

MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

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

Edition 24
Autumn 2021



TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA

Huddart Parker Ltd - War Service

1939 -1945



Throughout the war the Company's fleet of cargo vessels carried many thousands of tons of urgently needed supplies.

The demand for shipping space and the urgency of high priority cargo compelled the use of unusual methods and the adoption of any means to hasten the "turn around" in ports. All the ships were defensively armed and carried gun crews. With the entry of Japan into the war it became necessary for supplies to be transported to northern ports and to the islands. Incidents began to occur close to the Australian coast. No longer was the war something to read about as happening on the other side of the world; it was at our very doors. Ships were mined and sunk off Cape Schanck and Cape Otway, torpedoes from submarines were encountered between Melbourne and Sydney. Convoys were organised, and the ships moved from port to port under escort. Several of the Company's ships had narrow escapes, and fortunately there were no casualties.

The Commonwealth's war economy altered the flow of cargo between ports. With munitions factories in various states pouring out equipment, it became essential for war supplies, particularly raw materials, to be moved in large quantities, sometimes from unusual ports. Stowage problems had to be met when ships intended for bulk trade were forced to carry large quantities of small and fragile store, and at the same time handle hundreds of vehicles.

As the war in the far north developed and essential supplies were required immediately behind the battle zones, where means of transport were difficult, the problem of handling hundreds of thousands of packages, not exceeding 40 lbs. in weight, had to be overcome. Vehicles in large quantities, such as mobile workshops, Bren gun carriers, mobile kitchens, Bofors guns, ambulances, searchlights and generators, were regularly carried between main ports.

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While provision had to be made to cope with this traffic, the bulk cargo trade continued to be of great importance, and essential space for the requirements of the rapidly expanding munition establishments had to be catered for.

In order to synchronise departure times to fit in as economically as possible with convoy movements, the loading and discharging of the vessels proceeded round the clock wherever possible. This meant that much valuable and easily damaged cargo was frequently handled in the hours of darkness, which made checking and careful supervision more difficult. The military departments which were called on to arrange the transportation of these goods, rapidly acquired the necessary knowledge to effectively co-operate and worked harmoniously with the shipping interests in maintaining a regular flow to the wharves.

The extra demand on available tonnage had to be met, and although at times there were shortages and delays in many directions, the cargo fleet more than played its part.

The exigencies of the situation demanded the utmost despatch while vessels were in port, and labour shortages made it difficult to obtain the expeditious turn-round which was all important. It was agreed that when no other labour was available and urgent war supplies or important general cargo was held up, outside labour could be employed. Gangs were formed from the office staffs of various companies, and after working in the office all day, frequently worked on two or three nights per week, and on occasions all night, to discharge or load the ships. The figures show that these emergency gangs did remarkably good work.



On June 4th, 1942, "Barwon" was en-route, in ballast, from Melbourne to Port Kembla. She was in Lat. 38° 05' S, Long. 150° 14' E., about 35 miles S.S.E. of Gabo Island. The weather was overcast with a slight mist. There was no wind and a smooth sea. The time was 0531 hours, the Chief Officer, Mr. (later Captain) C. Rasmussen was officer of the watch. "Barwon" was proceeding alone. Mr. Rasmussen first noticed a strange vibration and dull rumbling sound under No 3 hatch. He turned to investigate this, when suddenly there was a violent explosion on the starboard side, just for'ard of abeam.

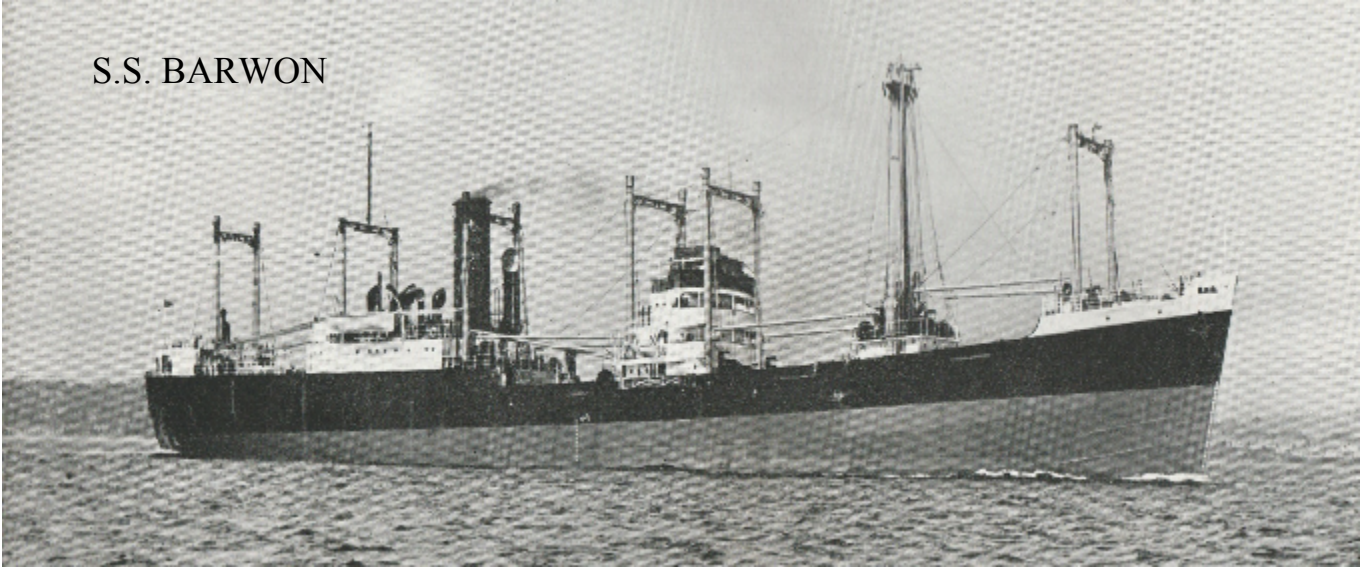
The Chief Officer's first thought was that they were being shelled, and he quickly altered course and ran to the westward, at the same time calling the Master, Captain N. F. Cook. The blast of the explosion shook the ship and two hatches fell into the empty No. 4 hold. On recovering these from the hold it was discovered that they had been struck by a jagged piece of steel, and this was later identified by the naval authorities as portion of the Japanese torpedo. Course was again altered to N.W. then to N.N.E., but no further attack was made, and nothing was seen of the submarine.

A member of the crew reported seeing the wake of the torpedo just before the explosion, and in altering course to turn the ship's stern to the supposed shellfire, the Chief Officer probably turned her directly at the enemy. If the latter was lying at periscope depth, as she probably would be to observe the effects of her attack, one can imagine the haste with

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which she dived on seeing a seemingly inoffensive merchantman turning to the attack. Possibly this saved "Barwon" from further torpedoes, as her rapid changes of course and poor light, would soon take her out of the enemy's range of vision.

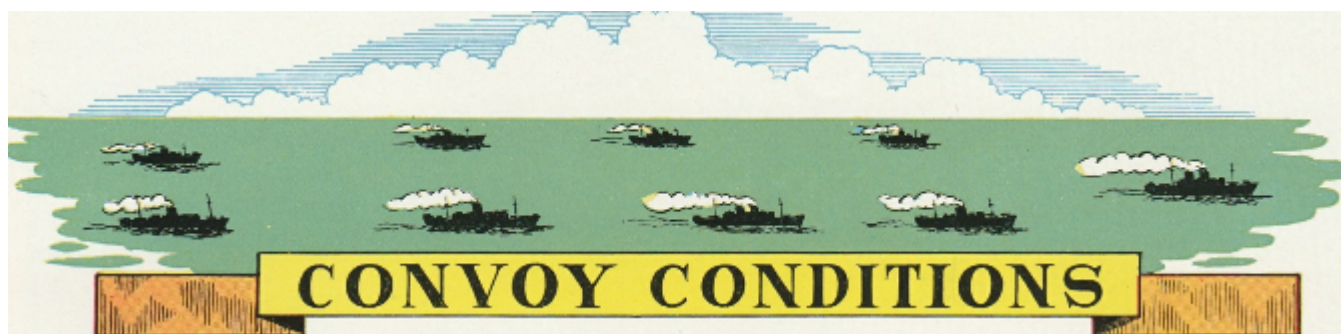
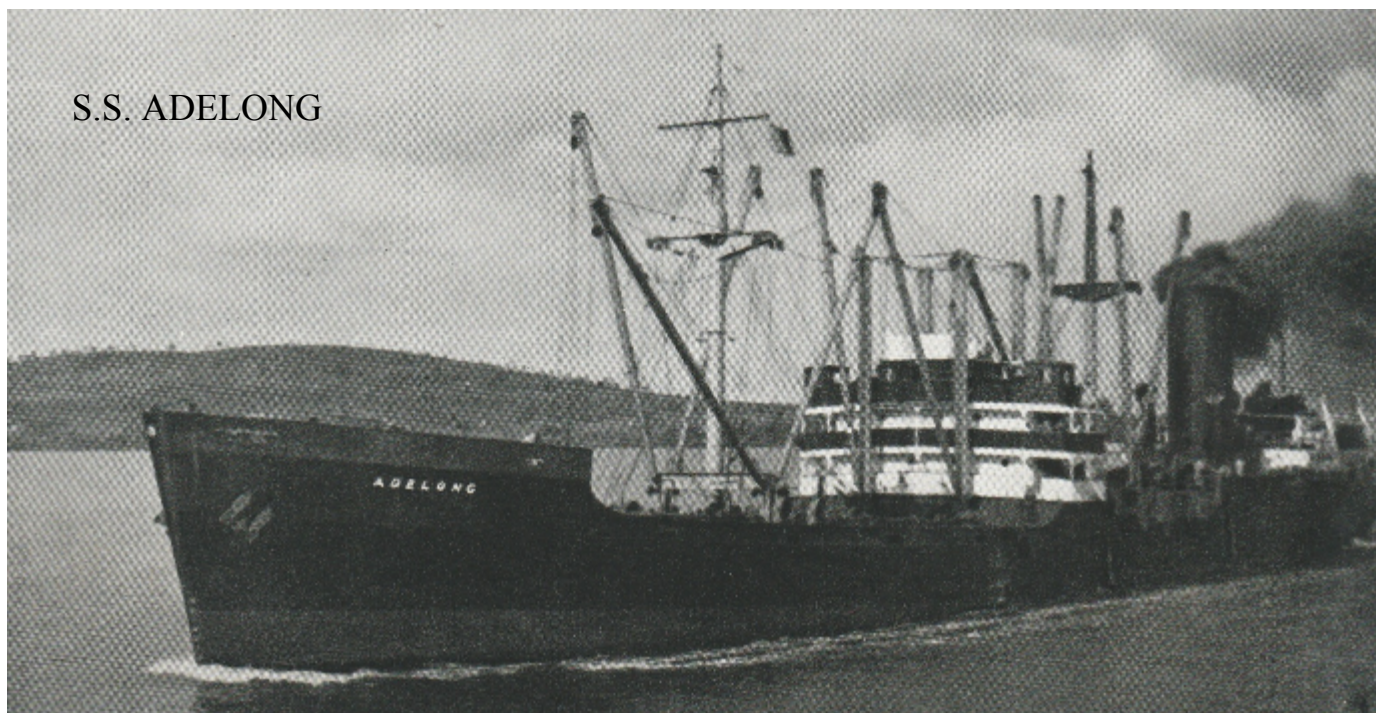
S.S. BARWON



Towards the end of April 1943, "Adelong" had a narrow escape whilst proceeding from Melbourne to Sydney. She was steaming in a convoy comprised of sixteen ships, which included a tanker. As was customary, the tanker was in the centre of the convoy. At 0430 hours the alarm bells were sounded, and the crew scrambled to action stations. Captain Paul Holthe hurried to the bridge, where he learned that the wake of a torpedo had been sighted. It had passed between one of Howard Smith's freighters and "Adelong" clearing the bow of the latter by not more than 50 feet. The impression gained by Captain Holthe was that the missile was a spent torpedo which had probably been intended for the tanker.

Some months later "Adelong" had another escape. She was proceeding in convoy to Newcastle when trouble developed in the engine room. On this occasion Captain Holthe was Vice-Commodore of the convoy, and he was naturally concerned when his ship began to lose speed and could not keep her station. The engineers worked desperately with a faulty pump which was retarding her progress, while the ship gradually fell further behind. Ultimately the defective pump was repaired and using all possible speed, "Adelong" gradually crept back into her station in the convoy. On arrival at Newcastle, the Master of one of the Broken Hill Pty. Vessels, which had been sailing in company, congratulated Captain Holthe on his vessel's escape. This was the first indication those onboard "Adelong" had of any untoward incident, so great had been their concern at the vessel losing speed. They were now informed that the wake of a torpedo had been observed and that it appeared to be making straight for "Adelong," but had just missed her, passing close astern.

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In World War I, when the menace of Germany's submarine warfare threatened Britain's lifelines, the convoy system was introduced. This ultimately provided the answer to the enemy's tactics, but in the initial stages there were many prejudices and natural antipathies to be overcome. The Masters of merchant ships, by instinct and training, tend to give other ships as wide a berth as possible, and the idea of steaming in company and keeping station was not readily accepted. Then again the wide variation of types and speeds of ships offered problems in the assembly and organising of the convoys. By the end of the war all these difficulties had been overcome, and when the necessity again arose, the experience gained enabled the convoy system to be introduced and to function quickly.

Convoy conditions, however, imposed an extra strain on the ship's Masters and Officers. The speed of the convoy was the speed of the slowest ship, and inferior bunker coal or poor work in the stokehold caused ships to drop back and lose position. A perusal of the log of the "Yarra" on a passage from Darwin to Cairns, disclosed passages like this: "Steamer astern unable to maintain station. Speed reduced to keep in touch." Then later, "Ship astern still erratic – usually in first hour of watch she will drop far astern and escort reduces speed until we are down to 3 knots. In night, whilst still going slow, overtaking escort, on one occasion getting ahead. Ordered back into station. The only way to do it was to take a round turn and come up between escort and slow ship." And so it went on. At night, in misty weather and sometimes in heavy seas, the ships did their best to keep stations. This meant constant vigilance and efficient reliable signalling to maintain that alert action that made convoy work effective.

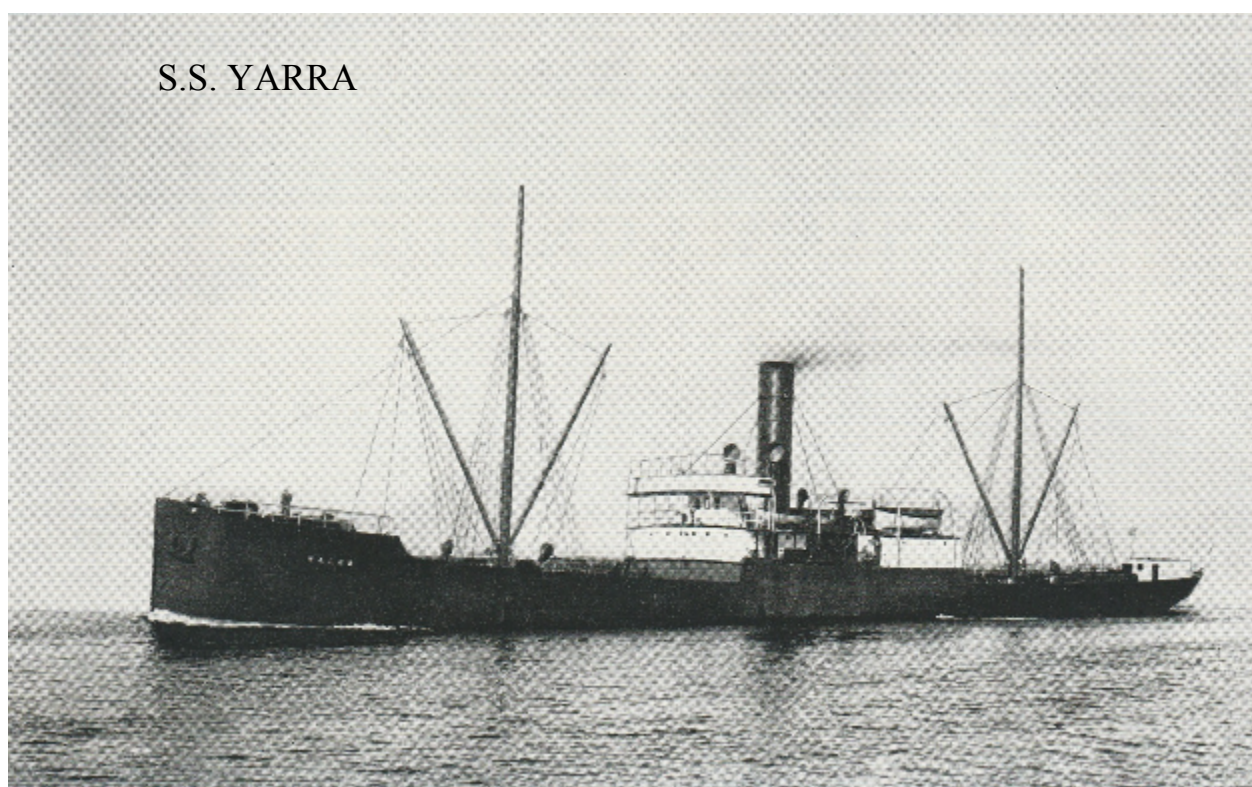
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“YARRA”

With her limited speed, and the fact that she was not a modern ship, “Yarra” might have been considered not the best ship for service conditions, and yet she put up a record of service that must awaken the admiration of those who know the circumstances of her activities. Urgently required coal and stores were transported through dangerous northern waters, and air raids came to be accepted as routine. She was lightly armed at first, but later carried a 12-pdr. Aft, two Oerlikons, four Hotchkiss machine-guns and two Vickers machine-guns. The ship’s log records target practice on many occasions, and “Yarra” could have given a good account of herself if attacked. A typical entry in the log, written whilst the ship was discharging at Darwin, reads thus:

“Sunday, May 2nd – Quiet and peaceful night. Sabbath Day observed. No Work being done. 10 a.m. Yellow warning from Fort Hill Signal Station. Crew to stations in engine-room and guns manned – commenced weigh anchor – Stand by below – water-tight doors shut – all fire hoses run. 10.8. Red warning – anchor aweigh – proceeded cruise close to Mid. Bank Spit (8minutes is good work). 51 bombers and fighters coming over. Plenty of A.A. fire from shore batteries and Spits. went up – bombs dropped near R.A.F strips and a few in harbour – crew behaved well. 10.45. All clear signal. 10.57. Anchored again in same place. Heard later the Spitfires brought down 13 enemy planes without loss.”

The tension under which officers and men went about their duties is obvious from a log entry dated May 10th, which reads: “Mod head sea and wind 6 a.m. Gun stations and extra lookouts. 9.55. Aircraft alert from corvette. Crew to stations, all hoses rigged. W.T. doors closed. 10.22. Aircraft friendly, all clear. 10.52. Cancel last signal, aircraft probably hostile. Crew to action stations. Hoses rigged, water-tight doors closed. 11.05. Corvette to convoy: Convoy attacked off Cape Stewart, 1 plane hit, no damage to ships; second attack in 24 hours. Keep good lookout. 12.41. Signal from corvette, aircraft approaching is friendly. 1.22. Crew dismissed.”



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The aircraft were not always friendly, as is shown in the following entries: “Mon. July 5: Light rain, overcast. 10.50. Action stations. Convoy closed up, W.T. doors closed. Hoses all going. Three enemy aircraft ahead – well up and coming our way – dropped bombs ahead and made off passing overhead with our escort on their tails. 11.10 a.m., All clear. Crew turned out fast and well.”

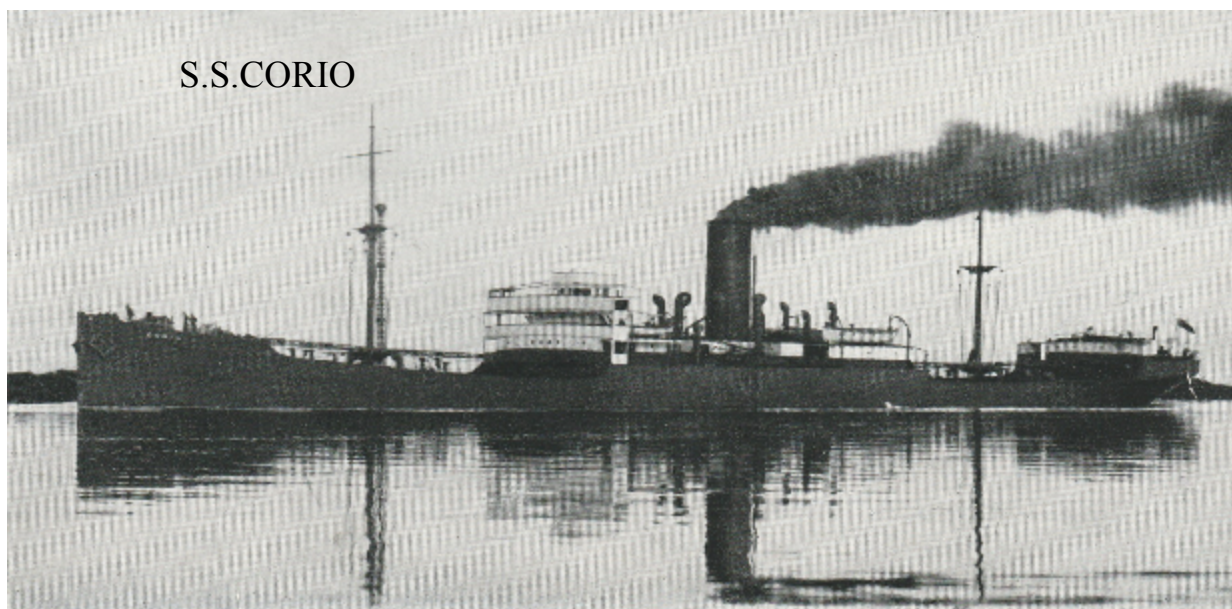
“Tuesday, July 6: Mod. Following sea – overcast. 11.10. Action stations – convoy closed up. Hands turned out fast, four enemy aircraft ahead about 7000 feet. Escort opened up with her pom-pom. Bombs dropped just ahead of escort. Enemy passed straight overhead, then turned and came back towards us, but must have sighted the Beaufighters of our escort as they cleared off.”

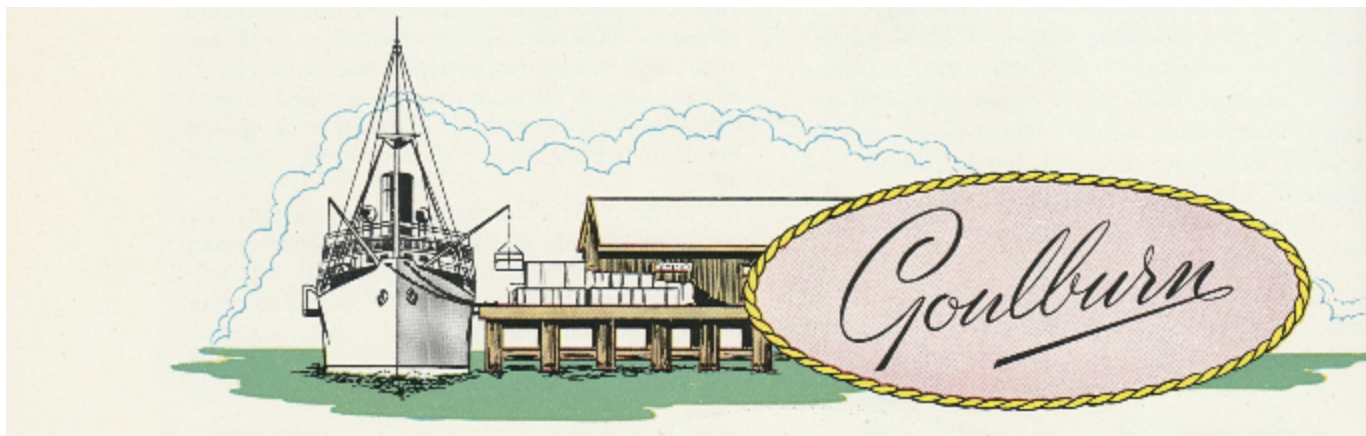
These extracts have been included as they are typical of the life of the Merchant Navy during the days when the enemy air strength was sufficient to menace the sea lines of communication to the northern battle areas.



As occasion demanded, “Corio” made several trips to Darwin and other northern ports. On one trip she loaded at Melbourne, taking 4500 tons of cargo for Darwin. This included 3000 drums of petrol for the R.A.A.F. This petrol was placed in No1 hold and special precautions were taken during loading. An insurance cover note for £100,000 had to be obtained and handed to the Melbourne Harbour Trust at Station Pier, Port Melbourne, before loading commenced. A military police guard surrounded the ship, and firefighting appliances were available throughout.

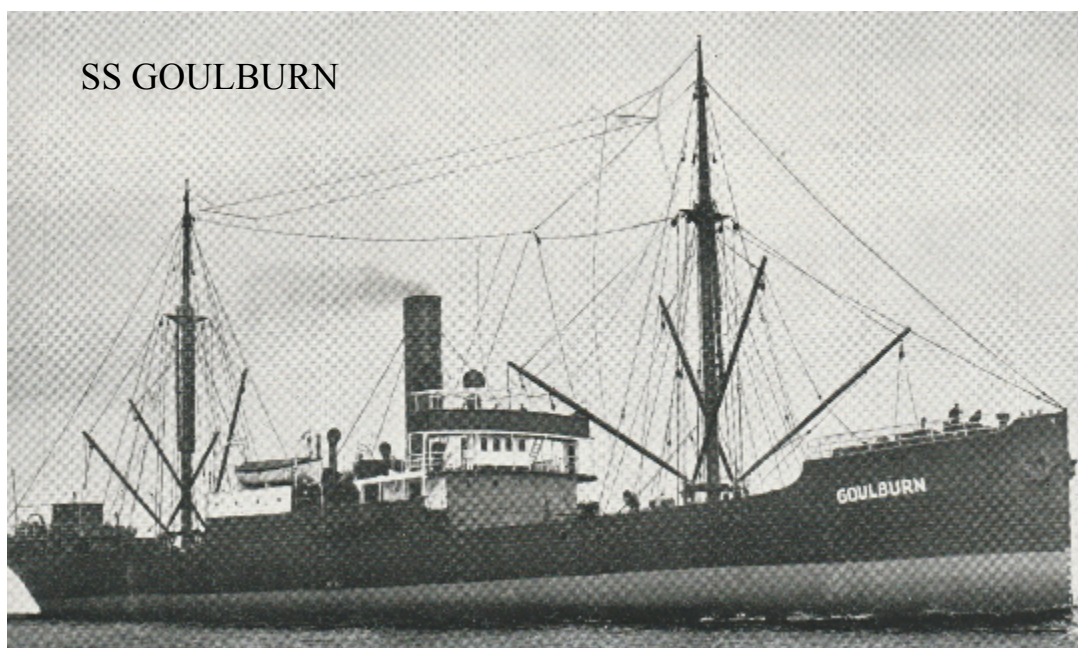
Whilst on passage from Rapid Bay to Port Kembla, “Corio” went ashore on a reef two miles west of Cape Banks, S.A. on February 26th, 1951, and became a total wreck.





“Goulburn” was fully employed throughout the war period, and although she did not feature in any spectacular incidents, she had her share of convoy work, and with her well-earned reputation for regularity, delivered important and needed cargoes as required.

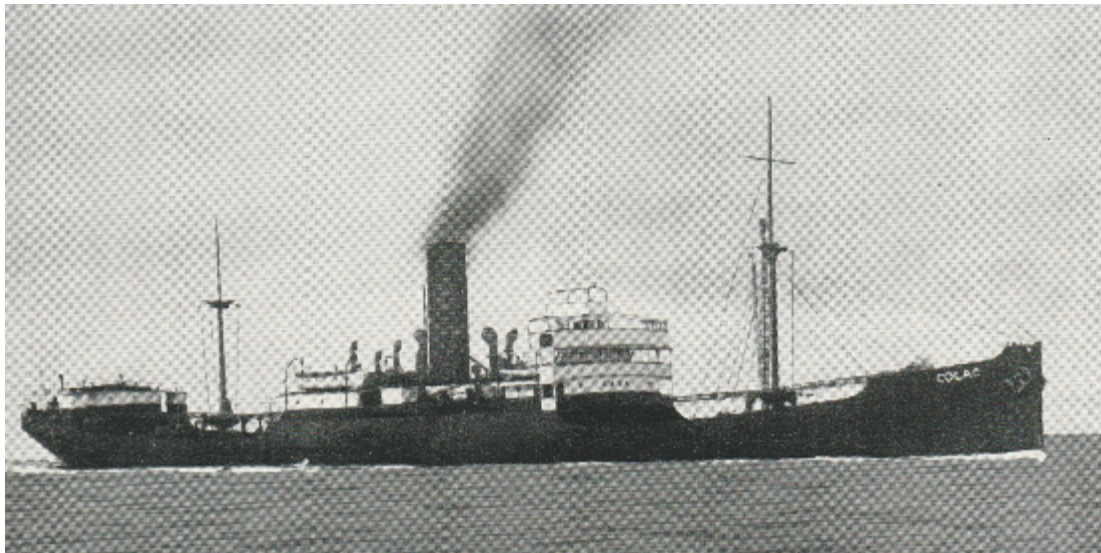
As was the case with all the ships, “Goulburn” was fitted for, and carried paravanes. The use of these safeguards against mines was compulsory, and though the Masters and Mates were given many anxious moments in handling them in heavy weather, they were used efficiently as directed.



“COLAC”

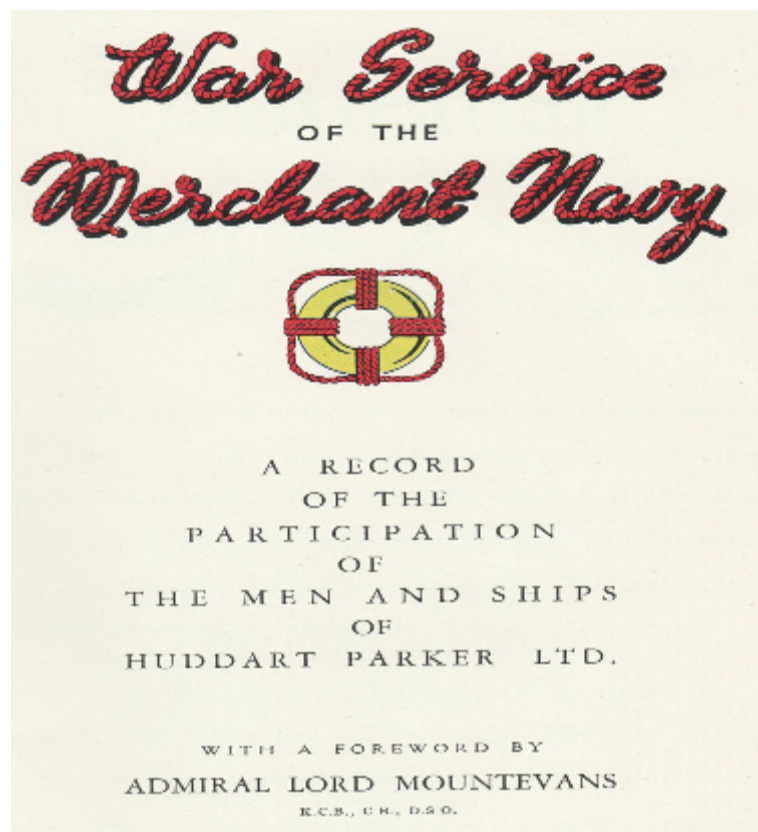
Port Moresby and other ports in the forward area were visited by “Colac,” her cargo consisting of stores, military equipment and vehicles.

Here again was the typical freighter which went about her business carrying urgently required cargo along the sea lanes, continually fraught with danger and the risk of enemy action. There was nothing spectacular to record, but it was this steady, unrelenting attention to duty that did so much to build the sterling reputation of the mercantile marine under war conditions.



S.S. COLAC

The source of this article is an extract from
the following 1951 publication:



MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH



A report to our members from President, Don Kennedy.

I gave you fair warning. For many years I have been pleading for those of our members who saw service at sea during WW II to allow me to submit details of their wartime activities. Until recently there was little or no response. The story of Mike Vandersee supplied by a family member after he had crossed the bar has really stirred things up. Also, Allen J. Seabrook has been kind enough to supply a lengthy and most interesting story of his wartime adventures, commencing in December 1941. I have just read a story supplied to me by our treasurer, Bob Harding about the amazing war service of his later father a ship's radio officer. With Bob's permission that story may also appear in a later edition of MN News.

The reason I have not previously submitted my own war story is that it was of short duration due to me being sixteen in 1944 and does not, compared to others, amount to much at all. However, like hundreds of others, I was one of those boys of a tender age who, for some vague reason, went to sea during the war while they were in their lower and middle teens. As my wartime sea story is rather brief, just sixteen months, I will first just write about my 'first ship' a Norwegian tanker, "MT Seirstad".

"Sierstad", 9916 GT a diesel-powered tanker, was built in Hamburg, Germany in 1937 for a Norwegian shipping company, A.F Klaveness & Co. I am not aware of her pre-war travels or even where she went to between 3rd September when war broke out and 1941. Obviously, she was not in Norway when the Germans invaded that country.

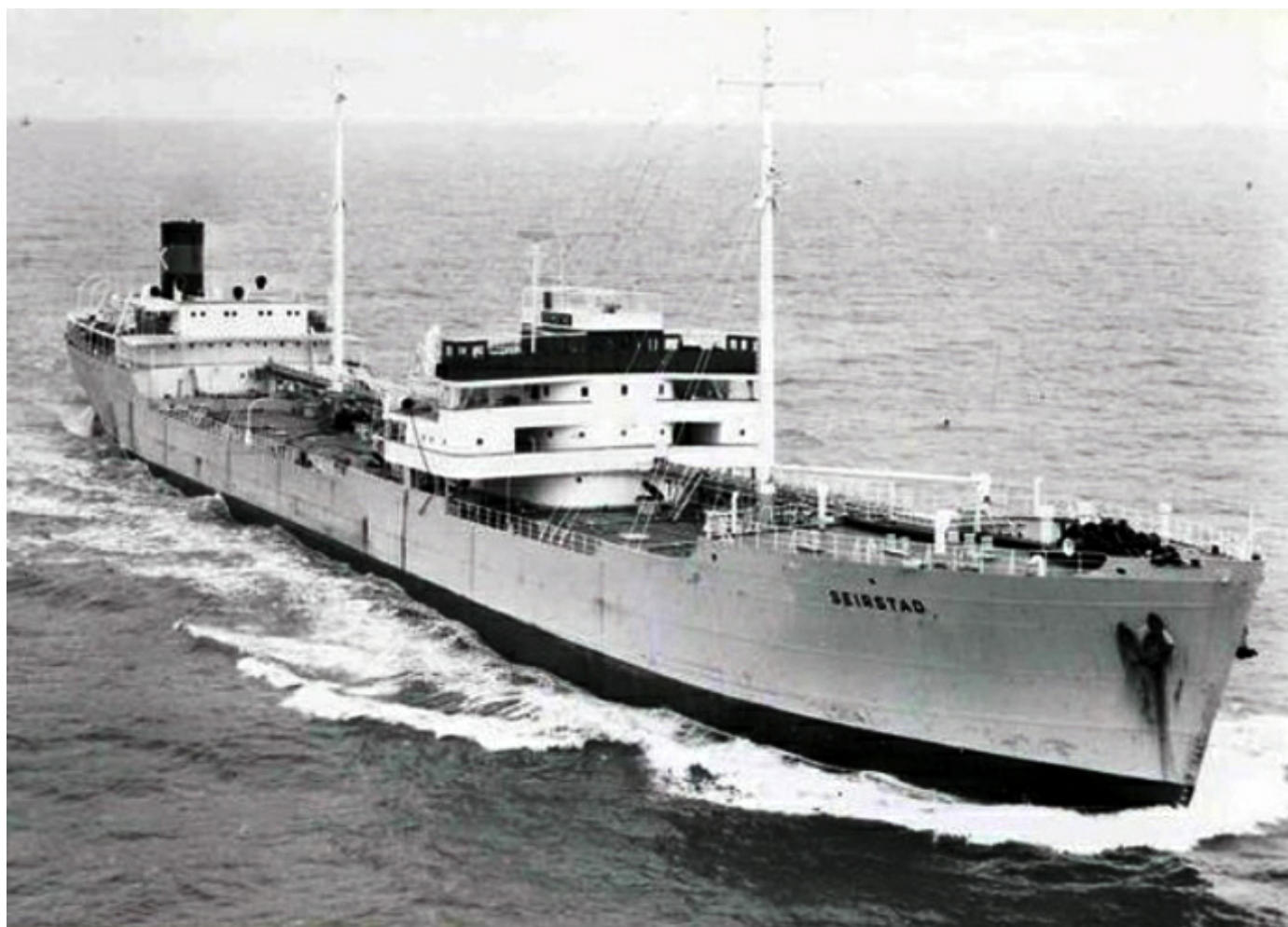
The records I have seen disclose that she escaped from Japanese seizure in Singapore in 1941 and went direct to Sydney. She then returned to Palembang and Batavia while at sea she was attacked by Japanese bombers on 14th February 1942 sustaining significant hull damage. She was able to escape under her own power, first to Colombo and then to Bombay where she remained for about eight months undergoing repairs to her hull.

Leaving Bombay (presumably with an oil cargo) she went, firstly to Fremantle on 16th October 1942 then on to Los Angeles (San Pedro) returning with an oil cargo to some Australian ports. Then to Talara in Chile in October 1943. Upon discharging her cargo once more in an Australian port she returned to San Pedro in September 1943, back to New Zealand and Australia, then again to Talara and back to Sydney in December 1943. She

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remained in Sydney until late February 1944 undergoing engine repairs and being docked at Mort's Dock for much-needed hull cleaning and painting.

"Seirstad", Like almost all merchant ships at that time was armed with a 4 inch naval gun on the stern, a three inch (twelve pounder) on the bow and four Oerlikon 20 mm anti-aircraft guns, two on each side, midships. In addition to the merchant navy crew (mostly Norwegians) she had ten Norwegian naval ratings aboard together with a junior Norwegian Navy Officer, (Fenrik). Their role was confined to maintaining and firing the four-inch gun on the stern. The operation of the four Oerlikon 20 mm guns were the responsibility of the merchant navy deck crew. In all there were close to dozen different nationalities in the entire crew.



Since about mid 1943 I had been making inquiries in Sydney about the possibilities of 'getting away' in the war. While many young boys had been able to join the services, mostly the army early in the war it was extremely difficult in 1943 to do that. Identity cards had been issued and my enquiries at recruiting stations in Sydney always met with 'at sixteen you are too young you have to be eighteen now, it is the law now.'

My parents at that time were separated so I was living with my mother in Manly. I had maintained a good relationship with my father who lived elsewhere in Sydney. Every time I saw him in the city, I sought his help, because he had a well-earned reputation for knowing a great many people. Sadly, his response was, as usual, 'too young, wait until you are eighteen'. Late in January 1944 at 16 years of age, I arranged to meet him once more in the city. At that meeting he probably got sick of me pestering him so finally told me he would try to help me because he had recently got to know a man who worked in a firm in Kent street 'who was in the shipping industry'. He handed me a piece of paper with the man's name and the name of

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the company on it.' He said, 'go and see this man and ask him if he could help you to get a job on one of their coastal ships, they supply things for merchant ships here in Sydney.

The next day I went to the city early and located a firm called Beldam Packing Company in Kent Street. I asked for the man whose name was on my piece of paper. When he read it, he said, "why do you want to go to sea.?" My eloquent response was, "oh - I don't know". He left the office and returned about ten minutes later and tore a small piece of paper from a large roll of brown paper on the wall. He wrote something on it and said, 'go to this ship and ask for the chief officer, the ship is in Mort's Dock. I assumed he had made a telephone call to this ship asking if they were prepared to hire a young boy as deck boy, but he told me nothing more.

I had no idea where Mort's dock was and being desperately short of money could definitely not hire a taxi. I must have sought directions from someone because around midday I located Mort's Dock and saw what I felt was a very large ship in dry dock. I had never before seen a ship in dry dock so after staring at it for some time and not being able to sight anyone I decided to climb down some steps to get underneath it and I even touched the massive propeller. There were men scraping and painting the hull. When I climbed back to the wharf, I still could not see anyone anywhere nearby. For a couple of minutes, I stood there and wondered if I should just leave and go home. Looking back, the decision I made that day has made a terrific difference to my life. I eventually plucked up courage, walked over the gangway and stood on the steel deck for a few minutes looking around. Still nobody appeared so I walked towards what I later discovered was the 'midships' area. A man walked close to me, so I stopped him and showed him my piece of paper. He looked at it and without speaking, pointed at a doorway which was a fair way up a steel staircase.

I climbed up slowly and timidly knocked on the door. I waited but nothing happened. After a minute or so I thought I would just try once more, this time I knocked a bit louder. The door then swung open to reveal a tall man wearing white trousers and a white singlet. He had been eating something and I could tell he did not seem happy to see me. He said, in a very foreign accent, "yes what do you want?" I did not speak, but merely handed him my piece of paper. He examined it for a while then said, "why do you want to go to sea?" You would think I was expecting that, but my response was similar to that I had given to the man at Beldam Packing Company the previous day. He read what was on the piece of paper again, looked me up and down then said, "OK, come back tomorrow morning at eight o'clock and bring your gear." He went inside and shut the door. I think it must have been his lunch time. The interview had taken less than two minutes. This was to be the beginning of my employment as a deck boy on that Norwegian tanker, "MT Seirstad", (subject to me returning by 8am the next day).

I did manage to get back there to the ship by the appointed hour the following morning and after waiting for about thirty minutes near the gangway I was approached by a Norwegian man, whose name I was never going to know. I soon found out he was the 'bosun' and as I was to be a deck boy, he was my boss. He was not at all friendly that day just saying, "come with me." I felt he was not too impressed with the decision made the previous day by the Chief Officer to employ me. Having absolutely no idea what I was expected to do I just left my former small school suitcase in the cabin where he told me I would be sleeping. The bosun then disappeared. I wandered about the ship for a couple of hours, gazing in wonderment at all I saw.

At about 11am I saw a couple of tugs arriving, so I went up to the bow to have a look. The enormous gates at the front of the dock began to slowly open and water from the harbour

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poured in. About 30 minutes later the ship began to float and with the assistance of the tugs, moved slowly out into the harbour. For the first time in my life, with the exception of a Manly ferry, I was on a moving ship.

Not knowing what was going on I wondered if the ship was about to leave port that day and, as I had not told my mother what I had done, I was terrified I would not get a chance to see her before we sailed. If I did not go home, she would not know what had happened to me and even my father did not know details of where I would be. I was massively relieved to learn later that day that the ship was to just anchor in the harbour and would not be leaving Sydney for a couple more days. That night I did get shore leave so was able to go home and break the news to Mum. later, much later, I came to believe that if I had made my enquiries to the Beldam Packing Company even one day later, I would probably not have even seen that particular ship and therefore may never have had the opportunity of going to sea. Fate was certainly on my side at that time.

My adventures at sea over the following sixteen months follow:

A couple of days later having told Mum what I had done I was at home saying goodbye. She was very upset, but I made light of it saying I would call in now and then to see her. She walked with me to a spot in the street, opposite the Many Post Office where we parted after a quick peck and hug. As I looked back to wave, I could see she had been crying.

That night at about 10 pm "Seirstad" weighed anchor and moved to the heads, dropping off the pilot and headed in a easterly direction into the dark towards, I knew not where. Before going to bed I walked right up to the bow, looking down as the ship crashed through the waves, I remember wondering how deep the water would be. My thoughts were interrupted when a Norwegian crew member appeared. He asked me if I had ever been to sea, so I told him I had only been on a Manly ferry. I asked him where we were going and was a bit surprised that he knew and was prepared to tell me. He said, "we are going to the Panama Canal via Cook Strait, New Zealand." I asked him how long the trip would take and this time he had a bit of fun with me, he said, "it could be done quicker but it will take about four weeks because we will be stopping at some island for leave at each weekend." This sounded pretty good to me but, as every seaman should know that was a little joke from him.

For the first three weeks of that trip all I did was wash down parts of the painted areas on the aft section and, using a chipping hammer and scraper, attacking a great many rust spots wherever I could locate them. The main interesting thing for me was the gunnery practice. About halfway it was announced that the 4 inch naval gun on the stern was to be fired. As I was on 'day work' I watched the navy sailors load the gun and prepare to fire it. They dropped a large steel drum over the side which lived up to its name as a 'smoke float'. As it drifted away the gun crew fired a few rounds at it, but I noted that the up and down movement of the ship's stern ensured the complete safety of the float. Obviously, if the target had been a ship, they may have had better luck.

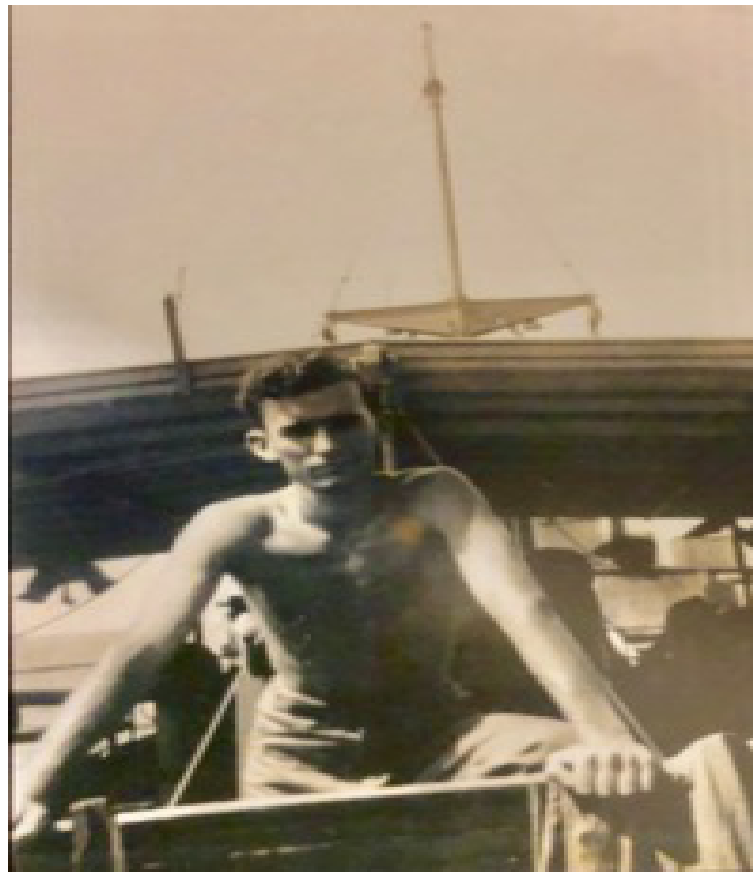
I had been allocated a job on one of the Oerlikon 20 mm canons. The job was called 'ammunitionslinger,' or something like that. My job was to remove the magazine when the ammunition had been expended and to replace it with another full one. I recall that the full magazines were pretty heavy and the noise of the gun when fired was awful. The target was a small parachute which had earlier somehow been fired up into the air by that cranky bosun. All four guns were fired in turn, but by the time the parachute reached the water it had escaped damage.

Those seamen who traversed the Panama Canal for the first time will understand my utter

amazement how our ship was raised up from the Pacific Ocean using ‘mules’, sailing through a very big lake and later that same day lowered once more into the sea, being part of the Atlantic Ocean. On that trip through the canal we had as ‘passengers’ about a dozen United States Marines. Four of them had gone down to the engine room, about four to the bow and the other to the stern. Their job was to ensure that nothing could be done by our crew to cause the ship to damage the canal locks. This would have caused a very big problem for US Navy and merchant ships.

Once through the canal the ship did not stop on its way to a place called Aruba. Naturally I had never heard of Aruba. We were only there for about 36 hours, but I accompanied a few of the crew to some sort of a café after being allowed leave ashore for a couple of hours. A few minutes after arriving and sitting down, a group of Dutch Colonial Police barged in shouting in English, “Out EVERYONE, GET OUT IMMEDIATELY.”

This came as a big surprise so, initially nobody moved. Obviously irritated by this the police withdrew their batons and stated to belt anyone they could reach. I was seated near an open window so out I went as fast as I could and disappeared down the street. None of us knew the reason but after we had left Aruba one of the officers told a Norwegian crew member that the day before, a young woman had been assaulted and the police thought the offender had left the island on a tanker.



Don Kennedy
as a
17 years old

I had begun to have conversations with a couple of the Norwegians by this time. They frightened the hell out of me telling me how many ships, especially tankers, had been attacked and sunk in that area during the war by that time. I was much relieved that the trip back to the canal was peaceful. A few days later we were back in the Pacific on our way to New Zealand. This voyage was also without incident and it was good to get to lovely Auckland for a couple of days. It was here that as a gift from the NZ Navy I received my one and only period of training as an anti-aircraft gunner.

RECOGNISING OUR WWII VETERANS

This training course held on Prince's Pier was far and away the shortest course I have ever attended in my whole life. About six of the 'deck crew' were assembled in a large room on the pier which had been set up for training for NZ naval recruits. It had a high curved ceiling painted white.

At the end of the room a 'dummy' Oerlikon gun was installed next to a 16mm movie projector. A NZ naval rating told us what to do, which was to take hold of the 'gun' as though it was a real gun. Lights were extinguished and the movie projector switched on. It depicted a German Stuka bomber moving along on the ceiling. The 'gun' was fitted with some sort of light which shone and blinked on the ceiling when the triggers were depressed. The trick was to aim the sights as the image of the aircraft turned down and raced towards you. If you 'fired' at the correct time and distance and the light shone on the image of the 'aircraft' you passed the test and qualified. I did well in my two minutes and passed with flying colours. I was happy about that.

We only discharged part of our gasoline cargo in Auckland before sailing right under Australia and anchoring just outside Fremantle. Here the remainder of the cargo was pumped into a couple of large barges. We were not allowed to go ashore for the twenty four hours we were there. The next port was to be in the Persian Gulf about a week's sailing up north. It would be tedious and boring to go into details concerning the many of my travels on that Norwegian tanker. I will just mention the ports we visited up to the time I obtained my discharge.

After obtaining a full load in Abadan (Iran) we went south to Cape Town in South Africa, then back to Abadan to collect another load, then to Fremantle on to Brisbane and off to San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles. A week there while the Americans celebrated Independence Day on July 4th, with engine repairs and back to New Zealand (I think) then to Talara in Chile and finally back to Brisbane. The war was winding down by then so, as I was allowed to do, I applied for a discharge from the ship and we parted on good terms. I caught a train back to Sydney the next day and went home to Manly. My mother had not heard from me since I had said goodbye to her even though I had posted letters to her. My next, and my last overseas journey commenced a few weeks later when I joined an American Army ship, 'USAT Point San Pedro' in Melbourne. It was loaded with frozen food for Australian and American troops in New Guinea and Borneo. It went via Balikpapan in Borneo, Subic Bay and the Philippines to Shanghai, China where the whole crew were discharged.

But that is another story, perhaps for another time.

My research reveals "Seirstad" departed the Pacific Ocean after I had left her and went to ports on the east coast of America. Subsequently she continued her voyages all over the world, probably carrying aircraft fuel which was recognised as damaging to a tankers hull. I later heard that while in the Mediterranean Sea on her way to Spain she encountered very rough seas and broke in two on 14th January 1958. Amazingly, both the forward and stern sections remained afloat. A French warship sank the forward section as it was deemed to be a danger to shipping. The rear (stern) section remained afloat and was towed to an Italian port where it was originally intended it to be joined as part of another ship. This idea was later abandoned so that section was towed to a ship's breaker somewhere and broken up. My first ship was totally destroyed, just 21 years old.

That is the sad end of the story of my first ship.

Don Kennedy OAM JP

President.

RECOGNISING OUR WWII VETERANS

The voyages of the "MT Seirstad" are listed on these original images from the Norwegian National Archives:

ARRIVED DATE	PORT SAILED	SAILED DATE	DESTINATION	V
	Nelson	27/5	For Los Angeles	
20/6	Los Angeles	30/6	For Dunedin	
28/7	Lyttleton	31/8		
1/8	Dunedin	4/8	For Los Angeles	
1/9	Los Angeles	8/9	For Auckland	
30/9	Auckland	7/10	For Talara	
29/10	Talara	31/10	For Sydney	
30/11	Sydney	3/12	For Devonport, Tas	
abt 6/12	Brisbane	12/12	For Sydney	
14/12	Sydney	¹⁹⁴⁴ 12/12	For Balboa	
10/4	Balboa Cristobal	11/4	For Aruba	
13/4	Aruba	15/4	For Cristobal	
17/4	Cristobal			
	Balboa	19/4	For Brisbane	
20/5	Brisbane	24 [*] /5	For Townsville	
27/5	Townsville	28/5	For Cairns	
29/5	Cairns	2/6	For Balboa	
3/6	Townsville	3/6	" "	
5/6	Gladstone	6/6	For Balboa	
1/7	Los Angeles	6/7	For Brisbane	
5/8	Melbourne	11/8	For Balboa	
	Cristobal	11/9	For Aruba	
13/9	Aruba	15/9	For Newcastle NSW	
18/9	Cristobal			
	Balboa	19/9	For Sydney	
21/10	Sydney	22/10	For Newcastle NSW	
prev. 23/10 26/10	Newcastle NSW	28/10	For Newcastle NSW	
27/10	Sydney	11/11	For Talara	
7/12	Talara	9/12	For Auckland	
¹⁹⁴⁵ 2/1	Auckland	24/1	For Fremantle	
6/2	Fremantle	7/2	For Bahrein	
	Rptd. off Khor Kuwait	26/2		
27/2	Bahrein Abadan	3/3	For Table Bay	
24/3	Table Bay	30/3	For Abadan	
19/4	Abadan	22/4	For Fremantle	
14/5	Fremantle	15/5	For Sydney	
	Sydney	26/5	For Brisbane	
27/5	Brisbane			

RECOGNISING OUR WWII VETERANS

DATE	FROM	DATE	DESTINATION	W
2/6	Gladstone	4/6	For Balboa	
5/7	Balboa			
	Cristobal	4/7	For Covenas	
5/7	Covenas	6/7	For Paulsboro	
14/7	Philadelphia			
17/7	Baltimore	13/12	For Las Piedras	
22/12	Las Piedras			
24/12	Curacao	24/12	For New York	
		1946		
31/12	New York	4/1	For Aruba	
11/1	Aruba	11/1	For Las Piedras	
20/1	New York	24/1	For Aruba	
31/1	Aruba	31/1	For Las Piedras	
10/2	New York	16/2	For Aruba	
23/2	Aruba			
3/3	Philadelphia	9/3	For Corpus Christi	
17/3	Corpus Christi	18/3	For Havre	
26/3	Curacao	26/3	For Havre	

<https://www.warsailors.com/singleships/seirstad.html>

Misc. WW II: (The following is an extract from the above website)

As will be seen when going to Page 1, Seirstad arrived Adelaide on Apr. 9-1940, the day of the German invasion of Norway. Her 1941 voyages also start on this document, continuing on Page 2.

In Dec.-1941, she was in Singapore, later sailing to Sydney and Brisbane, then back to Sydney and on to Fremantle, where she arrived Jan. 25-1942 (see Page 2 above). She was 1 of 4 Norwegian tankers in Convoy MS 3, departing Fremantle on Jan. 30 to pick up as much oil as possible in Palembang. In addition to Seirstad, they were Erling Brøvig, Elsa and Herborg. This was around the time that the Japanese attacked Sumatra with Palembang as their main goal. Around Febr. 12 all the ships in Palembang got the order to sail, as an attack was imminent. That night the Banka Straits was full of ships of all types, trying to retreat ahead of the Japanese threat. On Friday the 13th the convoy of tankers was out of the Straits and headed for Batavia, with the British destroyers Jupiter and Stronghold as escorts, when attacked by at least 8 aircraft. A bomb detonated in the sea close to Seirstad, resulting in a large hole in her side and she was listing heavily. She had a cargo of aviation fuel at the time. Her crew launched the boats and remained nearby for a while, then when it seemed safe to do so, they reboarded and continued towards Batavia, having managed to straighten the ship, and arrived Batavia on Febr. 14.

They were able to get out of Batavia shortly before the Japanese invaded. Seirstad initially went to Colombo (arrived March 4), but was redirected to Bombay, where she arrived on March 8. She was subsequently docked for repairs, remaining there until Sept. 30-1942, when she proceeded to Fremantle - again, see Page 2. It'll be noticed that she also spent a long time in Los Angeles, where she arrived from Melbourne on Nov. 27-1942; departure is given as Febr. 6-1943, when she headed to Brisbane - according to the Stavern Memorial, she lost a crew member on this voyage, ref. external link....

Page 3 shows another long stay in Sydney, where she had arrived from Brisbane on Dec. 14-1943. She did not leave again until March 12-1944. Her 1945 voyages also start on this document and continue on Page 4; as can be seen, she appears to have had a long stay in Baltimore that year. This document shows her voyages to March-1946.

THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

Capt. GEOFFREY HERBERT 12/1/2021 (B.H.P.)

**Capt. PETER STURT - 30/01/2021 (Former Burns Philp
Master & Qld. Coast -Torres Straight Pilot.)**

DAVID CAMPBELL 10/2/2021 (B.H.P. Chief Eng.)

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

COMING EVENTS

Rookwood Annual Merchant Navy Service: Sunday 11th April, 2021-
1030 hours for 1100 hours.

Due to COVID19 restrictions can you please register if you wish to attend. Contact:
Stan Moriarty - Secretary, MNWMF secretary@mnwmf.com.au 0418 488163

League of Ancient Mariners 2021 Annual General Meeting.

The Annual General Meeting of the League will be held at 1100 on
Thursday 25th March 2021 at Barracks on Barracks Level 2, 5-7 Barracks Street Sydney.
The Agenda will be posted on the website or available from Secretary,
(loam.secretary@gmail.com). Members can also apply for proxy vote from the secretary,
which must be received before start of meeting.**2021 Annual**

Luncheon

This years' function will be held at the Kirribilli Club at Milsons Point. The Committee
decided due to the uncertain COVID 19 conditions and possible limitations onboard ferries
that the Kirribilli Club offered the best option to be able to have a successful function and
hopefully back on the water next year.

The Kirribilli Club is near Milsons Point Railway Station; it overlooks the harbor and
provides a high standard of facilities for our luncheon. The club bar and café facilities
will be open and available both before and after our function. As per last years function,

U.S. Army Small Ships Section Reunion

Commencing with a Memorial Service on Level 2 of the Grace Hotel
Corner of King & York Streets, Sydney
At 11.00 am, Sunday 16th May. 2021
Followed by the Annual Reunion Luncheon
To be held on Level 2 of the Grace Hotel
Commencing at 12.00 pm

S.S. OONAH



“Oonah” was formerly a Tasmanian Steam Navigation Co. ship. It was transferred from the Sydney-Hobart service to the Bass Strait service and run by the Union Steamship Co. as contribution with Loongana, to the Service operated from 1921 with Huddart Parker Co., which contributed “Nairana” to the service. These Companies together formed Tasmanian Steamers Pty Ltd.

The “S.S.Oonah” was built in Scotland in 1888 and commenced voyages across Bass Strait to service Northern Tasmanian ports. She was noted for her sea going qualities which enabled her to give about 40years of service on one of the worlds stormiest stretches of ocean.

In 1911 a report in one of the local papers described an account of a voyage “Winds varying between North West and West with fierce squalls, which created exceptionally dangerous seas which caused the vessel to suffer severe buffeting. Conditions some have never previously experienced on this run. The ship was flung about and swept by heavy seas and she sustained some damage on deck. A huge sea broke over the port side smashing the saloon skylight and partly flooding the compartment. The port rail, stanchions and awnings were carried away.” No passengers or crew were hurt.

A few years later on a voyage to Burnie she proceeded through the “Rip” against a Southerly gale which had created big seas. As she headed out between the two cliff a very large wave advanced towards her stretching across the narrows. She plunged her bow into the wave. Tons of water crashed down on her deck covering her in green seas and towering spray. Watchers on the cliff thought she had gone, but the gallant “Oonah” pushed her way out from under and continued the passage. After clearing the heads her steering broke down, and she kept turning in circles until repairs were made, and so to Burnie. A few years later she ran aground on the Kelso Spit, but after discharging her passengers and cargo into local boats and barges she was re-floated. No damage was done.

“Oonah’s” next adventure was after completing the crossing and entering the mouth of the Yarra River, she had a head on collision with the “Cooma” who was on her way with passengers on holidays to Queensland. Both vessels sustained considerable damage, although no person was hurt, vessels made for berth. The “Cooma” passengers of course did not go on their holidays. The Bass Strait lost “Oonah” when she was sold to the Japanese for breaking up in 1934. But she was not finished with her adventure yet. The Japanese also purchased another ship for the salvage yards, the “Maheo” The contactors decided to tow the second vessel with the “Oonah” to Japan. All went well until in a severe storm off the Queensland coast, the tow parted and the ‘Maheo’ ended up on Frazer Island. Once again, no lives were lost but, “Maheo” remained as a monument on the Island. “Oonah” proceeded to Japan and no doubt came back as submarines, planes and bombs later.

(Story from the MNA – Newsletter “The Helm” June 2001)

A tragic tale I do confess
I put my faith in GPS
Then one day screen went black
I had no way of coming back
Recalling then in my despair
I heard the tale of St Hilaire
Who when he knew where he was not
Could figure quickly where he'd got
That's it I cried I am not done
I'll use the Moon & Stars & Sun
Like men of old I'll find my way
It's history will save the day!
Remember back in '92
Columbus sailed the ocean blue
He missed the east, but don't be mad
The latitude is all he had
Old Harrison was a crafty dude
He helped us find our longitude
If Shovell had that H4 clock
He might have missed the Scilly rock
Of course we can't forget Neville,
The almanac we're using still
So sailors then could find their path
He made the scholars check their math
Newton, Lecky, Meyer, Moore
Nobles in Celestial Lore
The universe in endless motion
Guiding us upon the ocean
Inspired thus to find my way....
I've Bowditch here to save the day...
Ok...he borrowed much from Moore
But all is fair in love and war
Here within this volume bound
The key to find your way around
If of course you can unwind
The workings of Nathaniel's mind
Read too much this epic tome
You're ready for a happy home
But if you somehow find it clear
You might find a course to steer
Our sextant mirrors do reflect,
A little error we correct
On or off the arc we get
Our index error then is set
With sextant clutched within our grip....
With height of eye we find the dip...
Next of course there is refraction
Bending light and its reaction

Then with altitude we're done
At least with planets star or sun
But for the moon we can't relax
There's horizontal parallax
Now of course we must relate
Our sight to what we calculate
The solution here you see in full
Is calculation spherical?
With almanac and tables too
And cosine laws to see it through.
If we split to angles that are right.
Short tables solve our sextant sight.
With two oh eight or two four nine
I can create a Sumner line
Poor Captain found the English coast...
Then CNAV turned his brain to toast?
With GP of the body found
(Transfer the zenith to the ground)
Then I can pick an AP spot
We may be there or maybe not.
Finish up with pole to guide
The local hour angle wide
Of course to find this you must know
If Greenwich Time is fast or slow
Three great circles now combined
A triangle is thus refined
A smaller circle is defined
Which of course we call a line
No real problem here you see
Preserving pure geometry
Approximation is ok...
The tiny segment saves the day
It shows an azimuth from me
And altitude above the sea
From sextant sight we find our way
That is toward or away
Thus ends here my tale of woe
Of how to figure where to go...
A study of the sky in motion
Charting me upon the ocean.
With sextant pointed to the sky
And scholars that could make me cry
With mathematics in profusion
At last I reach my sad conclusion
I figured out I can't be lost
Alone upon the ocean tossed
It's home that's lost, I now do fear
But I'm certain that I am right here.....
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CONTACT DETAILS

MERCHANT NAVY ASSOCIATION

President/Treasurer: Geoff Walls
PO Box 4181
SHELLHARBOUR
NSW 2529
Phone: 0242956527
Email: geoff.walls@bigpond.com

Vice President: Capt. S Herklots

Secretary:

Elizabeth Sandeman-Gay
All correspondence to:
PO BOX 4181
SHELLHARBOUR

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Geoff Walls
PO Box 4181
SHELLHARBOUR
NSW 2529
Phone: 0242956527
Email: geoff.walls@bigpond.com

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB- BRANCH

President:

Don Kennedy
Unit 4 11-13 Bernie Ave
FORESTVILLE
NSW 2087
Phone: 02 94516707
Email: donandwynne@bigpond.com

Vice Presidents:

Alan Read
Robert McMahan

Secretary:

Merrill Barker
PO Box 6159
NARRAWEENA
NSW 2099
Phone: 02 99447328
Email: merchant.navy.rsl@speednet.com.au

Treasurer:

Bob Harding
PO Box 470
CROWS NEST
NSW 1585