

T.S. VINDICATRIX ASSOCIATION NSW-ACT

A part of the world wide Vindi family



Yet though her splendour may have ceased to be she played her sovereign part in making me.-*John Masefield*
Branch newsletter April 2007 number 56

The Queen Mary 2 in Sydney, how ships have changed since our days at sea.
I went to see her and was amazed by her sheer size, she filled Woolloomooloo Bay.



151000 tons, 12 decks high. 345metres long. 40metres. beam. 2620 passengers, 1,254 crew.

My second thought was, look at all those deck heads to soogee!

As well as looking radically different all the onboard working gear will have changed radically too, push button lifeboat launching, ride on deck vacuum cleaners & scrubbing machines, no tricks on the wheel.

The cooks & stewards will still have the same end tasks to achieve but with modern equipment, no more galley boys peeling spuds. Would love to see in the kitchens.

Another change is 'tipping' now they take 10% from your credit card as soon as you walk onboard. Dramatic changes too down below, no more the hot cavernous spaces, giant engines roaring, ladders, catwalks, bright steel handrails, donkey greasers, now it's power plant compartments, behind sound proof walls controlled by computers in air conditioned rooms.

Main propulsion is by propellers still, now mounted on rotating pods, electrically powered by alternators driven by banks of diesel engines or gas turbines, the high temperature exhaust gases from these turbines is then used to make super heated steam to drive steam turbines that in turn drive more alternators to provide electricity for the ship, the exhaust steam from these turbines is then run through heat exchangers to heat water for shipboard use, innovations to save costs but also to reduce pollution emissions as port authorities world wide start to clamp down on ship generated pollution.

Ships like jet aircraft are now being more recognised for the high polluters they are, when you think about it bringing a big ship into your city centre is like adding an instant suburb, pollution wise.

The cruise industry is still booming, the Queen Victoria and the giant 'Freedom of the Seas' are soon to make their maiden voyages. In all 34 big passenger liners are on order for delivery by the end of 2011, adding more than 80,000 passenger berths at the cost of more than US\$15 billion!!

As nice as these ships are I still drool at a photo of a classic blue funnel Boat, the best looking ships ever (in my ever so 'umble opinion) below L-R the Diomed, Ixion, Atrous, Go on Drool !!



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Forthcoming Events

The next Bi-monthly branch meeting will be held at the Pyrmont Bridge Hotel, the old MONTY'S pub once of a right disreputable reputation which is right next to the old Pyrmont bridge now a historical treasure, once just a flaming traffic jam.

Saturday May 12 starting at 1100 (first floor)

Lunch drinks and a convivial chat on subjects worldly & wise to follow.

Red Ensign Mid Year Muster

The Markets Club Flemington

Saturday June 16—Starts at 1000 till about 1500. Cost \$22PP includes lunch and some drinks.

Free safe parking. Bookings Gordon Solomon on 02 9790 3505

Vindi outing

Plans are afoot to have a day out later in the year on one of the islands on Sydney Harbour, Garden Island with its naval museum and nice gardens is looking favourite, Cockatoo island is another interesting place with a fascinating history and well worth a visit. It will be a BYO picnic type day.

Final details for this in the next newsletter.

The 7th Annual Australia/New Zealand TS Vindicatrix Reunion 9-10 & 11 of November 2007

The WA Vindi boys are busy organising for a good time to be had by all at the Fremantle reunion, it certainly sounds good from what I have heard with a couple of 'new' events added to the usual program.

You would have received the full details with the last UK Vindi news, but in casa you have lost that bookings can be made by contacting.

Tony Harben Email: rob_marg@e-wire.net.au Phone: 08 8945 64292

Charlie White Email: vindiboy@tadaust.org.au Phone: 08 8959 29515

Events gone By

My Big 70th Birthday Bash in March went of very well (I'm still getting over it) we had a cast of thousands! Thank you all for making it so great. The Southern Area picnic day on the day following the 'bash' was also a good day enjoyed by all, with lunch at the port Kembla Seafarers Mission and a tour of the port in the mission bus. We had a tarpaulin muster and presented the Chaplain with about \$80 for the day.



Photos above from my Birthday bash Left Maureen scrubbing Peter's back Centre Len Britton, Bill King, Trevor Castleton (NZ Vindi), right John & me & Bev Castleton.

Photo on left.. David Masters the Lay Chaplain gave us an interesting talk on the history of the Missions to Seamen (*Seafarers in the politically correct days*) and what the Port Kembla mission does now and hopes for the future.

Vindi Visitors

Bill & Shirley Davis, who many of you have met at Vindi reunions, Bill is editor of the QLD Vindi & Shirley is the webmaster of their excellent website.

They have just retired and are currently on a round Australia trip with their new super dooper caravan. Seeing the sights and calling in on as many Vindi friends as they can. They will be in Fremantle in time for the Vindi Reun-



Message from John Mears
John has a feeling that he missed a couple of people out when he posted out the latest UK Vindi news in march this year.
So if you didn't receive a UK Vindi news letter in March
Contact John on 02 9874 5640
or vindi01@optusnet.com.au

OBITUARY

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Thomas Walker Hodgson 30/11/1930 - 13/02/2007

Tom was born in the Scotland road area of Liverpool, into a household that already held 19 brothers and sisters! And the odd cousin or two.

Tom said "the Corned beef Sarnies used to run out before they got down to me". He did say that he had a happy childhood growing up in those crowded streets but he always wanted to go to sea not so much for a career but a gateway to a new life.

Being in a 4 berth cabin and having three meals a day was a luxury to him he said. Nevertheless he was always inordinately proud of his family and up to the end he took pride & pleasure in being able to recite all his siblings names in chronological order.



Tom went of to join the Vindi and start his great escape in January of 1948.

Tom was ever a very practical man and used each event in his life to the best advantage that he could for himself and later his family.

This doctrine was evident in his sea time, ships plied the sea just to take Tom where he wanted to be and that place was Australia after his first taste of it in 1949.

Tom & Gloria – at Tanunda 2005

After just 2 years at sea Tom made the life changing decision to jump ship in Sydney. Picked up by Police shortly afterwards who told him, 'get away from Sydney, keep your nose clean for a year then apply to stay', good advice that Tom took. Going to a country town got a job and a year later presented himself at the Dept of immigration in Melbourne and became the proud owner of letter from the Commonwealth of Australia saying that the Dept of immigration had no objection to him residing in Australia.

In 1951 armed with this letter Tom settled down to a steady job on the Australian ships .

Until he made another "Life changing" decision in 1958 when on a train travelling from Sydney to Port Kembla to rejoin a ship he spied this very pretty young lady and never being of a faint heart he sat facing her on a wet seat next to a broken window that was letting the pouring rain in just to talk to her, insisting all the time that it was just fine sitting there. Gloria, the pretty young lady liked the look of Tom, but as Tom had to sail on his ship that day, thought it was but a "Brief Encounter"

Three months later Tom turned up at Gloria's work place in Lithgow bearing gifts and determination. They were married in Sydney in 1961.

When Tom left the sea he took on an amazing challenge, by taking a stevedore's job with Patrick's at Port Kembla docks, a 'Stevedore' is responsible for getting as much work as possible out of the Wharfies and turning the ship around as fast as possible, so you see why it was a challenge!

That Tom was good at it and even survived it in those turbulent years of Australia's industrial history into a happy retirement says a great deal about him.

He had a great sense of right & wrong and would not be swerved from it, ever.

He had a full and colourful Liverpoolian vocabulary but with it went a wonderful sense of humour.

He was in essence a product of his birth place, a real good 'Scouser' who knows where everything is in this world and which parts of it are HIS.

Our deepest sympathies to Gloria, sons Sam, Thomas, Timothy and their families.

Several Vindi boys and their partners attended Tom's funeral, his coffin was draped with the NSW Vindi Red Ensign banner.

SUBMERSIBLE SHIP SINKS

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Luanda, Angola, West Africa - 6th of December 2006.



The 27000 tonne semi Submersible heavy lift ship the "Mighty Servant 3" went a step too far when submerging to unload the drilling platform "GSF Aleutian" near the entrance to the port.

A miscalculation or an accident saw her keep going down until she was sitting on the bottom in 62 metres of water with just the top of the jumbo derrick to mark where she lay.

All the crew were able to escape from the sinking ship and were soon picked up.

The drilling rig was clear of the ship when she went down and the rig with her crew of 83 was safely towed away to her new drilling location.

The Dutch salvage company SMIT has been contracted to salvage the "Mighty Servant 3" their vessel "MV Smitt Orcahas" anchored over the wreck on March 21 2007.

These semi submersible ships are really amazing the loads they carry are mind boggling.

The "Mighty Servant 3" with the aid of Mother Nature (buoyancy) and some clever engineering can lift and carry a 'staggering' 25,000 tonnes of deck cargo.

Her deck is flat & open, 140 long by 40 metres beam, if the buoyancy casings on the stern are removed the deck cargo can overhang on 3 sides of the ship.

She is also equipped with a counter weight system to help maintain stability when loading & discharging.

The ship is owned by 'Dockwise' a company formed in 1993 when the 2 famous Dutch heavy lift companies, Wijsmuller & Dock Express merged. Dockwise today is acknowledged as a leading specialist in heavy lift shipping.

Their cargoes can range from yachts of just 10 tons in weight to a large, ultra-heavy and fully-integrated production and drilling platform weighing up to 73,000 tons.

The company has a fleet of 15 semi-submersible vessels, 9 ships- 5 open decked & 4 heavy transport carriers are mainly employed in transporting drilling rigs and offshore platform components.

Two dock type vessels are used for carrying mainly container cranes and other cargo handling gear. Four other vessels are permanently used for transporting luxury yachts!

Swan in Love With Swan-Shaped Pedal Boat

It was a summer romance, but it may survive the winter. Petra, a lovestruck black swan, has been happily paddling behind a big plastic swan-shaped pedal boat since May. Now locals have enabled the inseparable couple to spend the winter together

The affair began in the spring when Petra the swan flew in and started following the boat around the lake in the western German city of Münster. With winter approaching, the boat had to be removed from the lake but the owner



didn't have the heart to separate the two. So both the boat and Petra were taken to a pond in Münster zoo for the winter. The project was financed by local residents for whom Petra has become a celebrity. She has seemed unperturbed by the journalists and TV crews who have been crowding into other less attractive boats and pedalling after the odd couple. During the relocation, Petra followed her swan boat along a canal linking the lake with the zoo's pond. If the relationship survives the winter, both will be taken back to the lake. "What the swan wants, she gets," said the boat's owner Peter Overschmidt.

Wildlife experts hope she will lose interest in the boat when she gets to know the other black swans living in the pond. "There are four singles among them. So there's hope," said zookeeper Monika Ewering.

I had a rose named after me and I was very flattered. But I was not pleased to read the description in the catalogue: "No good in a bed, but fine against a wall."

-- Eleanor Roosevelt

TUG CAPZISES

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In my last newsletter you may recall I wrote an article about a tug that went missing with all hands while towing a ship from the African coast to India for scrapping on the beach there.

That was an old somewhat decrepit and undersized for the job she was doing but this tug story is about a brand new state of the art vessel that turned over with the loss of several crew.

EIGHT FEARED DEAD IN TUG CAPZISE Story from the 'Scotsman' by Frank Urquhart

At least three people died and five are missing, feared drowned last night after an anchor-handling tug capsized suddenly in the North Sea off Shetland in relatively calm waters.

Ten of the 15 on board the Bourbon Dolphin at the time were rescued, but the Coastguard later confirmed that three of these had died. Five crew members were unaccounted for among them are 14-year-old David Remøy who was doing work experience from school and his father Oddne Arve Remøy, thought to be the ship's captain as the search was scaled back for the night, more than six hours after the boat capsized in temperatures as low as 5C.

Royal navy divers had been flown to the scene amid fears the five may have been trapped in the vessel's upturned hull, however hope for the missing crew members' survival was fading fast as the night wore on.

It remained unclear why the state of the art vessel capsized. It was reported to be turning away from the Transocean Rather drilling rig, 75 miles north west Shetland, when the incident occurred 5:20 pm. Last night the chief executive of the Norwegian firm that owned the boat said such an accident "should have been impossible".

Rig operators Transocean said of the 10 people were rescued, eight were recovered initially and another two were winched by helicopter from the water at about 7pm. The seven were later airlifted to the Gilbert Bain Hospital in Lerwick, Shetland.

Last night a spokesman for Transocean said all 99 crew members on board the Transocean Rather rig had been accounted for. The Coastguard confirmed that all those on board the Transocean Rather were air lifted off late last night, because the Bourbon Dolphin - which had been handling one of the semi submersible's drilling rig's anchors at the time the accident occurred - was still attached to the rig.

The vessel, owned by Bourbon Offshore, is one of the newest supply vessels operating in the North Sea and was launched last year. The 3,000-tonne vessel, built in Norway is 75 metres long and capable of accommodating up to 35 people.

27th April 2007—a court of enquiry was opened in Alesund, Norway to take initial statements re this accident, below is a translation from Norwegian newspapers

The court heard from several witnesses including the off duty Master and the Chief Officer who was rescued from the scene. The Chief Officer Geir Syversen (32) described how the sequence of events started when another vessel the Highland Valour failed to retrieve the heavy anchor cable from the Bourbon Dolphin which was apparently too small for the job. The Highland Valour during seven attempts to take the chain caught it twice but dropped it both times, increasing the strain on the Bourbon Dolphin.

There was also a near collision between the two vessels which meant that the Bourbon Dolphin had to go full ahead on her engines to avoid a collision, calling into question the seamanship and ship handling of the Highland Valour. Then the Valour pushed the Dolphin in the wrong direction and the Dolphin was pushed out of position which meant that her bow thruster got overheated and the Chief Engineer asked him to reduce the load on the thruster. The Domino effect was in full swing and problems started mounting for the Bourbon Dolphin, when the Master decided that emergency measures were required, he asked the Chief Officer to use the quick release system to get rid of the anchor chain, but it was not so quick and by then the Chief Engineer called up to say that the engines had stopped.

By this stage hope was out for the ship and it had listed over on its side 90 degrees port side down.

Some of the crew managed to get off before she turned completely around. Then the survivors managed to climb into a raft and others were plucked out of the water.

Another newspaper ran this report: The only survivor who was on the bridge as she capsized. Geir Syversen was quoted in the Norwegian press before the inquiry began as saying he knows what caused the incident and that once he told his story, no-one will be in any doubts as to the cause.

Yesterday he told the inquiry that they got into difficulties whilst whilst working alongside another vessel, the HIGHLAND VALOUR, handling an anchor for the oil rig they were working with.

He described also that during proceedings the Highland valour and Bourbon Dolphin almost collided and that Bourbon Dolphin had put full power on to escape collision. He said that Bourbon Dolphin had to take the full burden of the chain they were handling and her thrusters were overheating as they battled with the increased strain. At one point Highland Valour was radioed and was told to go northwest, but it went in the other direction and the Dolphin's captain took the radio and said to the other vessel "Don't you know the difference between north west and south east?" Syversen implied that the Highland Valours's inability to take her share of the work left a burden on Bourbon Dolphin whereby it took a lot of effort to hold her against the wind and maintain position. With her difficulties increasing it became clear the vessel was in grave danger.

Sounds like a real bunfight coming up! It also sounds like many small errors and defects building into a major disaster as is often the case. I will keep you posted about the enquiry into this accident in my next newsletter.





campaigning again ... Ron Wylie yesterday. Photo: Peter Morris

ANAC DAY CONTINUED

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Ron Wylie pictured left is another veteran marcher, he has got around the problems of marching by using his electric gopher, Ron like Gordon is one of the pillars of the Australian ex MN fraternity and has led the charge for having September 3rd recognised as Merchant Navy day. On top of all this he has built and runs his great MN web site

www.merchant-navy-ships.com

Below is a report from Sydney Morning Herald 25 April 2007

Unsung sailors of merchant navy seek a change of tune

By John Huxley, RON WYLIE has always flown the flag - the distinctive "red duster" of the Australian merchant navy - wherever he goes. And now, at 86, he is campaigning for others to do the same - at least on one day of the year.

Like Australians everywhere, Mr Wylie - whose flag-flying electric buggy has become a familiar sight in Mosman, where he lives - will spend Anzac Day commemorating the sacrifice of the nation's war dead.

But he is concerned at how few people recognise the contribution of the men and women who were "called up" to serve alongside the forces on troop, cargo, evacuation and hospital ships.

He estimates that more than 1000 died in service in the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans, and even in the English Channel, where some 4000 Australian civilians manned transport ships used in the Normandy invasion.

Although a dwindling number of survivors march in Anzac parades, many bearing medals, their story - and that of fallen colleagues - has largely gone unrecorded and unsung, says Mr Wylie, who served on Burns Philip ships in World War II.

At one point he tried to transfer to a US vessel but was told he could stay put on an Australian ship, or be transferred to Long Bay jail. Such were the rules of wartime service.

"Regrettably, many people claimed that merchant mariners were receiving outrageous rates of pay," he said. Not only was their pay less than in the forces, but they were denied uniforms, leave (paid or otherwise), medical or pension benefits. They signed on to a ship voyage-by-voyage, their employment lasting until return to home port. Pay ceased when the seaman's ship was sunk. Survivors were classified "destitute British subjects" and placed in the care of charities.

Only after numerous sinking's off the Australian coast during 1942 were rules changed to allow a seaman's pay to continue until return to their homeport.

Mr Wylie has enlisted the support of his local MP, Tony Abbott, in a campaign to have September 3 declared Merchant Navy Day - as it is in Britain and Canada - and created a website documenting veterans' stories, some humdrum, some heroic.

Few can match that of Bruce Wharton, one of Mr Wylie's "league of ancient mariners". He delivered food to Liverpool during a bombing blitz, had his ship sunk by a German raider in the Atlantic, and was pulled from the sea with acid burns. Imprisoned in Germany, he escaped in a stolen Mercedes in April 1945. He eventually made his way back to Australia as a passenger and now lives in Bowral.

Merchant Navy Cemetery Memorial Service

John Mears (V41) has sent me this report on his attendance at this very moving service that is held in April at the Merchant Navy section in Rookwood Cemetery.

"Joining me for the service on Sunday the 15th were two other Vindicatrix lads, Brin Hansell (V47) and South Australian Mark Day (V40) who was visiting friends in Sydney.

I only live a few kilometres from Rookwood Cemetery and have been attending these Memorial Services regularly over the past ten years. Weather permitting, they are held in an open area of the cemetery that was dedicated in 1948 to the memory of merchant seamen, both Commonwealth and allied, who gave their lives in the service of their country.

It was Gordon Solomon, OA, President of the Red Ensign Association, who had the duty of reading out the names of 90 recorded ex-merchant seamen who had crossed the bar since April last year. Included in those names were two Vindi boys, Bert Wilkinson (V1943) and Tom Hodgson (V1947)

Despite it being an oppressively hot day there were more attendees than last year and emergency arrangements had to be made to send for more chairs.

I find this ceremony very moving. The RAN band always attends to add some extra majesty to it. (The twice-yearly raffles at the Flemington Markets Red Ensign Reunions are the source of revenue for their transportation fees).

A stunning story was related by a retired Dutch Sea Captain who told us how his cadetship was put on a four-year hold. He gave some insight of what it was like as a fourteen year old boy in 1940 to see his country overrun by the conquering German Army who were under orders to show no mercy to those who objected to its presence. I had the privilege, with many other Merchant Navy Association representatives to lay flowers on the Memorial that is erected on this hallowed plot. The card attached to ours paid tribute to all those Vindicatrix Boys, in peace and war, who have now also crossed the bar".

Age Doth Weary Them—The Anzac Day

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New blood is needed to march behind the MN Banners in the Sydney Anzac day march, as the report below by Bill King mentions, several of our stalwart Anzac day marchers have had to call it a day. Even that tower of strength Gordon Solomon didn't march this year, he attended to bring the banners but then took the short route to the club to join the marchers later.



ANZAC MARCH 2007

Left-Getting the flags ready.

Right-Some of the Vindi Contingent R-L
Alan Nash, Peter Bearman, Bill King, Linda Bearman, Andrew Bearman.



The Merchant Navy lads gathered in Castlereagh Street on a cool, wet morning, but the smiles and camaraderie, as we greeted familiar faces, brought its own warmth to the day. There was a noticeable reduction in our number owing to both the wet weather, and the now advancing years of our veteran members. Len Wade, and William and Angus McKinnon were very much in our thoughts, remembering their regular attendance of past years. We knew they would be watching from home this year, so we had to make a good show for them! We were glad to see our two veterans, John Mears and Geoff Maidment, marching with us: John proudly accompanied by his daughter and grandson. We were pleased to have two Vindi boys marching for the first time: Alan Nash and Len Britton. Len had already attended the dawn service on the Central Coast, and managed to make it down to join us in Sydney with his wife Amanda.

Peter Bearman, was accompanied by his son, Andrew, and we managed to persuade the three wives, Linda Bearman, Amanda Britton, and Jacqueline King, to swell our numbers and march for the first time. Needless to say, when the TV cameras focused upon our group, the wives got all the attention! Miraculously we managed to avoid the rain, and gathered at the Masonic Club afterwards. This proved to be a very wise choice as we were able to join some tables together and seat all of our party in great comfort. Coincidentally, this venue is also used by RAN personnel, so it was virtually taken over by seafarers of one kind or another. The Anzac Day Memorial Service, with a bugler playing "The Last Post", provided a meaningful focus for us, as this is what the day is all about. Food and free drinks were generously provided, and the wonderful Clan McLeod pipe band, which we lads formed up to march behind when they entered the Club for the Service, continued to play for us. There is something about a pipe band which really stirs us all! It was agreed we'd had a great day, and we'll do it all again next year! *Bill King*

CONCRETE SHIPS

There has been many types of concrete vessels built over the years, mainly yachts & barges recently, the only concrete ocean going ships I have heard about were 12 made in America during WW1.

The most famous of the 12 is the SS *Atlantus*,
I say is because she still exists today!

She was built by the Liberty Ship Building Company in Brunswick, Georgia and launched on December 5, 1918 and was the second concrete ship constructed in the World War I Emergency Fleet.

The war had ended a month earlier, but the *Atlantus* was used to transport American troops back home from Europe and also to transport coal in New England. In 1920, the ship was retired to a salvage yard in Virginia.

In 1926, the *Atlantus* was purchased by Colonel Jesse Rosenfeld to be used as ferry dock in Cape May, New Jersey for a proposed ferry between Cape May and Cape Henlopen, DE. The plan was to dig a channel into to the shore where the *Atlantus* would be placed. Two other concrete ships would be purchased to form a Y-shape where the ferry would dock.

In March 1926, the groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the construction of the ferry dock. The *Atlantus* was repaired and towed to Cape May. On June 8th, a storm hit and the ship broke free of her moorings and ran aground 150 feet off the coast of Sunset Beach. Several attempts were made to free the ship, but none were successful.

Since then the *Atlantus* has become a tourist attraction seen by millions.

Her vital statics were Length: 250 feet Beam: 45 feet Draft: 22 feet Weight: 2,500 tons Engine: T. 3-cyl., 1.520 hp., designed speed 12 knots



The Saga of MN recognition in War

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The battle for Merchant Navy recognition in times of war is still being fought by many MN people around the world one of the most energetic of those is UK Vindi Boy Phil Hughes who runs the Kent Vindi group, Phil & I have been swapping newsletters and MN items for around 10 years now, he recently sent me copies of letters he wrote to local newspapers about their coverage of the Falklands war anniversary, Phil never misses a chance and I suspect a lot of newspaper editors, TV & radio news people must tremble when they see Phil's name.

This letter he wrote to his local ITV station:

To whom it may concern,

I am very pleased to see your coverage of the Falklands war on meridian T.V. to ensure that those who lost their lives or suffered terrible injuries are not forgotten. I do not wish to detract from the heroism of the armed forces in any way as I am a firm supporter of them, but I have noted that one section has been completely overlooked yet again even though they lost men, ships and jobs during and after the war. It suggests that by having no mention at all that they were not involved in anyway and I refer to the civilians of our Merchant Navy who were boned in the Falklands whilst serving on the "Atlantic Conveyor" and the "Sir Galahad" and lost their lives. The "Sir Galahad" was a Royal Fleet Auxillary vessel under the Blue ensign and was manned in part by merchant seafarers and the "Atlantic Conveyor" was a P&O container vessel manned wholly by merchant seafarers. Other merchant vessels were there such as the P&O "Canberra" as a hospital ship and numerous ferries, some of them from the south east.

On national merchant navy Day in 2005 a Falklands memorial was unveiled at the Merchant Navy & Fisheries memorial at Tower hill in London in honour of those merchant seafarers who lost their lives in the Falklands war and their names are on a copper plate at the base of the memorial. It was a very moving ceremony in front of a Guard of Honour of Welsh Guards and "one bell" was struck as each name was read out. On June 15th there will be a ceremony at this memorial as part of the Falklands 25 events being held around the country.

It does appear that merchant seafarers and our merchant navy are so easily forgotten, especially as they have been some of the first into conflict areas such as Iraq and Kuwait whilst serving on Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, but like members of the armed forces, we will not forget our own. As I said, I do not wish to detract from the heroic armed forces at all but could we please have a level playing ground here and at least have a mention.

Thank you Phil Hughes.

Another letter, this one a commendation, to THE SUN newspaper April 10 2007

Well done my Sun for printing such a good article on the part played by the merchant navy and merchant seafarers during the Falklands war.

It must never be forgotten that merchant sailors are often among the first into areas of conflict because they man the Royal Fleet auxiliary vessels. Phil Hughes.

In the same vein is this story from a newspaper in Clitheroe, Lancashire

Death camp survivor speaks out

PROBUS member Earnest Sharrock, who is also president of the Clitheroe branch of the Merchant Navy Association, was the speaker at Clitheroe and District Probus Club.

In a powerful and moving speech, he dealt with the association together with his own experiences in the 1940s.

It is often not appreciated that the Merchant Navy and fishing fleets lost some 36,000 personnel in both world wars. The association was formed in 1989 to represent the interests of serving and retired seafarers, and to foster pride in the nation's maritime heritage.

The speaker then described his experiences in the last war when, on a convoy to Bermuda in 1941 his ship was sunk and he was captured. Well treated at first, conditions degenerated as the prisoners were transported across Germany in locked cattle trucks arriving eventually in a concentration camp. The smell of death is with him still.

Conditions were horrendous, but more so for the Russians in the next compound who were being systematically starved to death. Bodies were removed morning and evening in narrow gauge railway carts.

The British naval personnel organised themselves – setting up the inevitable committees, and thus managing to provide educational classes using the combined talents of the prisoners. The results were amazing, enabling people, on release, to gain proper qualifications.

The period prior to their release was dramatic and dangerous as they found themselves between the two opposing armies where once again the Germans flouted the Geneva Convention by locating their armaments very close to the prison.

Just to fill in this last bit of space and to fill out your education as well.

Merchant Navy Connections

I was very surprised to read in the Herald recently that John Howard's right hand man and adviser for 18 years Arthur Sinodinos was the son of a Greek Immigrant who spent his working life here on the Australian ships and a member of the Seamen's Union, later the Maritime Union who's deadliest enemy is John Howard.

Who'd a'throwt it!

Reading an article of woe from the West Indies about them getting knocked out of the World Cricket cup, it mentioned Gary Sobers and how he nearly joined his dad in being a merchant seaman but his talent as a cricketer was spotted when he was playing street cricket, that used to be the training ground for cricketers but is no more because of the influence of American Baseball (more money in it) and all the other modern distractions.

That's your blooming lot!