fees and my accommodation plus living expenses I was short of funds. I approached the Marine Superintendent to get back to sea as quickly as possible. He said I was to join my next ship in Hong Kong and I would not be on pay until then. This came as a shock but it was what it was so I booked a ticket and flew to HK. It was the most wonderful journey leaving London Monday night and arriving HK Friday afternoon with intermediate stops in Frankfurt, Rome, Nicosia, Beirut, Damascus, Basra, Karachi, and Colombo where we over-nighted at a five-star hotel [a suite of rooms to myself]. Departed the next morning for Singapore and another overnight stay this time at the Raffles Hotel and again a suite of rooms to myself. Off again the next day but as there was a typhoon hanging around we diverted for a stop in Saigon for extra fuel before finally arriving in HK where I was met and received my appointment to the "Hang Sang" a log carrier vessel.

A Hong Kong crew and as 2nd mate I was also the ships medical officer. The voyage was to Borneo for a load of logs for Japan. On arrival in Japan I was in two minds whether to stay or leave and return home to reunite with my family. However the company had the last say and appointed me to the "Lok Sang" for a voyage to Calcutta with cargo and deck passengers. As we were carrying deck passengers (Chinese) we had anti-piracy precautions in place with the main accommodation separated from the deck passengers by steel doors and barbed wire. We also had White Russian guards on duty at all times armed with double barrel repeating shot guns. We, the officers also had access to armed sub-machine guns. On sailing from HK we had machine gun practice firing at empty beer bottles that our ships quartermaster [seaman rating] threw over the side. We blazed away as a show of strength but nothing more. We were also required to send a 2 hourly radio message to the RN in HK giving our position relative to a square grid pattern on our chart. In this way if the RN did not receive this radio contact they would send a duty destroyer to investigate. Our ports of call were Bangkok, Singapore, Port Swettenham, Penang,

and Calcutta then return. On return to HK I had made up my mind to pay off and return home. I sent in my resignation and this time the company accepted it. The company paid my air fare back to Sydney. After spending a few days with my father I went job seeking. The first company I tried had no vacancies but I had better results with the second company the Australian Shipping Board [ASB] (later to become the Australian National Line). My first appointment was as 3rd Officer on the coastal freighter "*River Fitzroy*". I held this position for about three weeks before being transferred to the "*River Glenelg*" as 2nd Officer.

At that time there was a lot of talk about the Australian Government selling the shipping line (ASB was Government owned and operated). With this in mind and the possibility of becoming unemployed along with many other officers who would also become redundant I decided to jump before I was pushed and get myself another more established company. I paid off and approached the well-known Melbourne company McIlwraith McEachern and was appointed as 2nd Officer on the SS "*Kooralya*" a coal burning standard freighter.



Australian War Memorial

303855

I had been on this vessel a few months when in 1954 while alongside in Melbourne the chief officer came back from a visit to head office with a message from the company Marine Superintendent wanting to know if I was interested in joining their passenger vessel TSMV "*Kanimbla*" as

relieving 4th officer and if so to make my way up to the office to see him. I was down the gangway and practically ran to the office as passenger ships especially the "*Kanimbla*" was considered a top job with higher wages, a regular run and lots of overtime. With a speed of 15/16 knots with eight trips to Fremantle in summer and four to Cairns in winter this was what it was all about. Add to that the 8-12 navigation watch and responsible for the maintenance of the ships emergency and safety equipment [lifeboats and firefighting] I was settled in for life. I soon became the permanent 4th officer and later rose through the ranks to chief officer [later in my story].

I was still seeing Dorothy [from the "*Mooltan*"] and in 1955 I thought the future looked secure so I proposed marriage and she accepted. But first I had to go to Cowra to meet her parents and ask permission. All went well and I was accepted into the family. We arranged a date for marriage to fit in with the terminating in Sydney of the ships northern schedule voyages to Cairns and dry docking. We arrived at the berth in Darling Harbour at 0700 on August 19th, was on cargo duty during the AM, corrected some navigation charts until 1200 then scrubbed up and changed into my latest uniform and with the ships 2nd mate as my 'best man' we made our way up to St Stephens Church in Macquarie Street to meet Dorothy at the alter at 1600 for the marriage ceremony. The ship (*Kanimbla*) was in Sydney for all of the following week and I was on leave until the Friday when I had to rejoin for the western schedule.



TSMV Kanimbla was Australia's most beautiful and luxurious liner
The image above is a copy taken from an original painting that hung in the Chief Officer's dayroom.
What happened to the original is not known. If anyone has any info we would love to hear.

To obtain my next Certificate of Competency (Master Foreign Going) I required a further two years qualifying sea-time. I managed to complete this by mid-1956 and rather than head back to the UK I enrolled in the Sydney nautical school which at that time had been absorbed into the Department of Technical Education [now TAFE... Technical and Further Education]. At the end of the course [3 months] I passed all written and orals examinations. Now a qualified Master FG I was immediately appointed 2nd Officer on the *Kanimbla* now being responsible for the navigation. Coastal navigation was straight forward enough but when crossing the Great Australian Bight and out of sight of coastal features it was necessary to use astro navigation sights to obtain a position. This meant using the sextant to obtain sights from the sun and stars and then manipulating the appropriate Trigonometry Tables, Nautical Almanac, Chronometer and Logarithms to arrive at latitude and longitude. While a simple technique (taking a sextant sight of sun/stars) when on a stable platform with clear sky and horizon it was somewhat more intense when on a moving ship and when the sky is overcast. But it is what we were trained for and reinforces the meaning of the value of a Certificate of Competency FG.

In 1958 my navigation responsibilities became more time consuming and stressful when we were advised that the ship [*Kanimbla*] would be doing two overseas voyages to the ports of Yokohama & Kobe in Japan, Hong Kong in China and Rabaul and Madang in New Guinea then back to Sydney. It was my responsibility to put the voyage together [navigation wise... *now called Passage Planning*] involving ordering the Folio's of navigation charts with the latest corrections covering the whole voyage, plotting the courses onto the navigation charts, placing the navigation charts in their Folios in the order of use, gathering all the required nautical publications for the whole voyage [Tide Tables, Admiralty List of Lights and Radio Signals and various others]. This meant I would spend hours in the chartroom in each port going over the Passage Plan checking and rechecking to ensure that nothing had been overlooked.

On completion of our first voyage it gave me a great deal of satisfaction and the following cruises were less stressful as all the hard work had been done on the first voyage. But there was still no room for complacency as situations at sea and in port can suddenly appear making a review of some parts of the plan necessary. AS it so happened on our first cruise we ran foul of a typhoon while along-side the berth in Yokohama. The Port Captain ordered all ships alongside to evacuate

the port and move out to an anchorage in Tokyo Bay. We anchored but with the wind and sea the ship was unable to hold and started to 'drag the anchor.' With the second anchor down the ship still dragged so we took independent action to heave up both anchors and using the engines and steering gear we cleared away from the other 60 vessels in a similar situation. It was quite a sleepless night with the Master and all four deck officers on the bridge assisting in the navigation and relaying information to the Master. We also left a lot of passengers ashore who had gone on excursions and we had no way of tracking them or rounding them up before having to make the emergency departure from the port so they had to be accommodated in hotels through our ships agency. By morning we were able to move back into the port and berth alongside to pick up our relieved passengers and then continue the cruise. We sustained some superficial damage but nothing serious. This was my 3rd encounter with a typhoon and one I would never care to repeat.

Early in 1960 with air travel becoming more popular it was having an effect on cruise ships across the world resulting in the company deciding to withdraw from the cruise business and sold the ship to Japanese ship breakers for scrap. I was transferred to a small cargo ship as chief officer with no regular ports of call and not knowing when I would see my wife and daughter. While aware that I was now close to promotion as Master and my own command I decided to put that aside in preference to having more opportunity to see my wife and daughter Anne regularly so I resigned and joined the *MV Malekula* [Burns Philp Company] as 2nd Officer. This ship was trading from Sydney, around various ports in New Guinea and back to Sydney on a regular schedule. On return after the first trip I was transferred to another ship of the company [*MV Malaita*] on the same trading schedule but where the *Malekula* was mostly cargo with up to 12 passengers the *Malaita* was larger and carried 50 passengers. Once again I was back to 2nd Officer. The Master was a well-known identity on that run. Later while back in Sydney I heard that the P&O stevedoring company were looking for an assistant wharf manager. I applied and in due course I was appointed and my sea going career came to an end but I was still in the maritime industry as it was all I knew and enjoyed.

Although the position was technically 9 to 5 as often as not I would be called out to some cargo ship that was experiencing an issue with the loading or discharge (this was pre containerisation) usually about 3 am and often of weekends. But it came with the job so I accepted it for what it was. The big container revolution came in the early part of 1967 so

the whole concept of management was changing with odd and broken hours and not enough time to myself and my family so I resigned my position with P&O and joined the Maritime Services Board initially as Master on their general- purpose firefighting tugs then as Master on their Pilot Vessel and eventually Senior Master.

In 1981 having now reached the age of 55 I decided that after all of my time in the seagoing industry taking me away from my wife and daughter then the long and broken hours with P&O followed by shift work in the MSB especially on the Pilot Boat it was time to get my priorities straight and to put my wife and daughter ahead of everything else so without any pressure and completely my own decision I took early retirement. It was the best decision I could have made as Dorothy had undergone major surgery in 1971 and again in 1981 with six months in hospital in 1994, several times in 1995 and sadly passed away in early 1996. We had 12 wonderful years together including a world trip in 1990.

As every story has a beginning so must it have and end. I believe I have had a fascinating life with wartime service in the RAN, academic achievements gaining Certificates of Competency, seagoing service in the Merchant Marine, service in the shoreside maritime industry... it has been a fascinating life.

Post War service:

The Australian Government paid for a comprehensive refit of the war weary MS Kanimbla and having been all spruced up and once again looking absolutely splendid and ready for service she was officially returned to McIlwraith McEachern Ltd on December 13, 1950.

There had been a good number of improvements made, but also there had been a change of passenger capacities, which were now; 231 First Class and 125 Second Class for Coastal Liner services and 371 One Class for Cruises. Also, MS Kanimbla was now registered as being 11,004 GRT.



TSMV Kanimbla

10,985-tons

A popular postcard of McIlwraith McEachern flagship MV Kanimbla in Sydney Harbour

During one of her coastal voyages I December 1960, Kanimbla ran aground on a sandbank in Moreton Bay just out of Brisbane. She was soon refloated and taken to Brisbane where she was repaired.



**A WORKING LIFE IN THE
AUSTRALIAN MARITIME
INDUSTRY**

The intriguing story of
the career Neil Bevis will
continue in the Autumn
2026 edition.

THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

ROGER WILSON 18/11/2025

FREDERICK KRAUSETT 02/12//25

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN



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