

MERCHANT NAVY NEWS

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

Edition 28
Spring 2022



TO FOSTER THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA

Last hours aboard THE NOONGAH

Courtesy of the MUA: The Maritime Workers Journal Summer 2019

Able Seafarer **Bill Cockley** was one of five survivors when the *MV Noongah* went down on 25 August 1969, off the NSW coast. Alongside 3rd engineer **Russell Henderson** and crew mate **John (Jay) Lingard** he tells of their struggle to survive.

Billy Cockley was on the poop deck of the ANL *Noongah* when the call went out at 4.47am to abandon ship. He'd gone back for his cigarettes and a duffle coat.

The bulky was listing badly.

"I had hardly completed tying my life jacket when the ship gave a shudder and then, almost instantaneously, disappeared," he told the Seamen's Journal in September 1969.

"I went down with the ship – for what distance I do not know; it seemed an eternity."

Crew mate Jay Lingard was yelling "She's gone!" He started to run. "But the ship went so quickly I'd only got a couple of yards then the sea hit me," he recalled. 3rd engineer Russell Henderson was partially thrown from the ladder to the boat deck. "The ship



LAST HOURS ABOARD THE NOONGAH

gave one roll to starboard, hesitated and then went down by the head,” he said. “I was swirled around below, then broke the surface. I thought ‘You beauty’. Then I went down again.” Surfacing, Bill heard his shipmate, greaser Ken McIntyre, calling to swim over to his life raft. It turned out to be the cover.

Moments later Jay surfaced. He drifted with a plank to Bill and Ken and they grabbed on. “When a ship sinks, it only goes so far then it stops until all the air comes out,” Bill told MWJ. “Then it just drops to the bottom. While the air was coming out, it pushed us to the surface.” The four men were tossed in the dark, heavy seas, when they heard someone calling for help. “Ken (who wasn’t wearing a life jacket) swam off and brought back the chief cook, Thomas Ford,” said Bill. “A little later, we heard another man calling out and, once again, Ken went out to assist. This time he did not return.”

Nearby, 3rd engineer Russell Henderson had also made it to the surface. “We were in darkness, but could see lights from the men’s life jackets and hear them calling and cooeing to each other,” he said. “I swam toward the nearest group and joined Jay Lingard, Bill Cockley and Tom Ford.

Later, the chief cook, Tom, drifted off and away from the plank. Russell swam out and brought him back. Not long after he drifted off again, taking with him the lifeboat cover. “We didn’t see him again,” said Bill.

When dawn broke, the men found themselves alone, well out to sea. Huge waves flung menacing debris at them. They got hold of a lid and placed it under the plank for buoyancy.

By 10 that morning, the three men sighted a search plane far off. No one was looking that far from shore. Hours went by. They were thirsty. A rain squall came over. “Now we’re going to get wet,” Jay quipped. Bill laughed. “The rain was like hailstones hitting us in the face,” said Jay. “I kept looking at Russell and Bill, and among the thoughts that kept going through my mind were – how lucky a man can be to have two mates with him. Two men with more guts than he can explain... men he will call ‘friend’ for the rest of his life.”

By late afternoon they sighted a bulk carrier. They waved and called out. But it passed without anyone seeing them. Finally, before dusk, after more than 12 hours stranded at sea, they sighted the Adelaide Steam bulk carrier Meringa. “We started yelling and waving our arms,” said Bill. “A couple of the crew waved back.” Crew threw life buoys on lines to the three survivors and they were pulled onto the ship’s side where they climbed up the gangway ladder. On board, the crew gave them plenty of brandy, hot soup and blankets.

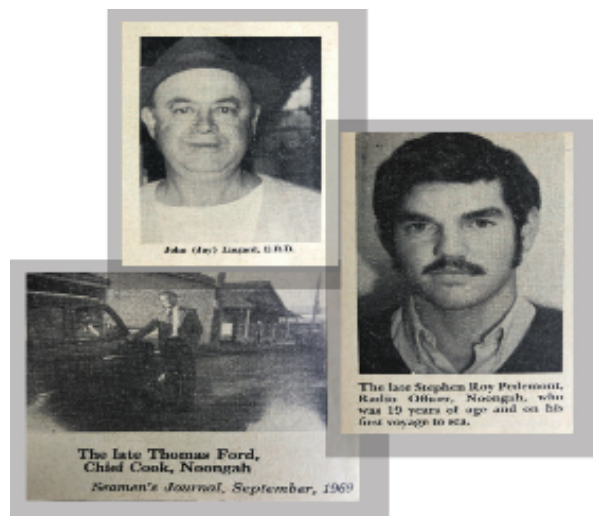
Two other Noongah crew in life rafts had already been rescued by the search team.

Crew of Meringa assist survivors Russell Henderson, William Cockley and John (Jay) Lingard aboard.



Russell Henderson and William Cockley

LAST HOURS ABOARD THE NOONGAH



Ken McIntyre was later given a medal posthumously for giving his life to save others.

Fifty years on, Bill Cockley, the sole living survivor, lives down the South Coast of NSW. Looking back, he sees the sinking all in slow motion. “I still think about it,” he said. “A lot. The night before things started to look bad. I went to have a shower around 5 or 6pm and the water was not running away.”

By the time Bill started the midnight watch the ship was listing. “I knew it was very bad,” he said. “I talked to the mate on watch around 2am. ‘This ship is going,’ I said.” The 2nd mate shone a light. The deck was awash. The ship was taking water.

The crew worked on the bilge pumps and when the engine went dead, struggled to get it started. The captain was alerted and radioed for help. He got Bill to go down and get all the day crew on deck. “Getting the fellows out of their bunks proved a bit difficult,” Bill recalls. “They could not believe anything was seriously wrong – until they got up, then they really noticed the list.” The men struggled to get the lifeboats out but, by this time, the ship was almost on its side and they were stuck.

Bill was not meant to be on the Noongah that night. He was rostered on the Iron Kimberley. But he had asked for a transfer rather than “pull a bodgy compo claim to get home” in time for his wedding. “One of the main things that kept me going was I had to survive because the woman I was going to marry had our baby girl. She was only 8-10 months old,” Bill says. Three months later, Bill was back at sea. He later bought a fishing boat and took time off in Adelaide to be with his wife and daughter to try to save the marriage. That’s when he joined Marine Rescue.

Back on the South Coast and many marriages later, Bill, 78, (2022 and approaching 81) still goes out with the Shellharbour Marine Rescue one weekend each month. “I couldn’t put a figure on how many times I’ve been out and how many people we’ve brought in,” he says. “I spent 28 years at sea and 28 (now 30) years doing marine rescue. That’s 56 (now 58) years on water.”

The man who was rescued, now devotes his time to rescuing others.



The Mayor of Mosman
For the Kind Attention of Cr Carolyn Corrigan.

Dear Cr. Corrigan,

Merchant Navy Day 2022.

I am a NSW Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch member who attended the Merchant Navy Day Memorial Service with my wife, held this year in the Mosman Art Gallery on 3 September 2022.

As Mayor, we greatly appreciate your support of the Merchant Navy Memorial in Mosman and always enjoy seeing and hearing you speak at the annual Merchant Navy Memorial Services held in Mosman. I would personally like to thank Mosman Council Management and Staff for their excellent assistance with arrangements on behalf of the Merchant Navy Sub Branch at the Mosman Art Gallery this year.

A strong roll up of 75 persons attended for this years' service, indicating that there is a strong desire for the annual Merchant Navy Day Service to be continued.

The Mosman Merchant Navy Memorial to my mind, is the right place to continue the annual memorial service after the NSW Merchant Navy sub-Branch becomes a Chapter.

This is a very accessible place for descendants of seafarers and others to attend at the Merchant Navy Memorial in Mosman without restrictions.

Mosman is surrounded by more sea, and has a longer seashore than any other suburb and was the northern end of the submarine net protecting Sydney Harbour in WWII.

Obelisk Bay Mosman is directly facing the Pacific Ocean hosting navigation lights showing the leads and marks for the safe pilotage of large seagoing ships of all types entering into and leaving Sydney Harbour.

Mosman has played a very significant part in Australia's maritime history and defence and the Merchant Navy Memorial is an important part of the Mosman Cenotaph to remember the sacrifice of seafarers.

I was fortunate to meet and speak with you at the Memorial Service two years ago and I know from that conversation, that as Mayor, Carolyn Corrigan is supportive of preserving the local maritime past and informing and engaging with younger generations. It was pleasing to see the contribution to the service by students from Mosman High School and I would hope that this part of proceedings will continue in future years

I hope we find a way to continue Services at this Memorial to remember our Merchant Navy

and the seafarers beyond the time when the NSW Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch becomes Chapter in the RSL.

I did my initial National Service shore side training at HMAS “Penguin” in Mosman before going to sea as a boiler room stoker in HMAS “Vengeance” and HMAS “Sydney”.

I did my trade test as an Engine Room Artificer in the HMAS “Penguin” workshops a few years later as at that time “Penguin” was home base to 3 T-Class British submarines.

The Navy’s Ships Damage Control training unit, the Naval Hospital and headquarters for the Navy’s clearance diving team were located at HMAS “Penguin” at that time.

On the main harbour side there is a large refuelling depot and wharf facilities on the north east side of Clifton Gardens Beach.

Defence Vessels and big US Coastguard Cutters used to regularly dock there on voyages to and from the US Base at McMurdo Sound in the Antarctic and elsewhere.

The Middle Head area of Mosman facing the sea has been home to 2 Army Bases and was heavily fortified during WWII and is now a heritage listed military establishment.

It was very disappointing this year for the Red Ensign Merchant Navy Flag, the Australian National Flag for Registered Australian ships, not flying on the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Merchant Navy Day, 3 September.

We trust that it was only an oversight this year and not a change in protocol and we trust that this flag error will be corrected in future years and shall not be overlooked again.

Despite less than perfect acoustics in the hall this year, I thought the content in the programme was really quite good. As a suggestion, some microphone training or assistance may be needed for some of the speakers.

Next year, Finola and I look forward to be outside at the NSW Merchant Navy Memorial again, with good quality microphone amplification of speakers and hopefully a live musical accompaniment.

Once again, I wish to sincerely thank you, Council management and Mosman Council Staff for your continued truly strong support of this significant uniquely Mosman memorial event honouring Merchant Navy Seafarers.

Yours sincerely,

Robert McMahon, Chartered Marine Engineer and Lieutenant Commander RANR (Rtd)
Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch.

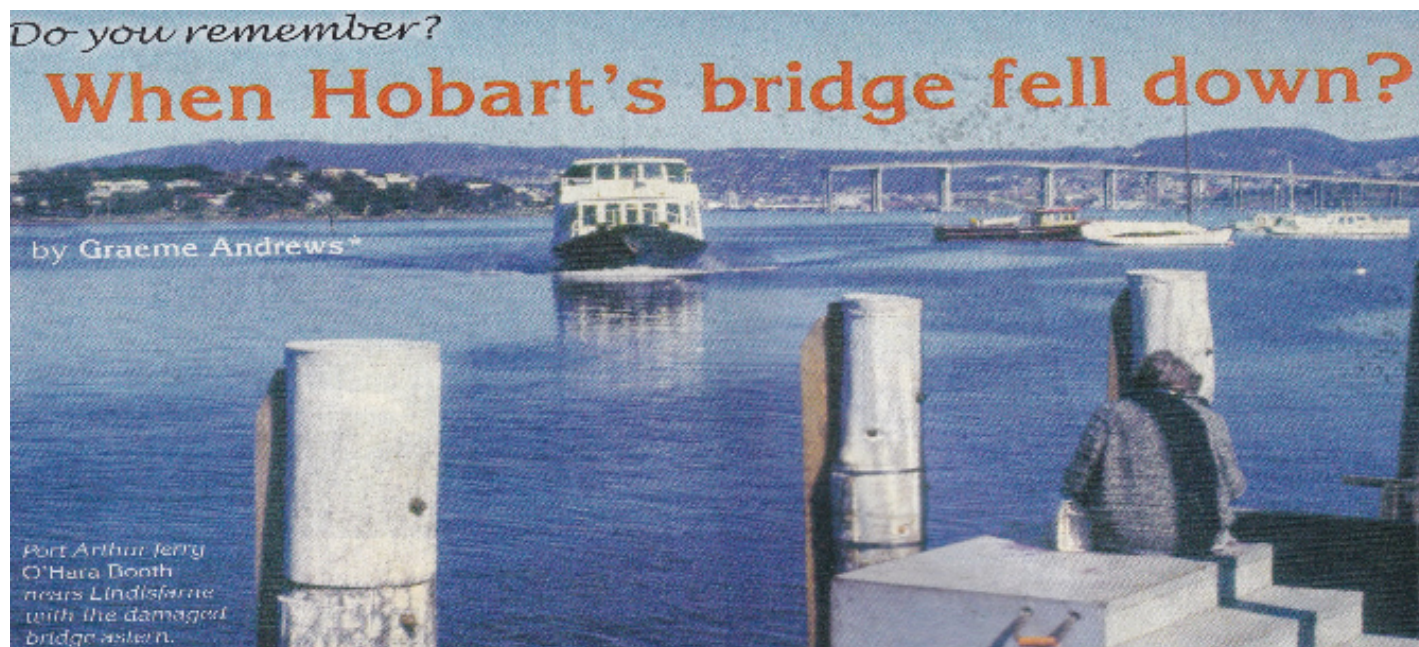
In memory of all our Shipmates

Who have gone before,

And now rest in the bosom

of the Great Mariner.....

LEST WE FORGET



Article: courtesy of AFLOAT Magazine December 2010

“Get up an hour early – get home an hour late. You’d better hurry up cause the ferry won’t wait ...”

So went a line from a popular song that quickly gained currency in Tasmania as the good citizens of Hobart learned how to negotiate a harbour that only had one bridge – one that had fallen down!

On a quiet Sunday night on January 5, 1975 the large bulk carrier SS Lake Illawarra was inbound on Hobart’s Derwent River. Her destination was the Hobart Zinc Works upstream of the newish Tasman Bridge.

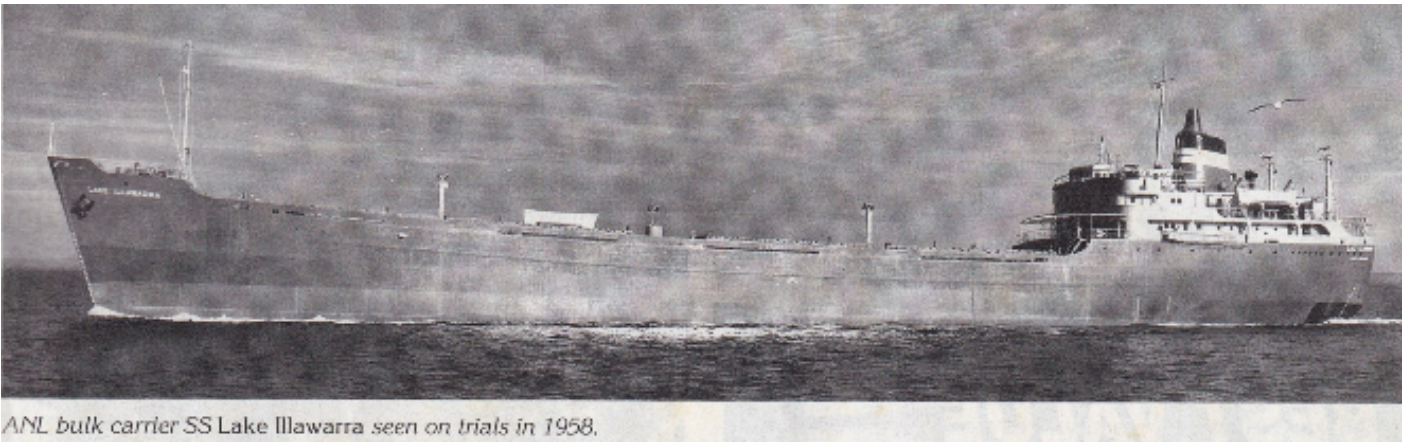
The Tasman Bridge was to Hobart what the Sydney Harbour Bridge is to Sydney, but perhaps more important, as Hobart had only one road crossing of the river within easy reach of the city and had allowed its ferry services to wither.

How and why Lake Illawarra swung off course and tried to go through an unsuitable section of the bridge section is too detailed for here but she knocked the bridge down. A large part of the bridge arch crashed on the ship, which then sank. Several cars hurtled into the space and sank in the river along with their occupants.

Local tugs that had been awaiting the ships berthing at the Zinc Works rushed to help those that could be helped. Emergency services went about their duties and a local charter operator started working out how to get Monday morning’s people across the river.

On the Monday morning Hobart had just three commercial ferries available to pinch hit – and no commercial passenger wharves. One was the 1912 river passenger cargo ship Cartela which eked out a precarious living as a cruise boat. The other two were the relatively new ferries Matthew Brady and James McCabe. The two steel ferries were quickly in use running an unofficial passenger service, with Cartela also quickly pressed into use.

When Hobart's Bridge Fell Down



ANL bulk carrier SS Lake Illawarra seen on trials in 1958.

Shocked local politicians, forced to make instant decisions, bought the car ferry Mangana up from the Bruny Island run, as Bob Clifford, owner of the two small ferries began the first run, less than an hour after the disaster. She was soon replaced by the older Melba as Bruny was cut off completely without her. By Tuesday about 23,000 commuters were using the ferries daily and various people were soon working out how to do this for quite a few years.

The analogy of Dunkirk in WWII was often noted in those days. During the next six months or so many ferries came to Hobart. A converted fishing boat Ray Larsson gained passenger facilities and went on the run. The O'Hara Booth which had worked on the Isle of the Dead run at Port Arthur became more concerned with the living and came to Hobart.

Upriver near the Zinc works, the veteran Risdon cable punt was co-opted to carry provisions and important freight overnight, with emergency vehicles and priority traffic during the day.

Bob Clifford started building another small steel ferry Martin Cash – he was to build several more and this business was, eventually to make him world famous with his many locally built International Catamarans.

It seemed that almost everyone was getting into the ferry act. The record Ferryboat Shuffle was heard everywhere and the cover of the 45 EP (Extended Play record) showed some of the multi coloured fleet.

From the Army came several small landing craft – on a long and uncomfortable voyage from Sydney. They were there to carry emergency vehicles if needed. From Bass Strait came an island cattle carrier – Phoenix – which carried different mammals to the Wrest Point Casino.

A commercial landing barge, such as are common along the Barrier Reef came Hobart to carry commercial trucks – at \$20 per trip and was flat out.

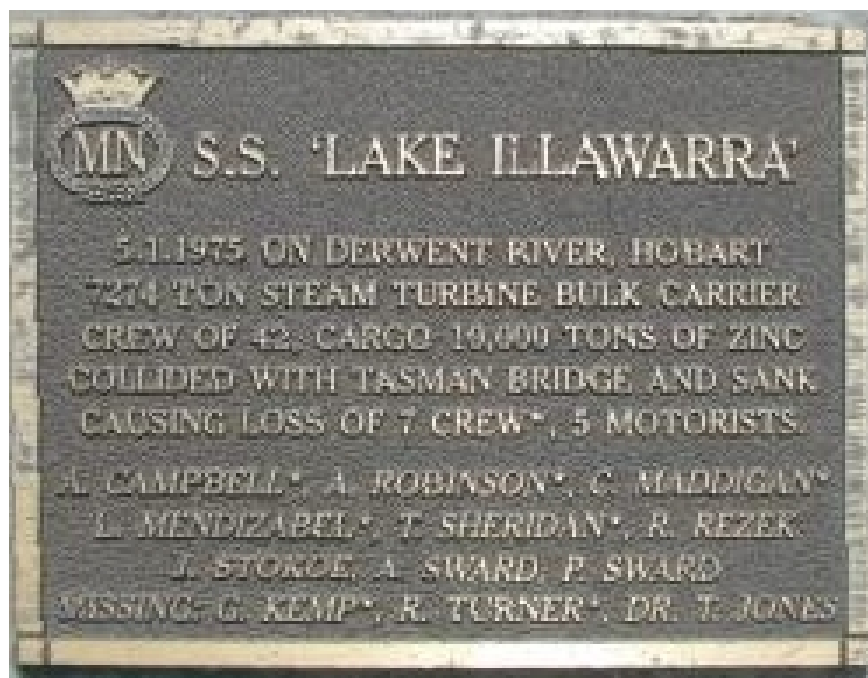
From Sydney came three famous Sydney ferries. Two, Kosciusko and Lady Edeline, were near the end of their working lives. At great expense they were towed to Hobart where it was found that Edeline was useless. Kosciusko, however, did a great job until the bridge was rebuilt. A brand new ferry, Lady

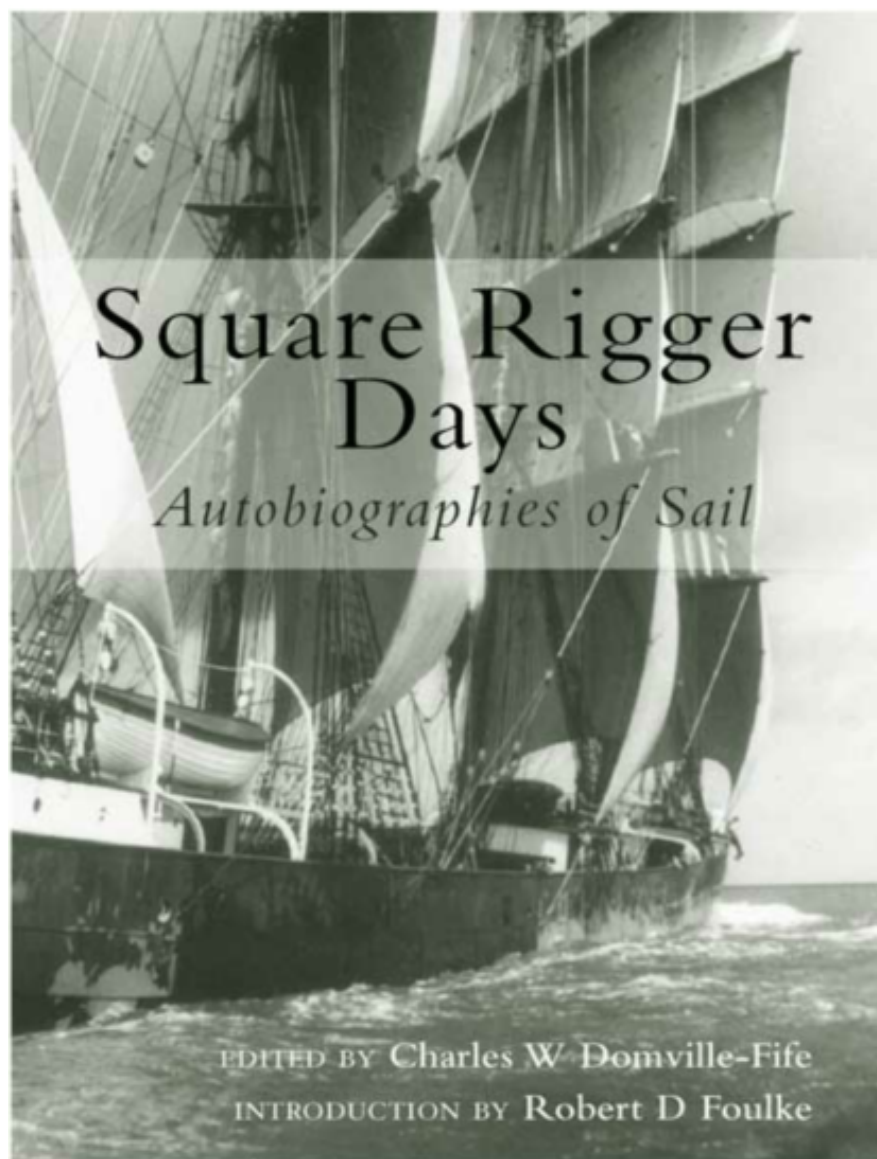


Mangana as passenger ferry in Hobart, Jan 6, 1975.

Wakehurst, was towed to Hobart and years later towed back to Sydney having done a great job.

Private enterprise got on with shifting people while the State Government got on with buck passing, indecision and then making some quite weird decisions. One such was to buy from Hong Kong a two-decked 30 year old car ferry and have it towed to Hobart. When Man On arrived it was quickly found out that her design as a car ferry made her use as a passenger ferry very dubious. Much extra money was expended before she was of any use. Meanwhile Bob Clifford was building and running his ferries very successfully.





Article: courtesy of AFLOAT Magazine December 2010

The second half of the 19th century saw the creation of the most beautiful ships the world has ever known. But, as time passes, the brutal reality of life under sail has been blurred by a veil of nostalgic sentimentality

Bruce Stannard removes his rose-coloured spectacles to look at a new book in which the men who crewed the great wind ships describe what it was really like to be lying out on the tops' l yards in a Cape Horn gale.

When I was a boy growing up on Balmain's gritty industrial waterfront in the immediate post war years, it was still possible to take a ferry across Darling Harbour to Erskine Street Wharf and there, in the rough and tumble heart of the old working waterfront, enter a world that had changed but little since the roaring days when the port of Sydney was crowded with sailing ships from around the world.

As a barefoot boy I earned my first meagre wages selling tabloid newspapers in smoke-filled, beer-slopped sailors dives up and down 'Erko' and the Hungry Mile.

SQUARE RIGGER DAYS

There, pitched in among the rowdy mobs of painted whores and drunken seamen, I was given the kind of wide-eyed education no boy ever gets at school. I quickly learned that sailors “worked like hosses at sea, but, spent like asses ashore.” Thus, I made far more in generous silver tips than I ever earned flogging newspapers.

Hard by the waterfront, on the northern side of Erskine Street stood an old ships chandlery and sailor’s outfitter, a bow-fronted emporium full of all the wonderful things that schoolboys’ dreams are made of brass bound ship’s wheels, lethal looking fids, sailmaker’s palms, cakes of beeswax, tubs of aromatic Stockholm tar, oil lamps, hempen rope by the coil, bolts of flaxen canvas and the straw-filled tickling mattresses that sailors called “donkeys’ breakfasts”

I still treasure a hand embroidered sailor’s keepsake from those days. “Don’t wait for your ship to come in,” it urged “swim out to it.”

Had there been a square-rigged ship in at anchor in Blackwattle Bay in those days, I would have been sorely tempted to do just that, but Pamir, the last deep waterman to sail from Sydney had long since cleared the Heads for London. Unfortunately, I’d caught my sea fever too late.

Over the years that miss opportunity became a source of profound regret, until that is, Seaforth, the British nautical publisher sent me a copy of Square Rigger Days, a beautifully illustrated book in which men who really did spend their lives before the mast, set down in vivid detail just how tough it was. Their accounts quickly made me realise that I would not have lasted 10 minutes, let alone endured a voyage that might have gone on and on for years.



Afterdeck awash on the four-masted barque Pommern, Rounding Cape Horn, 1930s.

SQUARE RIGGER DAYS

Captain R. Barry O'Brien, who came up through the hawsehole to command several famous British ships, also served under blood and guts American skippers who were, he says, renowned the world over for the brutal treatment they meted out to their crews.

"There were exceptions," Captain O'Brien writes, "but the majority of these Yankee packets richly deserved the title of 'hell ships' and 'blood boats.'"

Their hard-case skippers and bucko mates, possessed by some diabolical and inhuman blood lust, were experts in the art of 'working up' and 'man-handling' refractory crews; and many cases are on record of their beating a man to death with belaying pins or knuckle dusters, or of subjecting him to such refined methods of cruelty that he went mad, or jumped overboard to escape from them. In rare instances these human gorillas were brought to justice and executed, or sent to penal servitude for long terms, but in the majority of cases they went free to perpetrate fresh outrages elsewhere upon long suffering and down-trodden sailors.

"During my own sailing ship days (1800 – 1900) I was with a lot of men who, at one time or another, had served in these American ships. Nearly all of them bore some mark – a scar, a permanent limp, or maybe merely a tendency to insomnia, to remind them of the fact."

"One old shipmate I recollect in particular, who had served in a number of Yankee packets, had an ugly white scar running from his left temple, across the empty socket of his left eye, down to his mouth. A blow from a knuckle duster had inflicted this hideous wound and the old fellow was a proud of it as a war veteran might be of his VC."

"To have served in an American 'hell ship' and survived was regarded as a great honour. The experience lifted a man out of the ruck aboard a British 'lime juicer', singled him out as a hard case, stamped him as a man of iron – to be looked up to, respected and admired by his shipmates. Indeed, I honestly believe that the old sailor I have mentioned would far sooner have had his ghastly scar, which never failed to send a shudder through me, than all the proverbial tea in China.

Captain O'Brien recalls his time as an Able Seaman aboard the full-rigged ship *Star of India* under the command of the maniacal 'Captain X'.

The vessel sailed from London, bound for San Francisco on December 5, 1887, and before she was clear of the channel, O'Brien says, the new Captain made it known that he intended to run the ship in real Yankee fashion "and that when he spoke, he expected everyone to flap their wings and fly."

"As the *Star of Russia* ambled southwards through the tropics," O'Brien writes,

SQUARE RIGGER DAYS



the captain employed all the little tricks he had learned in Yankee ships to make life a hell for the men. The decks were holystoned and holystoned again, until they were as smooth as glass. The paintwork was washed and re-washed, until the sheen of the bare iron shone through it.

“When the supply of holystones and washing soda began to run low, the cables were dragged up on deck and chipped; then the sailors were sent down to scale the damp rust stinking chain lockers with eight or nine men being herded into one locker, so that the air they breathed was foul and there was scarcely elbow room.

The resulting hazing ultimately ended in tragedy.

“The ship was off the Horn, beating to and fro in the teeth of the furious westerlies,” Captain O’Brien writes. “Huge seas flooded the decks, repeatedly gutting out the fo’c’sle, petty officers’ and apprentices’ quarters. For three days no one had tasted a hot meal. The sailors bedding was as sodden as their clothes, for water continually seeped through the seams of the fo’c’sle deck head.”

“The elements were certainly doing their best to make everyone’s life a hell, but this was not enough for the captain, whose passion was for inflicting misery was an abiding passion with him.”

“Coming on deck on the morning of February 28 (1888) he saw the watch puffing disconsolately at their damp pipes, and instantly flew into a temper. ‘Can’t you find something better for the lazy hounds to do, mister?’ he demanded of the Second Mate, who was in charge of the watch on deck. ‘We’ve just finished hauling tight the weather braces, sir,’ replied the officer. ‘I dismissed the men for a bit of a spell.’ ‘A spell be damned!’ exploded the skipper. ‘Do you think this is

SQUARE RIGGER DAYS

a Sunday School, mister? Bring the loafers aft and set the cro'jack.'

"The Second Mate glanced at his superior in surprise for the cro'jack had been furled only a few hours before – there was far too much wind for it. He knew better than argue, however."

"The carpenter, sailmaker and bosun who were day men, turned out to bear a hand with the sail, and while its sheet was being hove down, a big sea broke aboard in the waist, sweeping the sailmaker overboard. The Second Mate threw a lifebuoy to him, but he might as well of saved himself the trouble, for within a few seconds the sailmaker had been swept out of sight in the smother of foam.

"Later in the morning, while a fierce squall was raging overhead, the cro'jack split from head to foot and blew into ribbons." There was no sailmaker to repair it.



Having read all that. I thanked my lucky stars that I remained a landlocked lubber after all.

Square Rigger Days: Autobiographies of Sail, Edited by Charles W Domville-Fife, is published by Seaforth, UK and is available through Boat Books.

THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE BAR

Capt. SNOW EALEY 18/08/2022

Capt. DAVID WELLINGTON 4/08/2022

RAYMOND SHARP 17/05/2022 (Ex Burn Philp)

WALTER JOHN PRITCHARD 6/05/2022 (SUA/MUA)

**MATHEW CARRELL 17/03/2022 (Barrier Reef ex Pilot
Master Clutha)**

Capt. CYRIL COCKSEGE 4/05/2021

THEY SAIL FOREVERMORE UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

CROSSING THE BAR

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call from me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the
boundless deep,
Turns again home.
Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;
For tho' from out our bourne of time and
place the flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

COMING EVENTS

CANBERRA ANNUAL COMMEMORATION SERVICE:

MN Memorial - Kings Park

Canberra, Sunday 23rd October 2022 at 1100 hrs

RSVP Stan Moriarty - Mobile 0418 488163

Email: secretary@mnwmf.com.au

NORAH HEAD MEMORIAL SERVICE

Saturday 3rd December 2022 at 1100 hrs



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