

Message from Ron Wylie



Hi Everyone

It's time to take stock and enjoy the recognition that the Australian Merchant Navy deserves. Catherine and I wanted to thank everyone for all their words of support, encouragement and advise over the years.

Below is a short story of how it all came about and a request to those organisations who can please on the 3rd September each year Fly the Red Ensign and hold a Memorial Service for those who made the Supreme Sacrifice "Whose Only Known Grave is the Sea"

Regards, Ron and Catherine

The photo left is from the 2007 Anzac Day edition of the SMH. Ed.

Merchant Navy Day 3rd September Fly the Red Ensign

As you are aware the present Federal Labor Government of Australia has Legislated and Proclaimed the 3rd September as Merchant Navy Day to be Remembered each year, and it has now been Promulgated by our Governor General Sir Michael Jeffery on the 4th July 2008.

In around 1998 I got together with two of my old shipmates Frank Snell and Jack Knight, we decided to write a book on the sacrifices of Australian Merchant Seaman during World War 2. After much discussion and deliberation and some external advise we decided the best way forward would be to develop a website, so that young people could read the stories of the Australian Merchant Navy. Today we have the following websites The Australian Merchant Navy the Mercantile Marine Forum and Mercantile Marine Pedia . Each month we have over 6800 visitors to these sites.



Whilst doing our research, writing and collecting stories from so many sources, we realised that the Australian Government did not have much in terms of official records and at the time there was no Merchant Navy Memorial, Monument, Nominal Roll and or special day of Remembrance. It was this realisation that started us on our journey which ended up becoming The Merchant Navy Day Campaign to have the Australian Government legislate 3rd September as Merchant Navy Day each year, as exists in the United Kingdom and Canada.

Over the last ten years we have written hundreds of letters to Ministers and Members of both State and Federal Governments, Associations, Companies and the Unions. We ran a petition from which we received 4987 signatures. We aggressively petitioned the previous Prime Minister Mr John Howard and the three different Ministers for Veterans Affairs with no luck.

In 2007 with the Federal Election looming we approached the Labour Party Shadow Minister for Veteran Affairs, Hon Mr. Allen Griffin and Opposition Leader Hon. Mr. Kevin Rudd the result was that the proclamation became part of their election platform and on the 4th July 2008 the Rudd Government fulfilled their election promise and legislated the 3rd September Merchant Navy Day a Day of Remembrance.

We want to thank the hundreds of people who have helped, supported and encouraged us from the Merchant Navy Association in Australia, the Maritime Union of Australia, Merchant Navy Sub Branch RSL NSW, The Company of Master Mariners, Burns Philip Group, Bar Bound, League of Ancient Mariners, and Vindicatrix Association Worldwide to name but a few. Thank you for keeping us going.

I am now 87 years old, Jack Knight crossed the bar in 2004 and Frank Snell in 2005. Today they would be pleased and proud that what started out as a dream has now become a reality.

We will Remember them on the 3rd of September this year.

Please fly the Red Ensign on the 3rd September.

Ron Steve Wylie 25th July 2008 www.merchant-navy-ships.com rswylie@bigpond.com

I spend a lot of time on the internet to much according to Maureen as she says I never have time to talk to her, she's right you know-so I bought her a computer now I can email her!!

Google Doodle -

I Googled GOOD & EVIL -

Evil got 257 million hits in 0.07 seconds

Good got 279 million 790 thousand hits in 0.06 seconds.

So us good guys are still winning!!!

VINDI TRAVELERS



David Partridge –left in his Tommy Cooper guise- is over in the UK now (July 20), picking up from model maker Dave Williams of Canvey Island the “Arranmore” in a bottle that has traditionally been raffled off at the Sunday BBQ of the Downunder reunions these past few years that this year is being held in Christchurch NZ.

Dave, when he has done the important bit and got our ‘bottle’ will be visiting his Dad in London to help the family celebrate the his old dad's

100th Birthday!!

What a knees up that will be! Great genes to inherit, worth Bottling!

Debbie & Mike Siegle have just done the compulsory big UK & Europe trip that us ex-pats just have to do. It was Mike's first trip back to Sharpness since he escaped in 1961- the trip down memory lane moved him more than he expected and brought a lump to his throat then when he started counting the years since 1961 he really realized how old he is now and that really shook him!



Mike Siegle pictured here doing what he does so well, spruiking, on this occasion at the 2006 Christmas party.

Debbie Siegle doing what she does so well—organizing us Vindi Boys! On this occasion as Santa's helper on the “Bounty”- Oh the other strange looking person is a youthful looking Bill King without the beard he sports now.



Got this email from UK Vindi Boy

G'day, You won't know me of course. I'm just another Vindi boy among a lot of them. I was at the Vindi March- June 1949. The ship's Captain then was Captain Angell, Camp Captain was Captain Duguid. Like a lot a lot of us I'm now firmly ashore. Haven't got a British MN anymore. What ships there are flying the Red Duster have got foreign crews. Over the years I've spent several holidays in OZ. The only state I haven't been to is Tassie. I've crossed OZ by train from Perth to Sydney by road from Darwin to Adelaide, spent three days in The Alice on that one. Still not sure how I got past Alice on that trip. If all goes well I'll be in Sydney for Christmas and New Year, 16th.Dec-18th.Jan. Don't know where you are but if you or any other Vindi Boy handy to Sydney wants to get in touch, let me know. Maybe we can meet up. Cheers for now. **Colin Hawken**
Seeing as he knows the correct form of address for us Antipodean gentlemen I wrote back to say we would be Blinking highly delighted to meet him when he is over here! Ed.

UK PORT STATISTICS 2007

Total freight traffic through UK ports was 581.1 million tonnes This suggests little overall change on 2006. Since 1987, total traffic has risen by 109 Mt (23 per cent). Inwards traffic increased by 111 Mt (45 per cent) whilst outwards traffic was almost unchanged over the period.

Grimsby and Immingham maintained its position as the UK's leading port in 2007 with 66.2 Mt (2.2 Mt higher than in 2006), followed by London with 52.7 Mt (up 0.8 Mt) and Tees and Hartlepool with 49.8 Mt (down 3.6 Mt).

The breakdown of major port traffic by cargo type in 2007 was: liquid bulk 44 per cent; dry bulk and other general cargo 27 per cent; lift-on lift-off (lo-lo) containers 11 per cent; and roll-on/roll-off cargo 18 per cent.

The top ten ports in 2007 in terms of tonnage were as follows:

Million Tonnes

Grimsby and Immingham 66.2 London 52.7 Tees and Hartlepool 49.8

Southampton 43.3 Forth 36.7 Milford Haven 35.5 Liverpool 32.3

Felixstowe 25.7 Dover 25.1 Sullom Voe 16.6

Our WW2 members

The granting of Merchant Navy day got me thinking about who in our ranks now served during the war. Going through our list we have:-

Fred Britt –1942
Geoff Burrell-1942
John Butler-1941
Fred Cooke –1942
Jim Crowhurst—1942
Graham Franklin - 1943
Jim Gardener-1943
Harry Halmshaw -1941

Peter Hand –1943
Eric Hitchen –1945
Joe Holden -1943
Don Jenkins –1945
Phillip Langham –1942
William Mckinnon –1941
Geoff Maidment 1942
John Mears -1941

Hugh Mullen -1943
Les Reed -1943
John Ryrie –1942
Andy Squibb –1944
Ken Taylor -1944
Mike Taylor –1942
Len Wade –1942
Eric Wright –1943

I hope I haven't missed anyone off, we have a couple of 1946 lads but not knowing their dates at the Vindi I don't know if they were at sea before hostilities ceased.

WW2 members who have 'Crossed the Bar' since our branch started in 1995

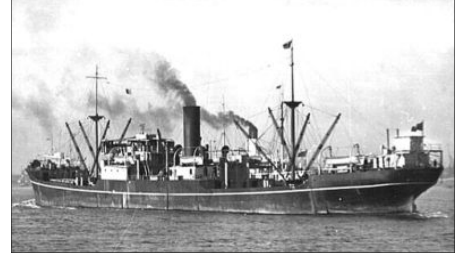
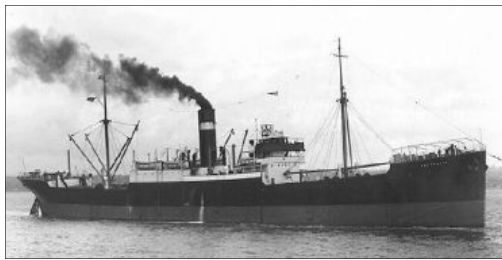
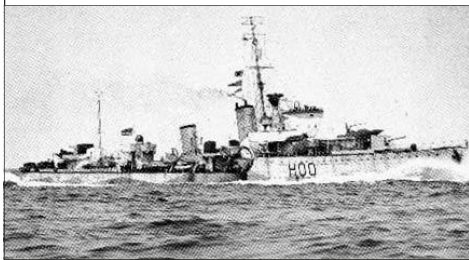
Bob Newton Vindi Feb 1943 - died 1996- Was our first WW2 member to pass away - he saw service on the Russian Convoys but found it upsetting to talk much about them. He was very proud of the MN and his house in Downer ACT was full of MN Pictures books & memorabilia when he gave me the 'grand tour'.

Grenville Fox –Vindi 1942 - died 1997 - I met Grenville a couple of times once at our inaugural Vindi meeting in 1995 and again at a MN memorial weekend in Canberra where he lived.

He was in the now famous or infamous convoy SC107 of November 1942. Later he was on T124X articles with 'Operation Pluto' the laying of a fuel pipeline across the channel after the Normandy invasion.

Convoy SC 107 Was attacked by a U-Boat Wolf pack which sank 15 out of the 42 ship that had left Sydney, Nova Scotia on 24 October 1942. The all Canadian mid ocean escort was 1 destroyer Restigouche & 4 Flower class corvettes—Algoma, Arvida, Amherst, Celandine & the rescue **ship** 'Stockport' and 2 rescue tugs.

Photos Clockwise— HMCS Restigouche, 3 of the ships sunk 'Parthenon' (greek), 'Hartington', 'Jeypore', a 'Digby class' RCAF bomber that sank U 502 on the second day. A 'Flower' class corvette (not a SC 107 escort)



158 seamen were lost with 7410 tons of Zinc, 8500 of wheat, 20 tanks, 11,809 tons of steel and timber, and 42330 tons of general cargo including trucks and 3050 tons of explosives and 8985 tons of fuel. When the 6690-ton British ship 'Hatimura' exploded the U-132 is believed to have been destroyed by the kiloton-range detonation of her cargo of ammunition.

Arvida and Celandine were detached to Iceland with Stockport and the 2 tugs overcrowded with 240 survivors. The Stockport an ex Grimsby to Holland LNER ferry saved many lives until she herself was sunk in Feb 43 with all her crew plus the many survivors she had onboard.

Our WW2 members cont.

Walter Jones -Vindi 1940 --died 2003- I knew Walter quite well, I used to take my tug crew around to help him drink the great home brew that he made in the bath tub at his home in Maroubra.

His first ship was a Dutch tanker, next the 'Moreton Bay' went to Canada with a couple of hundred German POWs & about the same number of RAF men going to the RAF Air training schools over there. In September 1942 he joined the Blue Funnel ship "Glenorchy" a month later sailing in the famous 'Pedestal' convoy to Malta she and one or two other ships were torpedoed and sunk by Italian MTBs.

Walter's lifeboat made it ashore to Tunisia where the survivors were made POWs by the Vichy French. Shortly after the north African landings by the Allies the POWs they were released and taken to the American lines thence to Algiers to join the 'Orontes' and taken home to England in time for Christmas 1942.



Photos top row-Glenorchy, Brisbane Star entering Valetta, Middle row- HMS Ledbury, Hole in the bow of Brisbane Star, Dorset being bombed & sunk, Ray Morton (Brisbane Vindi Boy) & Alan Shaw the only 2 living survivors of the "Ohios" crew with the Ohio's bell at the 2002 operation Pedestal reunion in Malta 2002—The famous picture of the OHIO being towed into Valetta with the destroyers Ledbury & Penn lashed alongside., signed by Ray & Allan & some of the crews from other ships.



Walter's next ship was the 'Perseus' from which he paid off in Sydney and joined a small coaster that was part the 'American Small ship Squadron' employed supplying the US forces in the islands to our north, he stayed on this ship until 1946, paying off in San Diego —Later he and 5 Australian seamen who had joined that USA supply fleet were repatriated to Sydney on the Matson liner 'Mariposa' along with 400 Canadian war brides who were going out to Australia to join the husbands they had married when they were at the Commonwealth air Training Schools in Canada—must have been an interesting trip!

Albert Dawson -Vindi 1944 - died 2005 — I knew Albert quite well, stayed at his place in Kerang, during our talks he never mentioned anything about his WW2 time so I am assuming he had a quiet war.

His first ship the 'Condessa' brought him to Melbourne on Easter Sunday in 1944 where he met his wife to be Wilma, they only talked for 10 minutes then parted, but kept up a romance by mail until Albert emigrated after the war and they married in 1950. Albert then became an instant wheat farmer, Wilma's father having no sons promptly retired and gave Albert the keys to the farm on his wedding day.



Left the 'Condessa'

Our WW2 Members cont.

Gerald Oates –Vindi 1941 -died 2003 Gerald was another of the now legendary Russian Convoy men - I should say Russian Convoy Boy! His first trip as deck boy after leaving the Vindi was to Murmansk where his ship was bombed and sunk soon after arriving. The ship he was being repatriated on was also sunk a couple of days north of Scotland, Gerald and some other survivors came ashore in Scotland and wandered around all day trying to get help but no one trusted them and they were shunned, it wasn't until a RAF truck came by and the driver picked them up took them to an RAF camp that they got fed and given some new clothes. I remember Gerald saying that he only got half as much money as the men did to replace their lost clothes and gear because he was a boy, the princely sum of seven shillings & sixpence.

Undaunted and obviously a glutton for punishment after his one month's survivors leave he joined one of Ropner's as an apprentice.

Alan Lowe –Vindi1942—died 1999 - We only had the pleasure of Alan's company the once-that was at a Vindi dinner that David Bell-Lennon put on for us at his home in Belmont but Alan was able to relate his interesting WW2 tale –and life's amazing coincidences– He left college where he was learning to become an Industrial Chemist to join the MN, his ship lost in the Greek islands, he with the others in the crew became POWs ending up in a POW camp in Italy, not being many MN prisoners they were put in with the Army prisoners where he became good friends with the British senior officer at the camp.



Following the Italian surrender he with some soldiers managed to escape whilst being moved from one camp to another, making their way south to allied lines.

In 1960 Alan newly arrived in Australia applied for a job as industrial Chemist at a sugar mill in Queensland, doing the interviewing was the senior officer from the POW camp. Alan got the job and worked for CSR for many years.

Ron Lutman –Vindi 1941 –died 2005 I visited Ron a couple of times at his Frankston home in Victoria and we had lots of good chats but I can't recall anything he said about his time at sea in WW2.

I know he stayed on at sea until the mid 50s.

In Australia he worked in the building trade at first but found his true vocation when he a Melbourne tram driver which gave him the contact with lots of people that he loved to talk to.

He was a prime mover for the MN Memorial in the Garden of Remembrance at the Heidelberg Repat Hospital, his photo is on a glass brick in the glass wall of remembrance, no doubt the artist couldn't resist that beard of his.

A remembrance tablet with his name is set into the floor of the Mcloud Shopping mall where he used to walk to every day when he retired. He loved to talk to the shopkeepers and run errands for them, he also was the Mall's resident volunteer Santa for many years.

That beard again!

He tried to get a Victorian Vindi branch going for a year or two but it never took off.

Peter Fairy -Vindi 1941 - died Feb 2008 –Peter was another survivor from the Russian Convoys being torpedoed on one of them and again later on an Atlantic convoy.

On leaving the MN in 45 he joined the Army he followed this trick by joining the Police force at Southend. There he met another young ex MN policeman they didn't meet again until our inaugural Vindi meeting in 1995, being true policemen they never forget a face and recognised each other after all that time, the other guy was John Watkins a 1939 Vindi boy.



Left Peter BBQ-ing at the Orient Hotel, the Rocks Sydney at our first Vindi meeting in 1995.

Right after his many years as District officer in Malaya he was a pucker empire man and loved to hoist the ensign every morning and lower the flag at sunset on his property at Yarrawonga near Gulgong.



at

OUR WW2 MEN Cont.

Herbert Holden - - Vindi 1939- Died 1999 who was on the Vindi during her very first months in Sharpness and also spent his time cleaning the ship up.

He was torpedoed on his first trip and spent 8 days in a lifeboat, he later became a ships radio officer.

He wrote a book about his times I have a copy but sadly can't find it now.

I know one or two of his ships were sunk but I never got around to talking to him to learn anymore.

John Fletcher -Vindi 1942—died 2002- he was torpedoed 3 times!! In one sinking he shared his lifeboat with a group of Nuns for several days which must have been a testing time both for the Nuns and the crew.

Another of his memories was sailing on one ship with a man who survived the Titanic.

Richard Griffiths - Vindi 1939 died 2002 - Richard was a new blip on my radar when I heard he had died suddenly - never learnt anything of his WW2 times just that he worked on the coast here for many years as Bosun.

Charles Taylor –Vindi1941 - died 2003- Charles never forgot the day he left the Vindi with 5 other deck Boys bound for Liverpool.



When they got to the Shipping Federation office in Liverpool he was number 5 in the queue -the first 4 deck boys were assigned to the 'Ceramic' Charles & the other fellow the 'Otranto'.

A few days later the 'Ceramic' went down with 655 souls the only survivor one lone soldier - Corporal Eric Monday taken aboard the U-Boat when it returned later looking for the Captain.

It took 5 torpedoes to sink her, the lifeboats got away but they all were lost in a force 10 storm that blew up.

When Charles retired he started to do research into the loss of the Ceramic and her crew this led to a life long mission to track down the details of British and Australian seamen lost in the war who names had not been officially recorded as war casualties.

Left– Charles (the tall one) with Len Wade V1942 in Len's basement 'Den'

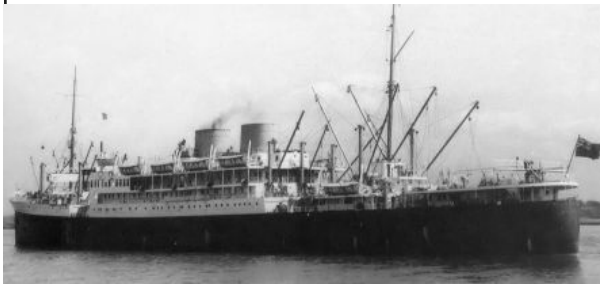
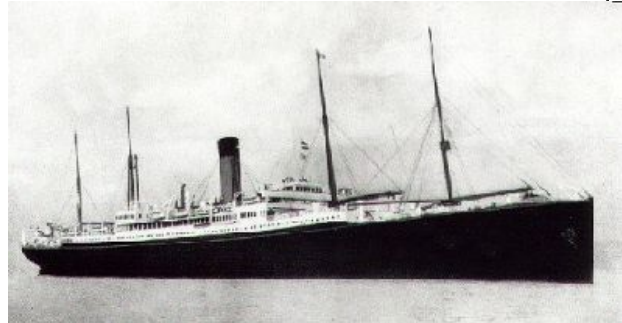
Charles's extensive library on Merchant Shipping was donated to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

He did two trips on the 'Otranto' to Australia & the Middle East troop-ing. His next ship was fitted out as a landing ship carrying landing craft and served in the landings in the Mediterranean theatre of war.

He saw the war out on the Atlantic convoys.

He was both a founder and an active member of our branch.

Right the Ceramic.



Bill Hammond -Vindi 1942-died 2005-

Bill lived in Bussleton WA- we swapped a couple of letters but never spoke on the phone –speaking to his widow Grace about him I learned they had met in 1944 and had fallen in love during their first dance at a meat works dance in Ensenada, Argentina.

Grace told me that the MN boys had been getting a bad name in town so it was decided to do things to try and 'gentify' them—dances were one of the ideas and all the girls at the meat works were asked to help out. Grace went along with her mother as chaperon, but she obviously didn't chaperon enough.

Grace & Bill didn't meet again until early in 1947 when Grace was able to secure a passage to UK on the 'Highhland Brigade' (left)

They married in Greenford Middlesex in June 47.

So you see danger lurks not only on the sea.



WW2 Members Cont.

Jack Key –Vindi 1943 - died 2002 Jack lived in Melbourne so again we never met, talking to his son in law I learned that jack had been torpedoed twice. Met his wife to be during a war time voyage here then jumped ship in Melbourne in 1947 to marry. Soccer mad he promoted the game and set up several soccer clubs, no mean feat in football mad Melbourne.

Albert Dawson –Vindi 1944 - died 2005 — I knew Albert quite well, stayed at his place in Kerang,.

During our talks he never mentioned anything about his WW2 time so I am assuming he had a quiet war.



His first ship the 'Condessa' (below) brought him to Melbourne on Easter Sunday in 1944

where he met his wife to be Wilma, they only talked for 10 minutes then parted, but kept up a romance by mail until Albert emigrated after the war. They married in 1950. Albert then became an instant wheat

farmer, Wilma's father having no sons promptly retired and gave Albert the keys to the farm on his wedding day.



Herbert Wilkinson-Vindi 1943-Died Dec. 2006, Bert, as he liked to be called, was born in Lancaster on 26 May, 1927, joining the Vindi on 26 July, 1943.

He signed on his first ship the Dominion Monarch as a laundry boy on 11 October completing two voyages on her. Two other ships he did wartime service on were the Samarinda and Empress of Scotland. He met his wife of 60 years, Isabella, in Morecambe, two days before reporting to the Vindi. They were married on 8 August, 1946.

His son, Brian, has written to me telling me that Bert was a very private person, only letting titbits of his WWII service out when documentaries were being shown on TV or WWII films; merely saying I was there when that was happening. Only six weeks before he died did he tell his family he was part of the firing party of a rocket launcher that fired twelve missiles at a time in support of troops going ashore from the ship he was on.

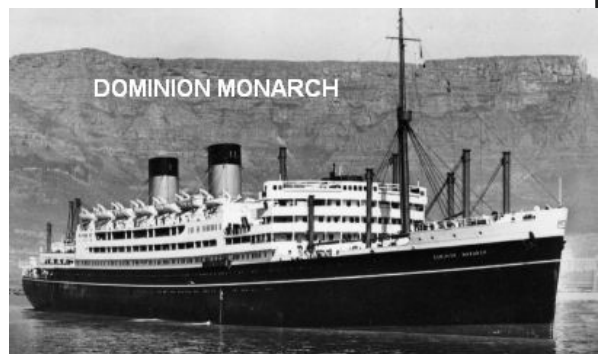
He swallowed the anchor in January 1947 after completing a further three single voyages on the Sterling Castle, the Franconia and the 20,000 ton Queen of Bermuda. His service on the latter ship: 3/9/46 to 26/9/46

coincided with the time I was serving on her as an assistant steward. Not surprisingly I can't remember whether we ever rubbed shoulders. (John Mears)

The Queen of Bermuda, at the time was still a troop ship, bringing home 3000 lads at a time who had fought all the King's enemies, from varying parts of the world. Bert however, didn't adapt well to shore life, in spite of Isobella bearing him two sons, one in 1947 and Brian in 1948.

On January 19th 1951 he joined the Grenadier Guards where upon he was sent to Korea and earned his discharge in November, 1955. (I suspect he could have told quite a few stories about those times too!)

Bert eventually trained as a fridge mechanic wanting to get a trade certificate to improve his income. He and Isobella followed their son Brian out to Australia in 1980. Bert determined to make a go of it, and in spite of being middle aged he took work where he could find it, including 12 hour shifts doing foundry work: not retiring until he was 70.



WW2 members cont.

ROY ACKRILL - Vindi-1942 -died -16 SEPT 2007—Roy was one the earliest TSVA members, his name is listed as a subscriber in the first 1993 print run of Roy Derham's book 'The Vindicatrix'.



I never got to meet him but I spent quite some hours talking to him on the phone mostly about his war time adventures that read like something out of "Boys own Adventures"

From being a regular MN seaman he went as an TX124 engineer in the RN, ending up on MGBs in the Aegean then to the SBS a commando unit in that area and later against the Japanese in the East. Altogether an amazing story, I asked him to write it all down but he said he couldn't as he had signed the "Official secrets act" but would leave his story posthumously, I hope he has because it is a story and a half!

Until ill health and or distance caused them to 'drop off' we had on our books three other 1939 Vindi boys- **Bill Lucas, Arthur Clark & John Watkins** in addition to the late **Herbert Holden** - unfortunately they have all dropped of my radar now, the phone numbers I had for them no longer work.

Bill who came from the school of hard knocks -St Barnardos orphanage in London was on the very first Vindi course he went down to Sharpness in the back of a truck from the Gravesend Sea School—his class spent the course cleaning the old ship up after her long idle sojourn in London docks were she had become a doss house for the unwashed apparently. Bill said they competed with the horde of rats for the food! He said the Vindi was 'easy' after Dr Barnado's!

I never got to talk to John Watkins about his wartime life.

Arthur Clark lives in Bundaberg, when he retired at 60 he took up wood carving with a vengeance and became famous world wide in that work. He also has a good stock of WW2 stories, I



can't recall all he told me now, I remember a bit about one story -the ship was bombed and ended up with a 250Kg unexploded bomb in the passengers lounge, told on

the radio to leave it alone they finished the trip with the bomb chocked off with a table cloth over it.

L-R Harry Halmshaw - me- Arthur Clark , Harry a 1941 VB lives in Bundaberg



L-R John Watkins, Mike Gartenfeld, Roy Derham, Bill Lucas. Taken at inaugural branch meeting March 1995. Mike was on the very last Vindi course.

Sad to have to report the news that two NSW Vindi Boys 'crossed the bar' recently

Peter Hellett -b-1501-1924- died June 5th. 2008. R260187 -Peter was a 1942 Vindi Boy hailing from Brighton. He was a founder member of our branch and attended branch events until his health took a turn for the worse, he also used to send lots of MN related cuttings for the newsletters. I never got to learn about his WW2 days.



He was badly injured in the 1989 Newcastle earthquake being trapped in the car park under the Workers Club for several hours, he was the last person to be rescued alive from there. His health never really was good after that and he took up residence in the Salvation Army Home at Merrywether, he was always full of praise for the way the home looked after him and the other residents.

our branch will send \$100 to the Salvos in his name as a token of his appreciation.

Harry Breslin -d.o.b. 18/03/1927-Belfast - Vindi 1944-R307379 Harry who for the past few years lived in a nursing home at Towradgi just north of Wollongong died early July 2008, I only heard the other day from a neighbour son who works at the home, he was the one who introduced me to Harry last year.



I brought Harry along to a few of our Branch meetings until he became to weak to take out, he did tell me about his time at sea but I can't recall the names of ships now or other details. After his arrival in Australia he was for many years a traveling salesman for a big grocery wholesaler a job that he really liked as loved to travel and meet people.

His discharge book was stolen in a robbery some years ago and he was really pleased when Robin Hurst (Vindi HQ) was able to get him copies from Kew last year.

Harry a widower for many years has three daughters and grandchildren in the Wollongong area.

Looking up the history of Convoy SC 107 on the internet I came upon this sad story about a Vindi Boy's first trip

HAROLD OSMOND HARDING 1925 ? 1942

Most families have a wartime loss to remember.

This is the story of our family loss and is dedicated to the memory of Harold and his generation.



Harold was the eldest son of Harold Harding Senior and Florence Ellen Harding (nee Tildesley). He was born 27th October 1925 at Prince Street, Pleck, Walsall and was Christened at St. John's Church, Pleck. There were eight children in all: elder sister Joyce, then brothers Stanley, Brian, Philip, Kenneth, youngest sister Enid and youngest brother Barry. Our family lived in Gower Street, Pleck, from about 1930 till the early 50s. Harold went to Hillary Street Junior and Senior school. The photo shows him aged about 12. In what little spare time Harold had, like many other elder kids at that time he had many chores to do with such a large family, before he could go out and have time to himself. Harold, known as "Opple Harding" amongst the local lads, was in the local 34th Scout Group, which met at Pleck Methodist Hall, on the Bescot Road. This would have been circa 1938-1939. Harold would call for his mate Ken Surch, early evening time and they would walk to the Hall to attend the Scout Meeting, where they would do rope knots and mental test games etc..

But the night always ended playing the same game, "British Bulldog". A simple game. All the scouts stood at one end of the hall except one scout who was chosen to stand in the middle of the room. The Scout Master would shout "British Bulldog" and all the scouts ran to the other end. The scout in the middle had to catch one of them and lift him clear of the floor and then there were two chaps in the middle of the room. They had to try to catch others on the second and later "runs". Very soon the middle group grew, until only one scout was left to "run" the hall. This scout was "Opple" on numerous occasions.

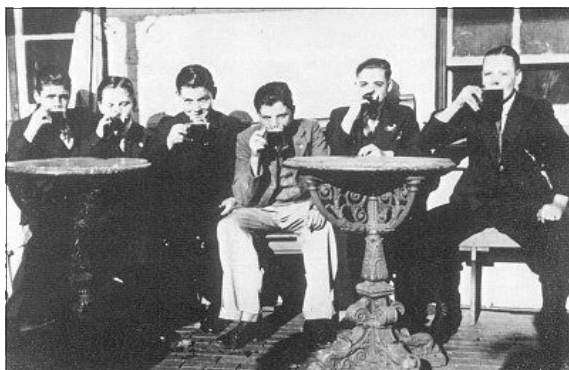
No one could go home until this was over and Harold tended to always make it extra time.

Harold left school at 14 and started work at Walker Brothers, Pleck Road, where he operated a hand press. He stayed for about 12 months when he went to work for Martin Winn, circa 1940-41.

Harold, aged about 14 or 15 years, photographed at a Martin Winn's works outing to Bridgnorth, circa 1939-41. Harold is third from the left.

In May 1942, Harold joined the Merchant Navy. My Auntie Joyce told us that Harold's last words to his mom were "Well I'm off now mom, if I don't come back don't worry... I'll be ok."

The inevitable happened. Harold never returned. My Grandmother received a letter, edged in purple, saying that Harold was "missing at sea". Later the dreaded black edged letter arrived. All the family knew was that Harold lost his life in the Atlantic some 500 miles off the coast of Ireland. This was all the family knew for 57 years. My grandparents hardly spoke of this as obviously it was



too traumatic for them to do so. Sadly, my grandfather, Harold Senior, passed away in 1974 and my grandmother, Florence Ellen, passed away in 1982. And that was all they knew too of the fate of their eldest son. Harold completed his 12 week training course on TS Vindicatrix at Sharpness, Gloucester. **The photo shows him aged about 16 and may be part of a group "passing out" photo.** Harold then travelled to South Shields and signed on as a cabin boy on his first ship, SS Hartington, for his first voyage.

Documents show that Harold was to be paid 5pounds per month as a merchant seaman and of this he was allocating 4 pounds per month to my grandmother, to help support the family.

Harold left Great Britain on 18th September 1942 and on the 19th September joined Convoy ONS 134, bound for Halifax Nova Scotia, duly arriving in Halifax on the 7th October.

Twenty days later, on October 27th, Harold's 17th birthday, Harold and SS Hartington left Halifax and took up position 73 in Convoy SC 107, laden with urgent supplies, destined for the United Kingdom. There were 42 ships in the convoy. On the night of November 2nd 1942, SS Hartington was the fourth ship to be torpedoed by enemy action at 4am GMT.

A total of 15 ships were sunk from Convoy SC 107, as a result of enemy action.

SS Hartington sank 20 minutes after being torpedoed. She dispatched two lifeboats, which stayed together until the following afternoon, when they were separated by severe weather conditions. One of the lifeboats was picked up 10 days later, with all survivors but one, by a destroyer on her way

back to St Johns, Newfoundland. She was going to re-fuel as she had missed her convoy, so it was by pure luck she had sighted the lifeboat.

Harold and his shipmates in the other lifeboat were never heard of again. SS Hartington rests at position 52D 30M North and 45D 30M West in the North Atlantic.



Harold is officially commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial to men of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and who have no known grave.

MERCHANY NAVY DAY CELEBRATIONS 2008

It looks like that any MN Day celebration in Sydney is going to be low key this year at least. Unfortunately just after MN Day was proclaimed by the government they also proclaimed the battle for Australia Day.



I have made enquiries to the MNA re their intentions for the day – which are –Meet at the Cenotaph Martin Place at 11am for the Battle for Australia ceremony then walk down to the Seafarers Mission in Sussex St. for a MN Day service.

I also enquired with the Seaman's Union to see if they were having any ceremony to mark MN Day 2008.

As yet they haven't officially discussed it.

They do hold an MN ceremony on "Maritime Day" the 24 of Sept. where they march with a band across Pymont bridge down to the 'Anchors' MN memorial adjacent to the maritime Museum at Darling Harbour for a service there. I was hoping they might do the same for MN Day and we would be able to join them.

We could do it ourselves if we get enough starters to make a show, let me know if you would like to try for this.

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