

MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

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

Edition 26
Xmas 2021



TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA

ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE



'This account is based upon the researches of Dr Peter Last of South Australia and the reminiscences of Mr R J Higgins of Devon, who was a 16 year old seaman on the ship.'

We are indebted to Dr Peter Last for permission to quote from his book 'The Repeat', published in Australia in 1994.'

When the invading Japanese army attacked the impregnable British colonial stronghold of Singapore early in 1942, swarms of desperate civilians attempted to flee the island on any ships able to get away. One such ship was Blue Star Line's *Empire Star*, designed to carry just 16 passengers but soon to be overwhelmed by more than 2000 refugees.



Seasons Greetings to All

ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE

The *Empire Star*, under the command of Captain Selwyn Capon, departed Singapore carrying a considerable number of RAF personnel, equipment and stores and it was estimated that there were 2160 people on board, including 35 children and 160 civilian and servicewomen. A party of nurses and physiotherapists arrived at the docks during an air raid and scrambled aboard the ship. One nurse recalls:

'There seemed to be some argument about taking us aboard until the colonel who had brought us produced a movement order and flourished it under an officer's nose shouting, "Look, 60 British nurses, 60 Australian nurses. Take them aboard!" And he drew his revolver - and on we went.'

An Australian nurse interviewed by Dr Last recalls smoke from a fire billowing over the wharf. She had to climb up a rope ladder and crowded into the hold, with a tin of bully beef and some biscuits. They sat about on the bottom deck of the hold with no bedding and the meat hooks swinging above them.

The *Empire Star* pulled away from the wharf to anchor overnight in a minefield. The next day she joined a convoy escorted by HMS *Durban* and HMS *Kedah*. At 0910 the first air attack came, after which the Blue Star vessel was bombed and machine-gunned for four hours by Japanese planes.

Direct hits

The *Empire Star* returned fire and one enemy plane was downed and another set alight. There were three direct hits with 17 men killed and 35 injured. One bomb struck a cabin beside the engine room and one of the two engines was damaged. The second officer, J D Golightly, continued to direct fire from a deck gun after receiving an injury which resulted in the amputation of his left arm. In the final sortie from high level bombers at 1310 two bombs exploded nearby, one on each side, and those in the hold felt the ship being almost lifted out of the water by the double blast. R J Higgins recalls: 'Following a direct hit, which destroyed a lifeboat, I assisted a wounded soldier to the engineer's mess, now turned into an operating theatre. On returning to assist others I was asked by a soldier in the boat deck gun box if I knew of anyone who could fire the gun there as the gunner had been hit.

'I had sometimes assisted in the cleaning of the gun and had also been shown how to sight, fire and reload. The chief steward told me to impart this information to one of the soldiers and then get below. I returned to the gun box, loaded the weapon and showed a soldier how to use it. Seeing that I was familiar with the gun and its workings he told me to stay and fire it when the next attack came. I didn't need a second telling and during the next dive bombing attack fired away at an oncoming aircraft.

ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE

'My soldier companion said that he thought I had hit the plane, as the Japanese tail gunner had suddenly ceased firing, although there was so much shooting, even from hand guns, that it could have been anyone's shot - or even crossfire from the Royal Navy escorts.

An anonymous RAAF officer later recalled the frantic scenes above and below decks, with medical treatment being improvised amid the air attacks:

'Fortunately there were eight or nine RAF doctors on board and they set to work with a will. The nurses also got to work. That day seemed more like a year. One felt so defenceless listening to the whine and scream of the bombs.'

Casualty station

R J Higgins has clear memories of the frenzied work to help the wounded: 'The main saloon had been turned into a casualty station and I saw the second officer, Mr Golightly, who had been hit in the arm whilst firing the 4.5 inch gun on the after gun deck. All around were nurses busily tending to the many wounded - and what a wonderful job they did. We were lucky to have them aboard and without their valiant work there would surely have been many more fatalities.

'That afternoon, once the attacks had ceased, we were able to take stock of the situation and clear away some of the debris. The dead were quietly buried at sea to the singing of the hymn *Abide with me*.

The ship had come through enormous danger, for as R J Higgins says: 'I shudder to think what would have happened had we been sunk by the air attacks, with only three lifeboats, each capable of holding 40 people, and over 2000 souls on board.



ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE

Rations were distributed from the ship's meagre stores and she limped into Batavia (Jakarta) the next day - one of three survivors from a convoy of 28 ships, the last to leave Singapore. British civilians were disembarked to travel on to Ceylon. The Japanese soon began to bomb Batavia and the *Empire Star*, with the Australian nurses and some civilians still aboard set sail for Fremantle.

17th Birthday

'On 23 February we reached Fremantle and our passengers were glad to be setting foot on home territory after their horrendous experiences. I had my seventeenth birthday in Australia and celebrated it well. The *Empire Star* did not survive the year. From Fremantle she sailed to Sydney where she spent five weeks undergoing repairs, and then it was back to Britain.

In October 1942 she sailed from Liverpool with 19 passengers and a mixed cargo, including ammunition and aircraft. On 23 October she was torpedoed by U 615. Four men died at once but everybody else escaped in the three remaining lifeboats. Two boats were rescued, but that with Captain Capon and 37 companions was never seen again.

Numerous members of the ship's company were decorated for their part in the operation. Captain Capon (pictured), who had already been awarded the OBE for his service in the First World War, was now awarded the CBE. Chief Officer Dawson and Chief Engineer Richard Francis were awarded the OBE. Second Officer James Golightly, Senior Second Engineer Herbert Weller and Third Officer James Smith were awarded the MBE. Boatswain William Power and ship's carpenter Sydney Milne

Captain Selwyn Capon



were awarded the BEM. Margaret Anderson was awarded the George Medal and Veronica ("Vera") Torney was awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire (Military MBE). Commendations were given to engineers JJ Johnson, J Middleton and JR Mitchell, stewards CE Ribbons and TS Hughes, cadets R Foulkner and R Perry, Able Seaman CP Barber and donkeyman HE Heaver.

Sources: GANGWAY No.70 (1996))- Journal of the Blue Star Line, & Associated Companies. www.bluestarline.org>empire2.

Forwarded by: Tony Francombe

INVADING FORTRESS EUROPE

By Captain Herbert McNeil (Retd)



'SAMINVER' (A liberty ship, photo from Imperial War Museum)

An entry in my Discharge Book reads '*SAMINVER* 3/5/1944' and the description of the voyage is 'Special Operation'. That operation was in fact the allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Western Europe, the greatest seaborne invasion in history.

Saminver was one of three Blue Star vessels to take part in the Normandy landings. Several weeks were spent in fitting out in Glasgow, where our already impressive armament was increased by six twin Oerlikens. The vessel's fire-fighting facilities were upgraded, smoke making equipment fitted and DEMS and maritime AA quarters extended to accommodate 24 gunners.

The lower holds were filled with sand up to the turn of the bilge, and boarded up to give maximum floor space for the carriage of vehicles. In addition, two of our tween decks were fitted with hammocks for troops. Deep tanks were cleaned and cement washed to take fresh water, it being feared that the enemy might poison French water supplies.

We sailed for London on 24 May, arriving two days later, and were the first ship to enter the Royal docks which were completely empty. (After the Germans started to mine the Thames Estuary all shipping, apart from the coastwise colliers, had been diverted to Liverpool).

INVADING FORTRESS EUROPE

Captain R T Hales was in command of the *Saminver*, with myself as Chief Officer, R Prince Second Officer, L Jorgenson Third, and I Macintosh, W Davies, and L Muir Cadets, C Dearden Chief Engineer, J Gill Second, A Anderson Third, and J Mullen Chief Steward.

On 31 May, 250 military vehicles loaded and 500 troops embarked, but we still did not know our destination. Naturally we thought it would be France and were further convinced when we found that the troops had been issued with 'occupation francs' and booklets giving guidelines on how to behave in France.

At noon on 3 June we left Victoria Dock and around mid-afternoon anchored at the Nore, in company with ships of all types. The following day, a Sunday, our chaplain held a brief but moving service on deck, which was well attended.

On Monday 5 June Captain Hales attended a conference at naval HQ on Southend Pier and returned with the information that we would be weighing anchor at 0200 hrs. on 6 June as part of a ten ship convoy heading for Gold Beach in Arromanches.

The officer commanding the troops produced a postcard depicting a view from seaward of our designated area. Some of us recalled how after Dunkirk an appeal had been made to send in postcards and photographs of coastal regions on the Continent to be used in planning a return.

We got underway at the appointed time and proceeded at eight knots. Names that come to mind of some of the other ships in our convoy are *Samrich*, *Samship*, *Samverne*, *Sambut*, *Sampep*, and *Fort St Croix*. By 9 am we were off Dover, where we came under shellfire from the French coast, losing *Sambut*.

There was no sign of the pilot cutter, which had fallen astern, and our pilot became worried that he might not be landed. In the end the Navy organised a launch to get him ashore.

We proceeded down channel and at 7 pm watched with delight as the second airborne attack waved past overhead in towed gliders. We reached our destination shortly after first light on D-Day plus one (7 June) – and what a marvelous sight it was to behold! We could see all manner of ships, from HMS *Warspite* to humble landing craft. There was no sign at all of any enemy activity and all was quiet apart from the occasional rumble from *Warspite's* heavy guns.

Roads leading inland were teeming with military vehicles and there was great activity on the beaches. We had to wait two days for a landing craft to become available, but in the meantime there was plenty going on to engage our attention and we also managed to solve one or two mysteries.

INVADING FORTRESS EUROPE



D-Day Landings (Consel Regional de Basse-Normandie/US National Archives)

During our passage from Glasgow we had noticed stripped-down steamers anchored at the Tail of the Bank with tugs towing what looked like huge concrete blocks and giant cotton reels. Now we have been able to see those same ships and blocks arriving to form a Mulberry Harbour, while the giant reels unwound to reveal piping for 'Pluto' - the pipeline under the ocean.

We returned to London after having completed no less than 22 trips from England to the Normandy beaches. Each time we carried some 250 vehicles and 500 troops, returning with damaged tanks and aircraft. Never at any time was there any enemy air activity, but mines could be a problem outside the swept channels or at speeds over four knots in acoustic mine areas.

Flying bomb hazard

The V1 flying bomb or 'doodlebug' was a further hazard. When the RAF started to shoot them down over the channel, sometimes flying wingtip to wingtip and tipping them over, it could be disconcerting to those aboard ship down below, especially in cloudy weather when we could not see what was going on. Later, when proximity-fused ammunition became available, the Kent coastal batteries had marked success against flying bombs and one fine morning off Dungeness we saw no less than 19 out of 24 shot down in the space of half an hour.

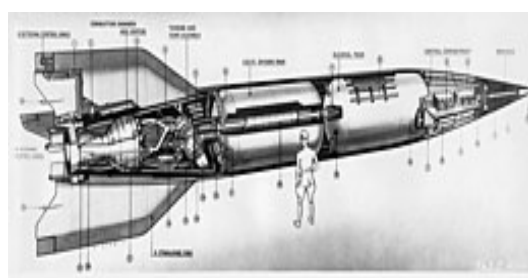
On 11 November we left Tilbury for Albert Dock for engine repairs, ending up at anchor in Long Reach. There we remained until mid-December, giving us a welcome break and ten days leave.

Three weeks in drydock followed, during which Antwerp came under sustained attack from V1s and V2s, several falling each day in our area. We had a lucky escape when a V2 hit a group of barges outside the drydock gates, which fortunately held.

But at long last the war in Europe came to an end. *Saminver* and her crew had come through relatively unscathed. She was a happy ship, helped by an excellent cook. All aboard were volunteers and each man pulled his weight and was proud to have taken part in the war effort. I would not have missed the experience for worlds.



V1 Rocket (Wikipedia photo)



V2 rocket bomb (Wikipedia photo)

Forwarded by Tony Francombe, Sydney, October 2021

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH



PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB BRANCH MEMBERS

In a previous edition of Merchant Navy News, I submitted a report concerning our decision to cease being a sub-Branch of RSL NSW and becoming a 'Chapter' of a large well- funded sub-Branch.

Your committee expected that this procedure would have been finalised by now but, for obvious reasons, there has been a delay so we may not now become a chapter until about March 2022.

Merrill and I have had a couple of meetings with a committee member of Forestville sub-Branch in which we learned just how much better off we will be when this matter is eventually finalised.

As all of would know the NSW Government and RSL NSW held a service in Martin Place on Commemoration Day, 11th of November. As sub-Branch President I had received an invitation to attend as one of the 'invited only' group of people allowed at the service. RSL NSW very kindly had invited a cross section of ex service veterans to attend a luncheon following the service.

MERCHANT NAVY RSL SUB-BRANCH

I was one of the twenty seven so honoured. Thinking I might be the oldest veteran there I was surprised to sit opposite one who was one hundred and one years old. It was interesting to hear some of the stories.

Our secretary, Merrill Barker and I attended the annual Merchant Navy service at Norah Head on the NSW Central Coast on Saturday 4th of December. This service, to which our sub-Branch is always invited, is arranged by a Member of Parliament, Ms Yasmin Catley who is the State Member for Swansea. Yasmin is a great supporter being, as she proudly proclaimed, 'I am member of a seafaring family in the Newcastle area'. A very energetic and efficient person she takes an active part in the service and always greets me warmly with a hug and a kiss. Nice lady, Yasmin.

Always enterprising, Merrill sought and obtained a copy of the address given that day by the retired Master Mariner. Our editor, Geoff Walls has kindly included the text of that address in this edition. He has also included an article I wrote some time ago which was omitted from the previous issue.

Geoff has produced a lengthy edition this time so I will conclude my remarks by extending to all of you Christmas greetings, hoping that you will be able to enjoy the festive season. Best wishes.

Don Kennedy OAM sub-Branch President.

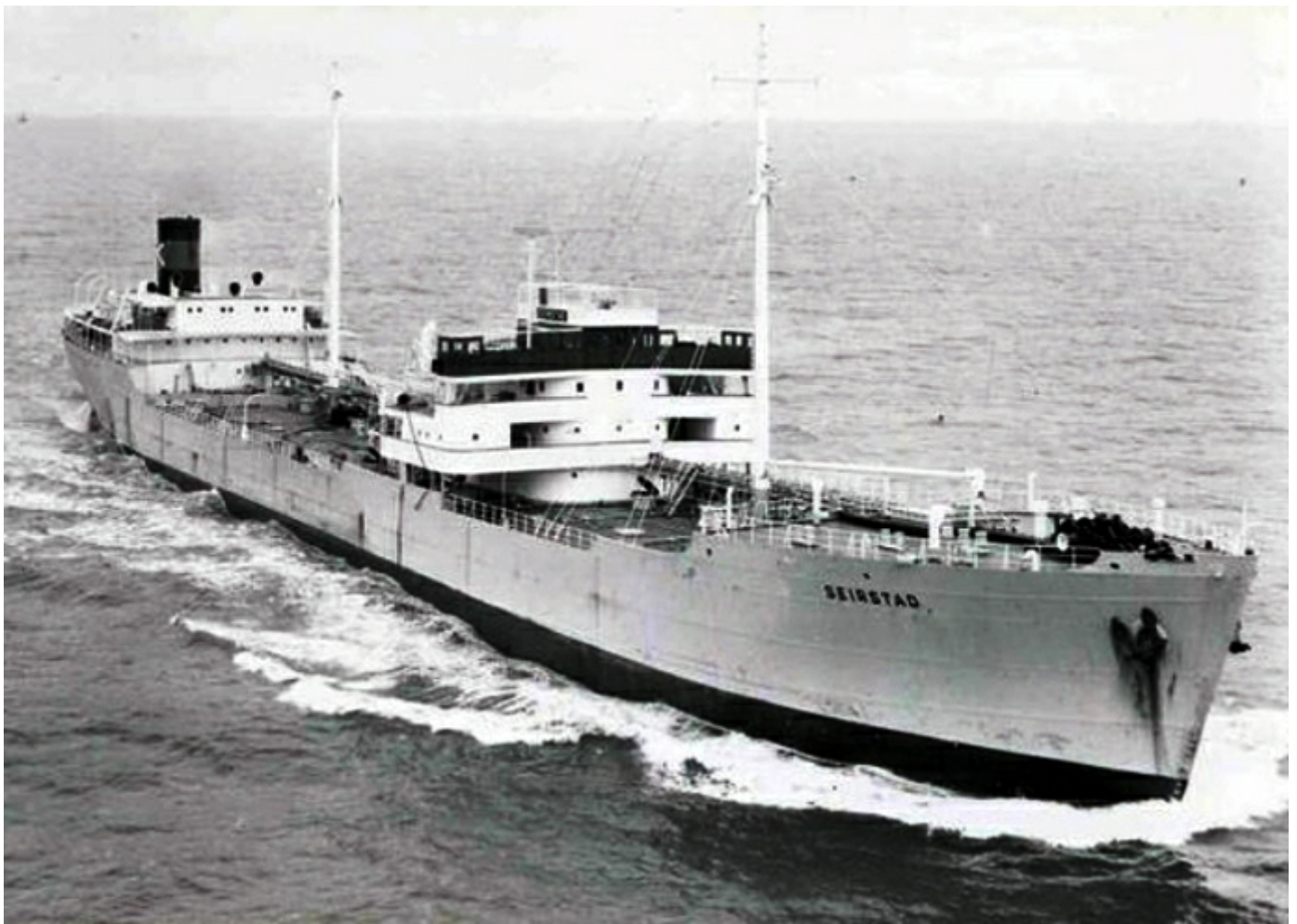
THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

**JOHN STEWART (Bosun) British MN Falklands Veteran
02/05/2021**

**CLARENCE DAWES 22/08/2021 WWII MN & US Army Small
Ships**

PHILIP ECKFORD WWII 13/10/2021

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN



You may recall that in the previous issue of 'MN News' I made an effort to explain what happened to me as a deck boy in the merchant navy during the latter part of World War Two.

When that article appeared, I noted that our very efficient editor, Geoff Walls had researched the internet and kindly printed details of the movements of this my first ship, MT Seirstad. I feel sure those details, as supplied by the Norwegian Government are accurate. To some extent, in my article I had been relying on my memory which unlike with some people, is not completely reliable.

The 'Norwegian National Archives' reveals Seirstad made a second trip to Aruba on '13/9'. This would seem to be on 13th September 1944. I had failed to include that trip in my article, but I should have remembered it because something happened on the return voyage from Aruba to the Panama Canal which was both interesting and distressing for this seventeen- year- old deck boy. As I was one of the deck crew I had earlier been appointed as assistant to the gunner on one of the 20 mm Oerlikan anti -aircraft guns. That crew member (I forget who he was) had left the ship at Balboa for some medical problem so I had been 'promoted' in his place. This appointment was announced by a typewritten notice, prepared by the radio officer and affixed to the bulkhead in the mess. It said, 'Number four Oerlikan gun to be now manned by 'Kannonkmander Kennedy'

I can assure you I had never been interviewed nor consulted about this significant event, but I did feel a bit excited and rather impressed to hear about it. To this day I regret that I did not 'souvenir' that typed piece of paper. As explained earlier I was scared after hearing stories from older shipmates about what had been happening at sea in the area where we were sailing. True or not, I had been told there a number of German farmer settlers in South America and some of them were avid supporters of the Hitler regime. It was said that occasionally, those with light aircraft would fly out after dark to spot allied shipping movements, especially tankers. A radio call to a nearby U Boat could then follow supplying details and directions. Having this in mind and not feeling at all brave I decided, after being relieved at midnight while on the 8 to 12 watch, to make a bit of a bed from old life jackets right up on deck aft just in front of the funnel. Wartime seamen will know that merchant ships mostly had very loud alarm (or action stations bells) installed around the ship.

I think it was at about 2.30 am when I was awakened by the sound of those very noisy bells. I was astounded because it seemed to be almost as light as day. I looked up and saw a large parachute floating down suspending a very bright light. Above the sound of the bells I heard a voice from the bridge area shouting out an order to 'fire'. I jumped up barefoot, climbed down a set of steel steps and ran along the storm bridge as fast as I could, then up a steel staircase to where my gun was located. The parachute and its' light were by this time gone also the bells had stopped ringing, but I could still hear the 'Fenrik' calling out his orders and there was the sound of an aircraft flying around above us. My gun had been loaded with a full magazine and I had left it uncovered. I was surprised to note that there was a small light showing from the aircraft, possibly from the cockpit area. I aimed in that direction and fired a full magazine towards it. As there were 'tracers' mixed in with some of the other rounds I felt my aim was likely to be effective. Probably not, because the aircraft may have been too high, and it quickly left the scene. In all the circumstances a wise move, I would think.

The Norwegian Naval officer (known as the 'Fenrik'), called out, 'cease fire' so I removed the empty magazine and replaced it with a full one. I walked back to the stern area and entered the mess where a few of the Norwegian seamen and navy sailors were gathered. As they were speaking in their own language, I was unable to understand them, but I could tell they were angry and disturbed. One of them then spoke to me in English saying they thought it had probably been a spy plane. Another one called out, in English, 'whose blood it that on the deck.'? One sitting next to me said, 'Don, it that from you.' I Looked down and saw my right foot was covered in blood. It transpired that I must have had hit something in my haste to get to the gun and had completely lost the big toenail on my right foot. I had felt nothing up to that time, but it soon started to throb

and became very sore and hurt like hell.

Later in the morning the ship's radio officer applied some ointment and a band aid thing after giving me a pain killing tablet. I resumed duty on the 8 to 12 watch on the bridge at 8 am that morning. I wonder if that entire incident, here accurately and honestly portrayed by me, was entered in the ship's log. The aircraft I mean, certainly not my injury. I was never told the true story but on reflection I suspected the aircraft may have been one of ours. That toenail was my one and only wartime injury. A couple of my shipmates joked that if I had been on an American ship (which I was, much later) I might have been eligible for the award of a US 'purple heart' medal. It is interesting to recall what some people think of the Merchant navy. What follows is an example.

Some ignorant RSL member called out at an RSL meeting in the city a few years ago when I stood up and asked why we could not get a mention in 'Reveille' re a place in the Anzac Day march, he called out re merchant navy, "they were only bloody civilians, put them down the back with the other civilians." The senior RSL official who was running the meeting merely looked down at the floor and made no comment. I wonder what that rude ignorant fool who called out actually did or if he was ever in 'harm's way' in a war. The employee running that meeting is no longer a RSL NSW employee. I can assure you that RSL NSW have a much different attitude about the merchant navy these days.

One can only wonder just how many 'civilian' Merchant Navy men and boys died during the war manning guns on merchant ships when there were no 'DEMS' naval men aboard. Whatever our complaints may have been after the war about things like that we have to acknowledge that 'Honours and Awards' did issue us the same campaign medals as were awarded to the members of the 'armed' services. Also, the RSL immediately accepted Merchant Navy veterans for service membership when they could show that they had been issued with the 1939/45 star.

That is now the end of the first part of the story concerning my wartime service on the Norwegian tanker MT Seirstad. The Norwegian Government awarded me their 'Participation' medal for service on their ship also, what they called a diploma. We might call it a citation. I will try to insert a copy of the citation. Perhaps someone who speaks Norwegian could translate it

In the next issue of MN News, I will try to detail what happened to me when, much by accident, I later became a member of the crew of a United States Army Transportation ship. It was interesting.

Don Kennedy OAM
President, MN RSL sub- Branch

ANDREA DORIA - STOCKHOLM COLLISION

The various accounts of the collision between the two passenger ships, *Andrea Doria* (Italian) and *Stockholm* (Swedish) leave several unanswered questions including the handling of ships at high speeds and in close quarter situations. Both ships had twin propellers.

The accident happened on the night of 26 July 1956 when the two ships were proceeding in opposite directions in the East-West route between Nantucket Shoals Lightship and Ambrose Lightship (approaches to New York). *Andrea Doria* was proceeding West at 21.5 knots in dense fog bound for New York; *Stockholm* was proceeding East at 18.5 knots in fairly clear weather, bound for Sweden (but entered the fog bank shortly before the collision).

There were no other ships in the vicinity to complicate the situation. The *Andrea Doria* sank the next morning and the *Stockholm* survived with a smashed bow. Fifty one lives were lost.

An inquiry was set up but was terminated when the two sides reached an out of court settlement.

The first substantive account of the accident appeared in a book 'Collision Course' by Alvin Moscow (a Journalist) in 1959, and more recently in a paper 'An Objective Forensic Analysis of the Collision Between *Stockholm* and *Andrea Doria*' by Samuel Halpern (a systems Engineer in the USA).

Diagrams 1 & 2 from Moscow's book and diagrams and tables from Halpern's paper are given at the end of this article.

The diagrams from Moscow's book shows that shortly before the collision *Stockholm* interpreted the radar echo of *Andrea Doria* as being fine on its port bow and that a safe port-to-port passing was the appropriate action. *Andrea Doria* on the other hand made the opposite interpretation that *Stockholm* was fine on its starboard bow and that a safe starboard-to-starboard passing was the appropriate action.

Back in 1956 ships' radars did not show the relative direction of motion of each ship; this required the use of a plotting board over several time intervals.

Halpern's diagrams and tables show what happened by reference to the course recorders on each vessel. When first appearing on each vessel's radar, the ships were about 17 n.miles apart (when the seeds of the accident were sown).

COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS

The US Coast Guard recommendation at the time was that Eastbound ships keep to the South of the centreline of the route and Westbound ships keep to the north (this has since become compulsory). The *Andrea Doria* observed this

ANDREA DORIA - STOCKHOLM COLLISION

recommendation, while *Stockholm* did not and sailed on the north side of the centreline (trying to save a few miles in steaming distance!).

The bridge of the *Andrea Doria* was manned by Captain Piero Calamai and two officers (plus a lookout and helmsman). *Stockholm* was manned by only one officer (the Third Officer, Carstens Johannsen) with a lookout and helmsman.

At the inquiry the different versions of events leading up to the collision are as shown in Diagrams 1 and 2 on the following page. The Swedish Line version is based on the testimony of Carstens, corroborated by that given by the *Stockholm*'s lookouts, and the ship's course recorders.

The Italian Line's version is based on Captain Calamai's testimony, corroborated by the second and third officers who were on the bridge with him. Moscow notes on page 219 of his book that *Andrea Doria*'s course recorder information was more difficult to interpret; Captain Calamai and others testified that there had been some issues with the course recorder pen and times shown.

Moscow notes that it is in the differing interpretations of these events that the crux of the controversy lies. The diagrams and tables provided below will help in making judgements on these matters.

It is easy to understand why the two shipping lines decided to terminate court proceedings. Continuing would have involved endless legal arguments about the precise interpretation of the COLLREGS, the course recorder information, and exactly what the direction of approach was of each vessel. In the absence of a full inquiry, there is nothing to indicate that the testimony that Carstens (*Stockholm*) and Captain Calamai (*Andrea Doria*) gave was not what each truly believed to be the situation.

Nevertheless, both sides breached the COLLREGS including by proceeding at excessive speed. There have been comments to the effect that both ships should have taken action under Rule 18 (1948 Rules); that is, both turned to starboard. However, Rule 18 only applies to ships when in sight of one another.

We are therefore left with how Rules 27 and 29 (1948 Rules) should be interpreted. Rule 27 basically says that there may be circumstances which render a departure from the Rules necessary to avoid immediate danger. Rule 29 provides, in effect, that nothing in the Rules exonerates the owner, master, or crew from what may be construed as negligence.

It has been said that this was the first radar assisted collision.

ANDREA DORIA - STOCKHOLM COLLISION

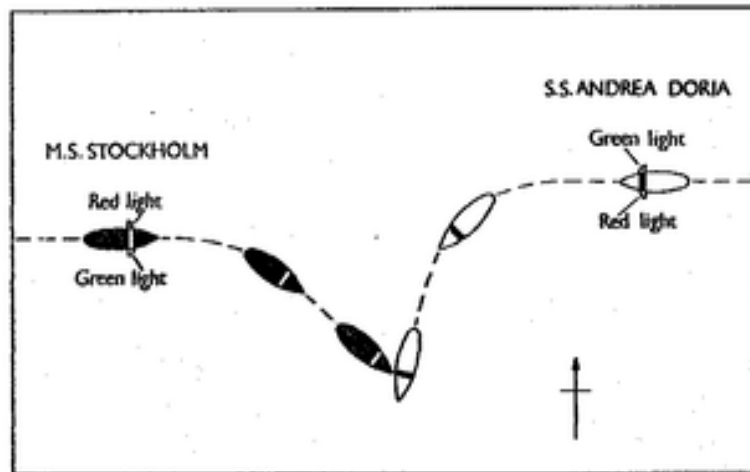


Diagram 1: Swedish-American Line version: The two ships were on a port-to-port passing course until the *Andrea Doria* turned to port across *Stockholm*'s bow.

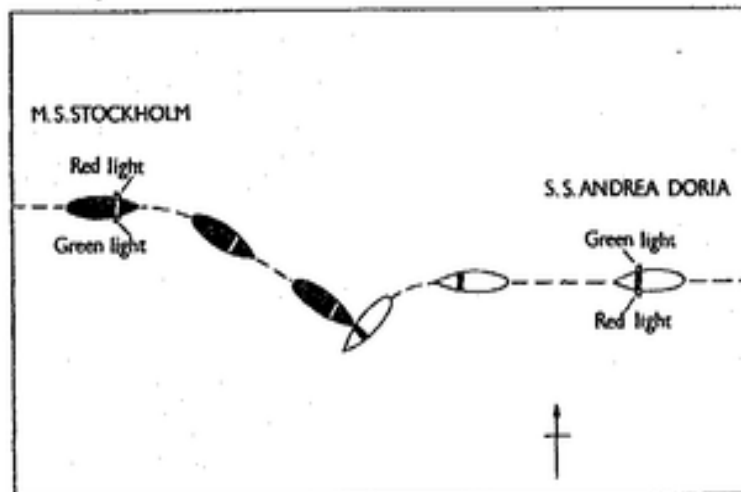
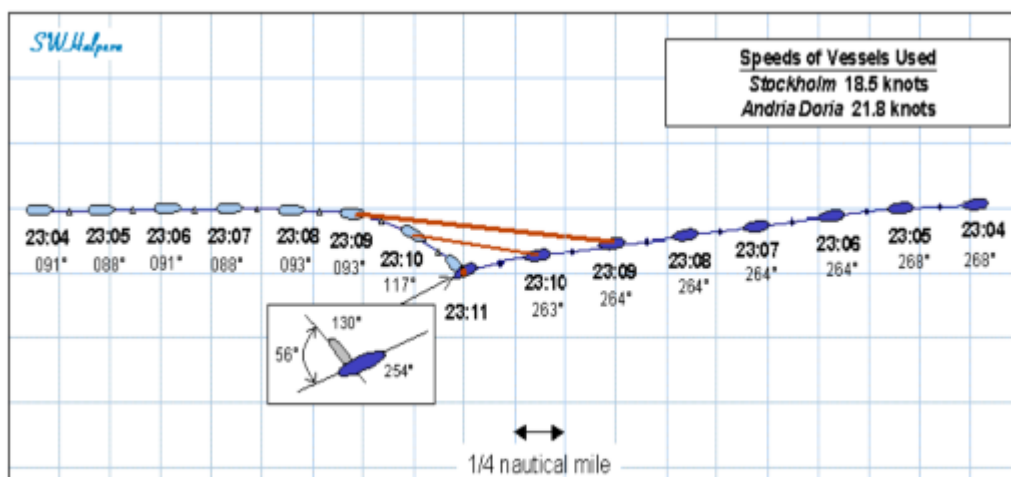


diagram 2: Italian Line version: The two ships were on a starboard-to-starboard course until *Stockholm* turned to her starboard and hit the *Andrea Doria*, which had turned only 10° to 15° to port at the time of collision.

SAMUEL HALPERN's DIAGRAMS AND TABLES



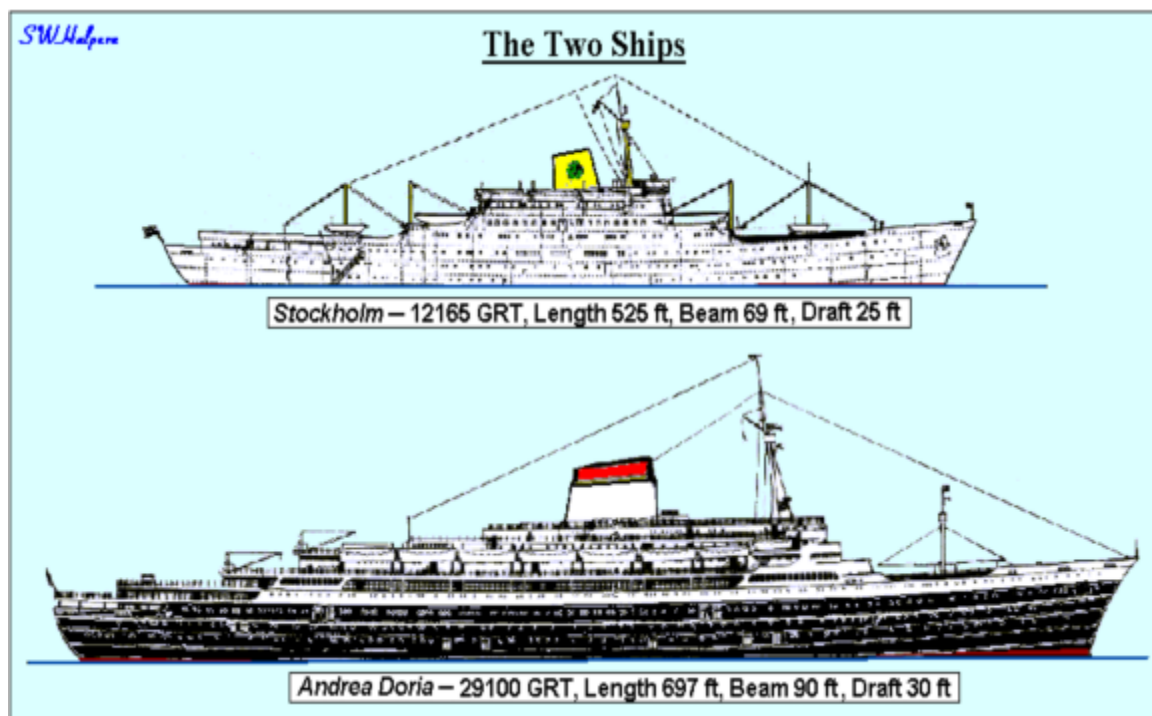
ANDREA DORIA - STOCKHOLM COLLISION

SW Halfpenny

Time	Range (NMs)	Mean Heading of Stockholm	Mean Heading of Andrea Doria	Rel. Bearing of Andrea Doria from Stockholm	Rel. Bearing of Stockholm from Andrea Doria
22:45:30	17.1	090°	268°	1° port	1° stbd
22:56:00	10.0	090°	268°	dead ahead	1° stbd
23:02:00	6.0	092°	268°	2° port	2° stbd
23:05:00	4.0	088°	268°	2° stbd	2° stbd
23:05:30	3.6	090°	264°	1° stbd	6° stbd
23:11:00	0.0	130°	254°	n/a	n/a

SW Halfpenny The Final Two Minutes of the Approach (all headings and bearings rounded to the nearest degree)

Time	Visual Observations and Actions Taken	Range (NMs)	Heading of Stockholm	Heading of Andrea Doria	Rel. Bearing of Andrea Doria from Stockholm	Rel. Bearing of Stockholm from Andrea Doria
23:09:00	Ships not yet visible	1.3	093°	264°	3° stbd	12° stbd
23:09:30	Stockholm turning stbd	1.0	105°	264°	8° port	13° stbd
23:10:00	Diffuse lights seen	0.6	117°	263°	18° port	15° stbd
23:10:30	Ships take evasive actions	0.3	117°	262°	18° port	17° stbd
23:11:00	Collision	0.0	130°	254°	n/a	n/a



Tony Francombe, Sydney, October 2021.

NORAH HEAD ANNUAL MERCHANT NAVY SERVICE 4th of DECEMBER 2021



Capt. Iain Steverson (photo from file)

ADDRESS by CAPT. IAIN STEVERSON

We again assemble at this lovely tranquil venue, to remember the sinking of the Australian coastal ship NIMBIN, close by offshore, on 5 December 1940. A victim of a German mine, with the loss of seven Australian seafarers.

We also again acknowledge the part played by the Members of the Merchant Navy, in the many, now long forgotten wars that Australia has participated in.

President Roosevelt of the USA in WW2 referred to the Merchant Navy as the 'Fourth Arm of the Military Services'. The Merchant Navy and its personnel played the KEY role in both the major world wars. Unfortunately for many years, after the war concluded in 1945, former Merchant Navy seafarers, were not treated with the same recognition by the Government, in comparison to those of the other Three Services. These Three Services were almost totally dependent on the Merchant Navy, for their all-encompassing logistic support. Today the Merchant Navy's outstanding record and efforts are not generally known, appreciated, or is their part, even understood by today's public. This lack of understanding or acknowledgement is especially noted in the National War Memorial Museum, Canberra. The only major Merchant Navy exhibit observed, relates to the tragic sinking of the British owned and manned, Australian Government requisitioned Red Cross ship CENTAUR tragically sunk off the Queensland coast.

NORAH HEAD ANNUAL MERCHANT NAVY SERVICE

The Dreadful Human Waste of War.

War is cruel, and the Merchant Navy during WW2 resulted in 36,000 British and Commonwealth Seafarers, became casualties, this included 678 known Australian Seafarers. This casualty figure resulted in a higher proportion per individual than any other Service in that conflict, and sadly many have only the Sea as their resting place.

Those many brave WW2 Merchant Seafarers, gave their lives for the quality of life that each of us present are fortunate to enjoy today. As the diminishing number of WW2 veterans slowly pass away, it is important that we, the modern generations, keep their memory alive, never forgetting their brave and dedicated efforts.

We acknowledge this year the dreadful tragedy of the loss of HMAS SYDNEY. We have recently been reminded, with the identification of the body of the lone survivor, that just over 80 years ago, the Royal Australian Navy's light cruiser, HMAS SYDNEY was sunk on 19 November 1941 with the loss of 683 lives, in a furious gun battle with the fast German Armed Auxiliary Cruiser, a converted merchant ship, KORMORAN ex STEIERMARK, off the Western Australian Coast, near Geraldton. KORMORAN had previously intercepted, as one of the many ships she had captured and sunk during her voyaging, was the Australian manned and registered steamer MAREEBA on 26 June 1941, near Cocos-Keeling Islands in the Indian Ocean, taking the crew as prisoners of war.

I would like to give three examples of British Merchant Navy Ships, with an association with Australia which were lost tragically in WW2.

A little-known incident, and long-forgotten short sharp devastating gun battle took place in the Tasman Sea on August 20, 1940. This was the action between another fast German Armed Auxiliary cruiser ORION, ex KURMARK, also a requisitioned merchant ship, which took place on August 20, 1940. The New Zealand Shipping Company refrigerated cargo ship TURAKINA, was intercepted halfway across the Tasman Sea, on passage from Sydney to Wellington. TURAKINA had previously loaded 4,000 ton of lead, at Port Pirie, wheat, dried fruit at Melbourne, and wool at Sydney. In New Zealand ports she was to complete the loading of frozen meat, each of these cargoes being desperately needed for Great Britain's War effort, and survival.

At 5.30pm the ORION suddenly came out of heavy rain squalls, and ordered TURAKINA to stop, and not to use her radio to alert the shore Radio Stations, with the appropriate Raider Distress Signal. Instead, Captain Jock Laird ignored the German orders on both counts, turned his ship stern onto the raider,

to allow his sole armament, an ancient 4.5-inch gun WW1 relic to engage the raider. TURAKINA proved no match against the ORION's modern armament of six 5.9-inch quick firing guns. The battle is recorded by the Germans as being all over by 6.12pm. ORION followed the brutal shelling with two torpedoes with the TURAKINA sinking finally at 6.22pm. An extract from the action recorded by survivors was "having given the order to abandon ship, Captain Laird came down from the bridge badly injured, and wanted "another shot at the bastards". The Third Officer pointed out at that stage only the muzzle of the gun was above the water!" The raider fortunately picked up 21 survivors, who became POWs. Captain Laird was amongst the 38 killed. This first enemy engagement in Australasian waters, shattered the calm and complacency of the Australian and New Zealand Navies and Air forces, that had prevailed since the start of the then European WW2, which had begun 12 months earlier."

I draw two examples of comparisons between the ships of the Merchant and Naval Services as to how they are remembered,

Two examples of tragic mysterious Merchant ship sinkings with an Australian connection occurred also 80 years ago. The first was the brand-new Federal Navigation Company cargo ship, NOTTINGHAM, on her maiden voyage from Glasgow, crossing the Atlantic independently to the USA, with a cargo of whisky for much needed US dollars. On completion of discharge, she was scheduled to commence loading for Australian ports. Instead, NOTTINGHAM, was torpedoed on 7 November 1941 just two weeks into her voyage, with the loss of all 62 persons. The sinking was not confirmed until after the war from information gleaned from U-boat records. When she failed to arrive at New York it was assumed she had been a U-boat victim.

Another mysterious loss was that of the large British passenger cargo liner CERAMIC that visited Port of Newcastle on many occasions and major Australian ports over three decades. This outstanding ship, which was a familiar sight in Newcastle, during her extended service, was the White Star cargo passenger liner CERAMIC, of 1913, built for White Star Line's Australasian service, between Great Britain, and Australia. and New Zealand, which that company had inaugurated in 1899. In the case of CERAMIC built for the same company, (White Star Line) originally as her more publicized bigger sister TITANIC, the story of which is well covered even today, in print and visual media and her memory is in complete contrast to her younger sister. CERAMIC originally carried 600 third class passengers, plus large general cargoes outbound, refrigerated cargoes, minerals and wool on her return. Passage was via Capetown, South Africa, each way, with calls at most main Australian ports. A significant aspect of this ship is that it remained a coal

burning steamer with a similar engine arrangement as TITANIC for all her 29 years of service. This resulted in her being a frequent visitor to the Port of Newcastle, to take on coal bunkers for her return voyage North.

CERAMIC was the longest and largest ship, to trade in Australia at 675 feet in length, for her 29 years and had an enormous cargo capacity, for the time of 19,500 deadweight tons. A comparison with recently remembered ships of last century, she had the same deadweight carrying capacity as BHP's Whyalla, 1960s built ore carrying sisters, IRON FINDERS/DAMPIER and was in fact 100 feet longer (33m) than that pair! CERAMIC was the longest ship to visit Australia until the arrival of the Orient Line ORCADES in 1948. During WW1 CERAMIC was utilized both as a troop ship, for the Australian Expeditionary forces and because of her large refrigeration capacity, was also employed mainly on her original trade with Australia. Sold in 1934, to Shaw Savill Line, who retained her in the Australian service. In WW2, she remained sailing independently in the Australian trade, due to her large refrigerated, general cargo capacity and passenger accommodation. As a coal burning ship, was also able to receive large quantities of good steaming coal in Australia, saving on scarce oil fuel at both voyage terminals.

On 23 November 1942, CERAMIC left Liverpool for Australia with 378 passengers, including many women and children together with a crew of 278. The first actual confirmation of her loss was when she failed to arrive at Capetown nearly two weeks later. It was many months later, that it was discovered that she had been torpedoed and sunk by U-boat U-515 at midnight, on the night of 6 December 1942, west of the Azores in the Atlantic. Due to heavy winter gales in the area at the time, there was only one survivor, an Army Engineer which the U -boat picked up the next day, and incarcerated as a POW and not released till wars end. Retribution did come some months later, when U-515 was sunk by US Navy Destroyers, who captured her Captain and Crew with the former being killed trying to escape.

CERAMIC's end received no initial publicity due to war time censorship and not much is known about her actual demise, due to her sudden disappearance without even apparently a distress radio signal. In one short action, a ship was lost with 656 deceased nearly as many as the complement of HMAS SYDNEY or the total of all the Australian Merchant Seafarers WW2 casualties. In this case however, the casualty list, besides that of the ships Company also included civilians, passengers, men, women, and children, destined for Australia. It would have been a horrendous unthinkable death, for her passengers and crew especially the engine room ratings.

A Final Thought on the predicament of Current Seafarers in this Covid Pandemic World Now days, Merchant ships are not being subjected to sinking

by Military action, but instead their crews are treated everywhere, like seagoing pariahs, not allowed shore leave, in most ports of the world, unable to be relieved or replaced, difficulty obtaining Covid vaccination, or in many cases remaining unvaccinated. This all exacerbates their predicament, stuck in their steel prisons, with minimum communications, with their families and loved ones far away, as they go about their normal duties. Please always remember today's Merchant Seafarers of the World and their Families as they go about their business keeping the wheels of industry moving and all far from home.

Thank you for your attention as we all look forward to a better 2022.

Iain Steverson 4/12/21

"MV Nimbin" Australian Freighter, sunk by a German Mine off Norah Head, NSW on 5 December 1940



"MV Nimbin"

AWM Photo ID No 303698

The Australian Freighter "MV Nimbin", 1052 tons, was sunk about 8 miles off Norah Head, New South Wales (10 miles east of Bird Island) after hitting a German Mine at 3:20pm on the 5 December 1940 with the loss of 7 lives. It is believed that this mine had been laid by the German Commerce Raider "Penguin". "MV Nimbin" had left Coff's Harbour jetty on 4 December 1940 on its way to Sydney.

German Raiders "Penguin" and "Passat" and "Orion" laid extensive mine fields off New South Wales, Hobart and in Bass Strait between the mainland and Tasmania during WWII.

In 1940, the German commerce raider "Penguin" accompanied by a tender ship sailed through Bass Strait and laid mines along the Victorian Coast, including the area off Apollo Bay. This field claimed two ships, "S.S. Cambridge" and "MS City of Rayville".

"MV Nimbin"

The "Penguin" also laid mines in South Australian waters including the Gulf of St. Vincent and Investigator Strait (near Kangaroo Island) areas. Numerous mines were reported washed ashore along the coast of South Australia, especially along the south east coast area. "Penguin" also operated off Newcastle, Sydney and Hobart.

"MV Nimbin" was owned by North Coast Steam Navigation Company a NSW Shipping Company. The loss of "MV Nimbin" and its captain and 6 crew is commemorated on the Australian Merchant Seamen's Memorial (Seventh Plaque).

The following crew went down with the "MV Nimbin" and their bodies were never found:-

William James Bysantson, Master, 57 years old, Australian Merchant Navy
 Ernest Walter Hallett, Wiper, 60 years old, Australian Merchant Navy
 Ernest Wilfred Carlson, Donkeyman, 56 years old, Australian Merchant Navy
 Nils Hulton, Greaser, 60 years old, Australian Merchant Navy
 Charles George Chapman, Chief Officer, 56 years old, Australian Merchant Navy

Archibald McAllister, Third Engineer Officer, 47 years old, Australian Merchant Navy
 William Gorry, Able Seaman, Australian merchant Navy

The mine exploded on the starboard side aft at about the bulkhead between the engine room and No. 2 Hold.

An aircraft took off from Rathmines and reported a wreck and approximately 12 men in a position 5 miles east of Bird Island. 13 crew members were eventually rescued two and half hours after "MV Nimbin" sank. They were picked up and taken ashore on the "S.S. Bonalbo" arriving in Sydney at 10pm on the 5 December 1940. Three of the survivors were badly injured and a fourth slightly injured. The survivors were as follows:-

Injured

Arthur Nicklen, Emil Andersen, Charles Cartwright, John Reynolds

Uninjured

Stuart Kennedy, Thomas Humphrey, Frederick Whelan, Edward Green, William Pry?, Walter Nicholson, Christopher Banks, David Powell, Frederick Gough.

The Port of Newcastle was closed to shipping and sailings to Newcastle from Sydney stopped until further orders.

We kindly thank Peter Dunn OAM for allowing us to reprint this article - Peter Dunn's "Australia @ War" www.ozatwar.com



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 McMahon

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